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MEETING WITH THE EU FIRE SPRINKLER FORUM – 1 NOVEMBER

Issue

1. Further advice and briefing in advance of your meeting with the EU Fire Sprinkler Forum on 1st November to discuss the economic costs of fire to modern economies and the unnecessary damage inflicted on business and the workforce.

Recommendation

2. That you note the attached briefing material at Annex A.

Timing

3. Routine

Consideration

4. My submission of 24th September gives the background to the EU Fire Sprinkler Forum. Attendees will be senior representatives from the insurance industry as well as MEPs from the EU Sprinkler Forum. The EU Fire Sprinkler Forum wish to raise two key issues with you at this meeting:

- Sprinklers for property protection (non-domestic)
- Sprinklers for environmental protection

5. The attached briefing sets out the CLG position and lines for both issues. Anthony Burd (Sustainable Buildings) and Mike Larking (Fire and Resilience Directorate) will be in attendance at the meeting.

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Cc
Susan Schofield
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Anthony Burd

Annex A

Sprinklers for Property and Environmental Protection

Lines to take:

- The Building Regulations apply to most building work, typically the erection, extension or material alteration of a building undertaken in England & Wales. The locus of Part B of the regulations, which deals with fire safety, is the health and safety of people in and around buildings.
- As the locus of Part B of the Building Regulations is currently restricted to life safety it is **unable to address property protection** – this is a matter for the relevant building owner and their insurer.
- It therefore remains open for property owners and developers, in conjunction with their insurers, to install sprinklers or other protective measures if they consider them to be an effective means to address fire risk.
- The potential impact of fire on sustainability is an area that we plan to investigate in the future (subject to available funds).
- A recent review of Part B considered fire safety in all types of premises including dwellings, residential care homes and warehouses. It also considered the important role that sprinklers and other types of fire protection measures may have.
- All changes to Part B and the accompanying guidance in Approved Document B (AD B) must be robust and justified in an RIA. Research into the effectiveness of residential sprinklers designed to BS 9251 showed that such systems were effective in saving lives in many situations, although they are not effective at dealing with slow-growing or shielded fires.
- It also showed that it would not be cost-effective to require such systems to be provided across all dwellings but that it might be cost effective to provide them in certain types of residential property (care homes and tall buildings).

Background

The revised Part B came into force on 6 April. Functional Requirement B3 (Internal fire spread (structure)) has been amended so as to give explicit recognition to the provision "where reasonably necessary" of "suitable automatic fire suppression systems" such as sprinklers.

AD B has also been amended to include references to residential sprinkler systems for the first time. It suggests that residential sprinklers should be provided in tall blocks of flats (over 30m) and in some residential care homes. It also suggests that they may be provided as a compensatory feature in a range of situations (eg in lieu of an alternative exit from tall houses).

AD B specifically refers to BS 9251 compliant systems for use in residential applications. This is because we have robust evidence that such systems are generally effective and so systems designed, installed and maintained to that standard should meet the functional requirements of the Regulations.

Sprinklers for Property Protection

A key objective for the EU Fire Sprinkler Forum is to persuade Government to legislate for sprinklers to protect property, in particular in commercial buildings. However, there is no provision for Government to legislate for this requirement. The 1984 Building Act, under which the Building Regulations are made, does not provide the locus to regulate for property protection. This is an issue Government very much leaves to property owners and their insurers – in the same way Government merely expects drivers to carry at least third party insurance on cars.

Sprinklers for Environmental Protection

The 1984 Building Act does provide for greater levels of fire protection to a building for justified sustainability reasons (which the Building Regulations can cover). Sustainable Buildings plan to investigate the potential impact of fire on the environment and building sustainability. In summary, the current position is:

- budgets are very tight, highly unlikely that SB will be in a position to let a research contract on the impact of fire on the Environment and Building Sustainability until 2008/09
- research will probably take the form of an initial scoping study and then more detailed analysis - will probably take 24-36 months in total to complete ie 2011-2012.