

CASE STUDY JUL03/B

BURNING ISSUES

Two burning issues are currently high on the agenda for insulation manufacturers, and the stance taken by some has helped to spread confusion and misunderstanding amongst the construction industry. The CE marking of products and the use of the new Euroclasses for reaction to fire are both widely billed as being statutory in the UK. This is not the case.



The CE mark is intended to help break down barriers to trade between Member States of the European Union, and is carried on products to show that they have been looked at independently and comply with the European product standard relating to them. However, there are no plans to make it mandatory for internally traded goods in the UK and Ireland to carry a CE mark, even though they do need to comply with the product standards. In other words, products in the UK do have to comply in order to carry the CE mark, but they do not have to carry the CE mark in order to comply.

The next area of confusion lies in the newly introduced system of Euroclass ratings for the reaction of products in case of fire. The system has so far only been developed for a very specific area of product applications i.e. wall and ceiling linings. The classes are based on a series of tests, in particular the Single Burning Item or SBI test. The classifications can reflect an insulation product's reaction to fire in its naked state or installed in application e.g. behind plasterboard or blockwork. The results can therefore be misleading, giving a potentially poor rating to naked insulation products that will actually perform well in their intended application.

The RADAR 2 Project was commissioned by the DETR to compare the current, comprehensive British Standard ratings with the new Euroclasses. The results for the different types of insulation products were quite startling. For example, the mineral wool sector obtained a clear and very positive correlation, while the conclusion for cellular plastics was that: "For the product group as a whole, no correlation was obtained between the Euroclass system and the UK system".

In the light of this consistency, existing national fire standards are not set to be withdrawn for five to ten years, and the Government has stated that the new Euroclass system will not be implemented until the industry as a whole is ready to adopt it. Hopefully this won't happen until more realistic and representative tests have been developed.

The link between this issue and CE marking is that products cannot carry the CE mark without also displaying their Euroclass rating. Many manufacturers have opted to continue to state their products' fire performance in accordance with the more relevant BS 476, and do not therefore carry the CE mark, even though they comply with all of the relevant product standards.

Kingspan Insulation has published two new documents covering these two subjects.

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