

# What's behind the mark?

**Conformity assessment and certification of fire protection equipment is, at first sight, reassuring. But specifiers and end-users should understand exactly what assurances are behind the marks, cautions Graham Orme of BRE Global Ltd.**

Building and fire safety professionals should be fully confident of the level of performance (and test evidence for it) provided by passive/active fire protection systems which they recommend or specify. Only then can they make sound and defensible decisions that demonstrate due diligence and protect professional indemnity, and, of course, safeguard property, livelihoods and ultimately lives.

As a guide, here are 7 essential questions when assessing fire protection systems:

## **1. What test regime is the fire safety declaration based on?**

Be aware that some marks are based on a one-off 'type' test. This effectively vouches for subsequent products without obligation to police their conformity with the test or design standard. In contrast, reputable third party certification provides on-going system audits and audit tests, independent of both supplier and customer. It ensures products in the marketplace meet and continue to comply with the appropriate test standard(s).

CE marking, increasingly seen in the international market for fire critical products, sets a minimum requirement for fire safety performance, defined and sanctioned by the EU. However, it should not be assumed to be a mark of quality.

## **2. Third party certification: what are the benefits?**

Products with the mark of a reputable certification body working to a reliable test standard(s) will provide greater assurance of performance. Whilst providing compliance with regulations and legislation, it enables the whole supply chain – manufacturers, end users, insurers, specifiers, contractors and even installers - to better manage their risks.

Adoption of products certificated by a third party saves time and money researching and verifying claims for alternatives, and can help avoid costly mistakes. Check whether the supplier is self-declaring product performance for its safety mark. It could compromise traceability and see products sanctioned that do not perform well.

LPCB<sup>1</sup> Fire protection products have a unique certificate number providing ready traceability should the scope of certification need verification. In the rare event of a failure, this will help mitigate any challenge that the specifier or other individual has been negligent.

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<sup>1</sup> LPCB is the certification brand of BRE Global Ltd.

### **3. Is the performance standard robust and reliable?**

Make sure that products are being tested to appropriate performance criteria – schemes should be based on publicly available and technically challenging standards. Where bespoke standards and schemes are developed, they should draw on state-of-the-art international standards and be subject to external scrutiny. The Loss Prevention Standards (LPS) used by LPCB are underpinned by its own innovative world class research into fire testing recognised at national and international level.

### **4. What's the pedigree of the certification body?**

The certification body should be able to demonstrate technical expertise, and be subject to external technical and quality accreditation to ensure that its schemes are independently scrutinised and are traceable. Certification bodies like LPCB, which are actively involved in scientific and technical developments, are well placed to make demanding technical assessments, handle complaints about products and keep standards and schemes up-to-date with developments.

### **5. Is certification compliance being monitored?**

Manufacturers should be subject to regular audits to ensure they are adhering to the quality management and compliance criteria of their certification. The certification body should also enforce its rules, removing certification from poorly-performing suppliers and operating an effective complaints process. LPCB certificated products are listed online in the Red Book so that specifiers can verify the authenticity of the products. LPCB actively investigates and takes necessary action where misleading or false claims are made.

### **6. Who's approved the certifier?**

Most LPCB certification schemes have United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) Accreditation. UKAS is the only UK national accreditation body recognised by Government to assess organisations that provide certification, testing, inspection and calibration services, against internationally agreed standards. UKAS is also a member of the International Accreditation Forum (IAF) which accredits only those certification bodies that operate at the highest standards and comply with appropriate international standards.

### **7. Who's certificated the installer?**

Selecting certificated products is only half the story – their performance can be severely undermined by poor installation and maintenance. It is therefore vital to ensure that the fire safety equipment installer is also certificated to a credible certification scheme that assures the quality and competence of their services. LPCB offers complementary installer certification schemes which include office audits to establish the competencies, qualifications and training of operational staff, and correct sourcing and use of products.

*For more on third party certification and its benefits, and a full listing of LPCB fire protection products, visit: [www.RedBookLive.com](http://www.RedBookLive.com) (app also available)*

**ENDS**