

# Safety standards conflict

▶ There are worries about the requirements for domestic alarms in the Scottish Building Standards Technical Handbook says **Gerald Jones**, Kidde Fyrnetics Business Manager.

Not only do they contradict the British Standard Code of Practice but also require much lower provisions than in other parts of the UK.

BS 5839 Part 6:2004 – Code of practice for the design, installation and maintenance of fire detection and fire alarm systems in dwellings gives the most extensive guidance covering new and existing homes, for single families or houses in multiple occupation (HMOs) consisting of self-contained units. While BS 5839 Part 6 is based on a risk assessment approach, it recognises that in most cases the guidance given can be applied as a minimum standard. The Code considers different ‘Grades’ – the reliability of a system in terms of its power sources. In all new homes and most existing, Grade D is now the recommended minimum standard – hard-wired smoke and heat alarms with backup, installed by qualified electrical contractors, leading to a resulting growth in the market. This is one area where national Building Regulations around the UK are all now in agreement. Category LD1 provides extensive protection throughout a property while Category LD3 covers just escape route circulation areas in halls and landings. But the minimum recommendation in BS 5839 Part 6 for new housing and

most existing homes (where structural fire precautions may not be up to standard) is Category LD2 – requiring alarms in Living Rooms and a heat alarm in every Kitchen, as well as the usual smoke alarms in circulation areas. In contrast to the Code, Scotland’s latest Domestic Technical Handbook, 2007 calls for a smoke alarm ‘in a circulation area which will be used as a route along which to escape, not more than 7 m from the door to a living room or kitchen and not more than 3 m from the door to a room intended to be used as sleeping accommodation. Where the circulation area is more than 15 m long, [a smoke alarm is required] not more than 7.5 m from another smoke alarm on the same storey. These recommendations are broadly... a Grade D Type LD3 system.’ This level of protection is considered unsuitable for new homes in the Code of Practice. The latest fire statistics for Scotland attribute 56% of fatal fires to smoking, followed by cooking, with a growing trend for fires starting in living rooms, followed by kitchens. The savings made by omitting smoke or heat alarms in these rooms form a tiny proportion of total construction cost – but the real price paid in terms of lives could be severe. Statistics for Scotland show 60%



more domestic fire deaths (per 1000 population) over the same period than in Northern Ireland, where the regulations closely follow the Code requiring smoke/heat alarms in living rooms and kitchens as well. Contractors should encourage customers to consider the recommendations of BS 5839-6:2004 and not just accept the lower standards of the Scottish Technical Handbook. The additional smoke and heat alarms required mean extra opportunities for installers – but they could also save lives. Kidde Fyrnetics has published an 8-page guide covering national Building Regulations around the UK and Ireland, British Standards and other requirements for fire and carbon monoxide safety in housing. It is available free of charge via [kiddefyr@ukgateway.net](mailto:kiddefyr@ukgateway.net) or on [www.smoke-alarms.co.uk](http://www.smoke-alarms.co.uk) using the ‘Contact us’ link.

**Building Regulations around the UK now require hard-wired smoke alarms with backup power.**