

P-05-858 Fire Sprinklers are for life, not a fast buck!, Correspondence – Petitioner to Committee, 08.09.19

I have received both praise and criticism in equal measure for my petition to the Committee requesting relevant authorities (particularly Building Control) to use third party accreditation as evidence of competence to design and install.

When it comes to designing and installing sprinkler systems true competence only comes with several, if not many, years' practical experience that provides a well rounded knowledge of what will, or will not, work in situations that do not neatly fit into the limited practical examples that are provided in a three or four day design course.

Just a few questions that may arise during a design or installation:-

If a typical two storey house only has one sprinkler in each room are you sure you only allow for one head operating for a category 1 system? There is a very common error made by the inexperienced when considering this.

What do I do with this shadow area?

How far should my sprinkler be from this light?

Where do I position the sprinkler on this vaulted ceiling?

Competence comes from experience and training, not just the passing of an exam. Experience tells you where to look for answers that may not be in the relevant Standard or data sheet. An in depth understanding of how sprinklers operate, particularly of their spray pattern, will help a 'judgement call' when a situation that does not fit any guidance presents itself. Having a policy of utilising third party accreditation as evidence should ensure an installer is 'competent', after all, competence and ability is precisely what has been tested and assessed by the relevant certification body.

One criticism that occurs frequently on this issue is an accusation that my position on this is 'protectionist', the 'big boys' keeping competition out. This is far from the case, it is not prohibitively expensive to secure third party accreditation. No more expensive than what plumbers have to expend to secure their 'Gas safe' certification. My brother and I started our company in 2013 with no working capital yet immediately sought our accreditation with EXOVA FIRAS, becoming the first company in Wales to secure accreditation. Since that time we have actively assisted and sponsored others towards their certification, creating competitors in the process!

There have been some very expensive errors made by inexperienced trades (often plumbers or electricians) that have decided to install sprinkler systems creating much

distress and unnecessary expense for, in particular, individual house building projects. There were quite a number of non compliant mist systems installed by unqualified installers in 2018, most of which either failed causing water damage to houses, or were identified as not suitable and had to be replaced by fully compliant sprinkler systems. Unless some control measures are in place such situations will undoubtedly grow in number.

Kindest regards,

JOHN NEWMAN