

## **Regulations Spotlight: Essential understanding Part B Fire Safety**

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Fire safety is a complex area. Many of us rely on Approved Document B as the starting point and rightly so. However there are several important and related documents that need to be consulted.

Most recent and essential reading is BS 9999:2008. This replaces the majority of the BS 5588 set of standards that have been the byword for many years. However three years ago the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 (FSO) came in to force. It is important that designers recognize the implications of this legislation and its relationship to Part B. Because it is not directly part of the 'design tools' it is easy to overlook, but ignoring it can delay your building control application.

Before covering that issue it is worth just reminding ourselves of the main changes that were brought in under the FSO. It was a consolidating piece of legislation bringing together several areas of fire safety legislation.

Primarily it shifted the onus on to building owners and operators to ensure they manage fire safety arrangements and have in place proper procedures for escape in the event of a fire. Specifically there must be a fire escape management plan setting out the procedures and a person in authority. Staff must be trained and the safety systems must be correctly installed, and tested at the time of commissioning. The plan and the equipment must also be tested regularly on an ongoing basis. Unlike the previous legislation (the Fire Precautions Act, which covered "designated buildings") the FSO covers all buildings except private dwellings (and includes the common areas of blocks of flats). This may come as a surprise but this applies to your own offices.

Guidance was issued and is freely available as downloads to clearly identify the recommendations from the Department of Communities and Local Government (CLG) to satisfy the FSO. One down side has been the demise of the occasional visits from the fire officer and without this 'threat' the level of compliance with the FSO is thought to be very poor. It is important designers are aware that the issue of a completion certificate by the relevant building control authority does not demonstrate that all of the obligations placed on the responsible person under the FSO will have been met. Designers should be mindful of the FSO order and risk assessment process and ensure that a feature of the building design does not inhibit the appropriate management of the fire risks.

The other main requirement relating to the FSO is found tucked away in the guidance text of Approved Document B under General Introduction. Unusually reference is made directly to a regulation, 16B of the Building Regulations, and it is not highlighted in green as is usual for a regulation. This is because this refers to a regulation from the statute where all the regulations we are used to are in fact from the schedule of requirements contained in the statute. In the case of Part B these are B1 to B5.

To make this clearer and offer a little more background we need to look at the structure of the building regulations themselves. The answer to the above conundrum is found in consulting the statutes that cover the current building regulations; two statutory instruments (SI's) are relevant, S.I. 2531 and S.I. 3318.

September 2010

The former sets out the regulations that cover the statutory requirements for the building regulations numbered 1 to 24 and a working knowledge of these is highly recommended. This is supported by 3 schedules.

SI 3318 2006 introduces two additional regulations, 16B fire management (fire safety information) and 17 relevant information (for the purposes of completion certificates in relation to fire information and carbon dioxide emission rates).

The importance of these changes is that while not expressed in the usual fashion in the approved guidance the implication of regulations 16B and 17 are quite significant especially for the designer.

The detailed text is to be found in CLG circular 05/2006. In annex C of that document Part B Fire Safety and Fire Safety Information clauses C1 to C20 set out the requirements.

Of these the following two are relevant -

C3 Regulation 16B requires the provision of fire safety information necessary before a completion certificate can be issued.

C5 The information necessary relates to the design construction services fittings and equipment of the building allowing the building to be operated and maintained with reasonable safety.

Back in the non legalised real world, the practical application of these measures means, in addition to the normal requirements of part B, in order for the project to receive a completion certificate the design team needs to ensure that information relating to fire safety management is included in the handover information.

Operations and Maintenance manuals including advice have been standard handover documentation for many years. The CDM regulations have also required this is supplemented by information on safe operation and maintenance of the building.

To ensure compliance with regulation 16B this must also be accompanied by clear and well considered information on the fire safety systems and engineering sufficient for the building owner or operator to safely manage the building in accordance with the FSO. (It is also worth noting that the need for effective management has been recognised in AD B. But where previous issues of AD B said that there was an "... assumption that the building ... will be properly managed", AD B 2006 says that the designer should consider how the building will be managed and cannot rely upon an "unrealistic or unsustainable management regime".)

It is clear from feed back from fire officers that most designers are not as aware of their responsibility in this area as perhaps they should be. Either in generating information or in ensuring that the team provide it prior to handover.

In proportion to the information already provided this is relatively small and straightforward and can be prepared in parallel with other information required. Quite apart from being a building regulations requirement that may in some cases delay the issue of a completion certificate it may also help to ensure safer buildings.

September 2010

### **Additional Bits**

#### **SSIP**

On the 20<sup>th</sup> May the SSIP web site was launched. This is the source for information on the Safety Systems in Procurement Forum. A body that is seeking to ensure prequalification for health and safety is made simpler cheaper and more constant.

Members of the SSIP are audited to ISO 9001 and follow a mutual deemed to satisfy agreement. Membership of one will qualify for membership to all others. This is a major step towards reducing the increasing burden of health and safety prequalification

See [www.ssip.org](http://www.ssip.org)

#### **Part G**

Has been revised (enforcement date October 2010) and is available at the CLG website.

#### **BRE Innovation Park**

The BRE Innovation Park is a world leading and ground breaking demonstration development designed to give a glimpse of how the future delivery of sustainable buildings and communities can be achieved not only in the UK but around the world. The visitors centre provides access to full information on all of the buildings and products on the Innovation Park, while also showcasing a range of new designs and technologies. For more information see [www.bre.co.uk](http://www.bre.co.uk).

#### **Refurb Campaign**

Grand Designs Kevin McCloud has instigated the great British Refurb Campaign. We are all aware of the need to bring the existing building stock up to a reasonable standard. Some say this is the biggest challenge confronting us. Regulations in this area are generally found wanting. This campaign is raising the profile of regeneration much needed to ensure we build momentum and better housing towards cutting carbon see [www.greatbritishrefurb.co.uk](http://www.greatbritishrefurb.co.uk)

Peter Caplehorn is part of the BRE/CIAT/RIBA Technical Taskforce. An information sheet on Part B, BS9999 and BS7974 is available to download from the Institute's website @ [www.ciat.org.uk](http://www.ciat.org.uk)