

History of the Fire Testing Safety Group

Like many common-interest groups, the origin of FTSG are indeterminate but probably date from the informal meeting of those fire testing laboratories which existed in the early 1970's. Prior to that time, when an increasing use was being made of the independent consultant laboratories, there were no authorities. However, in recognition of the sheer quantity of data that was being produced by the independent laboratories, Her Majesty's Stationery Office agreed to include some of it in 'Fire Note No. 9', a publication which previously had only presented test data from the Fire Research Station. Publication of the independent consultant laboratory's data in such an authoritative document had to be justified by an assessment of the capabilities of this organisation, and the Fire Research Station undertook correlative exercises with the laboratories concerned on various items of test equipment.

Following this informal agreement, and with the relinquishment by the Fire Research Station of any responsibility for industry sponsored research or testing, it was recognised that the position of the commercial laboratories, with now established national and international reputations, had to be regularised. A series of meetings between the laboratories, Fire Research Station (FRS) and Central Government resulted in the "Supervisory Scheme of Fire Test Laboratories" which was operated by the Department of the Environment (DOE), the Government department responsible for building legislation. Direction of the scheme was via regular meetings between all the laboratories, the DOE and FRS and when the scheme was incorporated into the National Testing Laboratory Accreditation Scheme (NATLAS) the laboratories agreed that there was considerable benefit in maintaining a continuing and intimate dialogue on technical matters. The FTSG was the final format of the agreed liaison forum.

Tests conducted for building control purposes may be to various standardised procedures or may be of an ad-hoc nature. The underlying philosophies which influence the design and the choice of ad-hoc procedures need to be common and agreed between the different laboratories designing such tests. Also, although the Standardised test procedures which are frequently called up for building control purposes, are regularly updated, these are often inadequate to keep pace with the development of new materials or forms of construction, or with the increasingly difficult interpretations of fire test procedures and test results. FTSG commits most of its efforts to resolving some of these problems and to such aspects as agreeing common interpretations or inadequately defined test procedures.

In the light of events in Europe, specifically the relationship between the UK fire testing laboratories and their European counterparts, it was agreed in 1991 to restructure the group into a more formal organisation and to open its doors to all accredited UK laboratories involved in fire testing. Following discussions the group was incorporated into a limited company in 1995.

During this time the internal structure of the group was also changed so that there was a clear division between matters that required purely technical discussion and those that required consideration of policy, etc. Accordingly, the group subsequently met in two forums; a technical group which restricted itself purely to technical matters and which drafted resolutions on those matters, and an executive group which considered and decided on policy items and also approved the resolutions produced by the technical group.

From 2000, the group has worked closely with the Passive Fire Protection Federation (PFPF www.pfpf.org.uk). Work includes producing several printed guides for Enforcement Authorities, manufacturers and other end-users and supporting the federation's efforts in raising the quality of installed passive fire protection.