

Performance is the priority with doors

Specifying and installing doors remains a complex area.

Steve Menary reports on the areas of caution and highlights best practice from industry specialists.



As standards over doors and ironmongery edge towards harmonisation, the lessons of the Lakanal House fire in 2009 must not be forgotten. A fire at the tower block in Camberwell, south London, killed six people and injured 20 more because, an inquest ruled, of failures in fire safety measures. Seven years on and attempts to harmonise standards for fire doors, partly in response to the tragedy, are edging towards a conclusion.

“Three million fire doors go into the market, so the [European Union] is trying to track them by ensuring they are all CE marked,” explained Paul Smith, sales director at Allgood, which supplies ironmongery and doorsets.

In Germany, there is an established industry that manufactures and sells doorsets, which, from November 2016, should have the mechanism to be CE marked. But the situation remains complicated (see box), and will still not cover doors where the parts are bought separately and assembled.

“People can still buy components separately and there is a huge risk,” highlighted Joe Cilia, FIS technical manager. “The danger from a contractor’s point of view is they buy a fire door, a frame, a closer and an intumescent strip and think they

have a fire door. But they might not have the appropriate parts; they might not have a strong enough closer, or the components may not have been tested together.”

In an industry where profit margins are constantly under pressure, buying separate parts is common.

Laura Glazier, sales executive at architectural ironmongers Harbrine, said: “There’s nothing to say once we’ve put a specification out to market that a contractor won’t decide that it’s too expensive.

A lot of projects are cost driven and are not getting the right product.

“There’s the threat of prosecution nowadays if the wrong product has been used, but a lot of it comes down to education. It might cost more, but further down the line it will work.”

Breaking down established practices can be hard in the construction industry, says Niall Rowan, the new chief operating officer at the Association for Specialist Fire Protection (ASFP), which, he argues, reflects the “cottage nature of UK industry”.

He explained: “A joiner would buy a door blank from a distributor that has a certificate and he would follow the instructions. But if he didn’t, the customer would have a door that might not work. Due

to the nature of the construction industry, that happens. Building control should pick this up, but often they don’t.”

The ASFP advises contractors in the first instance to buy a doorset, or, if they buy a door assembly with separate parts, to ensure these parts have been tested together. The association advises contractors to get doors tested, which is also

advocated by the British Woodworking Federation (BWF).

BWF’s schemes and technical manager, Hannah Mansell, explained: “We come from a scenario of managing risk for our members and their customers. Fire doors take an intricate route through the supply chain and performance can be diluted.”

To help members counter those problems, the BWF’s testing scheme is carried out by a third party certifier.

Ms Mansell added: “If I’m fitting a fire door that’s been tested by a third party, I’d have confidence that when the building inspectors come round with third party certification, I’d have traceability through the supply chain.”

CE markings will also offer that, but with third party certification, there is an assurance that a fire door, whether bought as a set or assembled, will work and successfully prevent a repetition of Lakanal House.



What CE marking means for fire doors

The European Committee for Standardization (CEN) has been trying to bring in a harmonised standard that allows doorsets to be sold with a fire safety CE mark since 2013.

From November 2016, doorsets can be sold with a CE marking, but that process is not totally complete.

The fire safety standard EN 16034 can only be used with external pedestrian doors (EN 14351-1), internal pedestrian doors (prEN 14351-2), industrial, garage and commercial doors (EN 13241) and power-operated pedestrian doors (EN 16361).

However, most fire-rated doors are internal pedestrian doors and the CEN certification process for prEN 14351-2 is unlikely to be completed until June 2017.

Also, while power-operated pedestrian doors have been ratified, the standard will not be published until early next year.

The result: most fire-rated doors cannot yet be CE marked. The wait goes on...