

To: PS/Jim Fitzpatrick MP

From: Tim Hayward
Fire Legislation, Safety &
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Location: Zone 5/B, Allington Towers

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Ref: (Paper)

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Copies: See attached list

FIRE SPRINKLER SYSTEMS

Issue

1. How to respond to the letter of 24th June from Alan Brinson of the European Fire Sprinkler Network asking for a meeting with you. The meeting would also include the National Fire Sprinkler Network.

Recommendation

2. That you agree in principle to a meeting but wait until the consultation on proposed changes to Part B of the Building Regulations and the supporting guidance in Approved Document B has been published, and final results are available from the low cost sprinkler project. A draft reply is provided at Annex A; an alternative response is provided at Annex B.

Timing

3. Routine.

Background

4. The European Fire Sprinkler Network (EFSN) is a lobby group set up in 2002 to encourage the greater use of fire sprinklers and to argue the case that the use of sprinklers in the USA can be successfully repeated in Europe. Its members include European insurance companies, the British Automatic Sprinkler Association, CFA and Merseyside FRS. Similarly, the National Fire Sprinkler Network (NFSN) campaigns for the increase in the application of fire sprinkler technology. It was established in 1998 by Peter Holland (now CFO Lancashire Fire and Rescue Service), Tess Kingham (former MP for Gloucester), and Bernadette Hartley (a political researcher for Tess Kingham).
5. There is currently little evidence on the efficiency of domestic sprinkler systems. However, a recent project sponsored by ODPM is investigating the effectiveness of low cost sprinkler systems and we understand that you saw a demonstration of sprinklers by the project team during your recent visit to Moreton-in-Marsh.

6. The Government's recent Home Fire Risk Check (HFRC) initiative has provided £25million aimed at the most vulnerable households. This provides free home fire risk checks by the fire service combined with the installation of free smoke alarms, and where necessary, based on risk assessment, automated sprinkler systems. Since the initiative began, a total of four automated sprinkler systems have been installed.

Consideration

7. Colleagues from Buildings Division have already met with Alan Brinson and Bernadette Hartley. As well as listening to their views on sprinklers, there was an opportunity to brief them on the informal stakeholder engagement that has fed into the Part B review which deals with fire safety. Colleagues responsible for the work looking at low cost sprinklers also briefed them on the work on low cost sprinkler systems.
8. A meeting with EFSN and NFSN would provide you with the opportunity to hear the views of those who are promoting the widespread use of sprinkler systems. It may also be useful to meet with Peter Holland, given that CFOA are planning a campaign in support of sprinkler systems.
9. However, we would recommend that any meeting is held after consultation on Part B of the Building Regulations and the supporting guidance in Approved Document B has been published later this month, and after final results from the draft report on low cost sprinkler systems are available (probably in September). Initial responses to the Part B consultation process will provide valuable information which will help inform the discussion about the use of sprinkler systems, as will the HFRC case studies and the low cost sprinkler research.

Presentational Issues

10. There is strong support for much greater use of sprinkler systems, particularly amongst the Fire and Rescue Services and the insurance industry. We therefore need to maintain a dialogue with groups such as EFSN and NFSN, as well as CFOA, who view the widespread use of sprinkler systems as an integral part of fire safety.

Financial & Legal Consideration

11. None.

TIM HAYWARD

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