

LABSS INFORMATION PAPER INFOP03 - 2015 Version 1

DOMESTIC BUILDINGS

Fire Resisting Doors

Use of uncontrolled self-closing devices on fire resisting doors

Applicable to Domestic Buildings in relation to Section 2: Fire

BACKGROUND

Discussions have been held within the LABSS/BSD Technical Working Group where BSD have carefully considered the advice contained within the draft LABSS TPN. BSD advised that they could not support the advice, and gave the undernoted rationale behind their decision. LABSS is content to support this clarification of intent and scope.

INTRODUCTION

The guidance supporting the Standards in Section 2: Fire of the domestic technical handbook (TH) recommends that fire doors should be self-closing and installed in accordance with the recommendations in the Code of Practice, 'Hardware for Fire and Escape Doors' Issue 2, June 2006, published by the Door and Hardware Federation (DHF) and the Guild of Architectural Ironmongers.

This publication has been withdrawn and replaced by Issue No 4 published in November 2012; however the TH continues to cite Issue 2, June 2006. The change of language between the 2 publications has led to confusion as to whether uncontrolled closing devices are acceptable on fire doors within dwellings.

TECHNICAL HANDBOOK GUIDANCE

Within the technical handbooks a self-closing fire door is defined as "a fire door, fitted to close automatically from any angle of swing." The use of uncontrolled self-closing devices on fire doors has been queried because anecdotal evidence suggests some types do not effectively close the door from any position particularly in modern houses with air infiltration rates of less than 10m³/h/m²@ 50 Pa.

RESEARCH

The Department for Communities and Local Government in England and Wales commissioned research in 2006 examining the interaction of occupants in dwellings with door closers "Householder interaction with self-closing devices on doors". Report by Andrew Irving Associates for ODPM.. They had become aware of anecdotal evidence that implied occupants were removing door closers from internal fire doors within dwellings. There was also no mechanism under the England & Wales building regulations for ensuring on-going compliance once consent is given.

The research identified that householders regularly complained that these devices were a hazard to children and a nuisance to other occupants and the infirm. As a result such closers were often disabled or removed soon after occupation

The results of the survey showed that around two thirds of households that should have self-closing devices fitted to their doors did not have them present. Where the devices were present, around two thirds of those households propped their doors open at least some of the time.

This research supported the removal of the provision in Approved Document 'B' for internal fire doors in dwellings to require self-closing devices. It also recognised the importance of fire safety education in raising the awareness of occupants on the need to close doors especially at night.

In Scotland, the Building Standards Advisory Committee reviewed the research but recommended that internal fire doors in dwellings should continue to require self-closing devices be fitted. This position recognised one of the key findings from the research which showed occupants were slightly more likely to close their doors at night where they had self-closing devices fitted.

“Hardware for Fire and Escape Doors Publication”

Issue No 4 of this publication has amended the guidance in relation to uncontrolled closing devices. Previously in issue 2, it stated that such devices “should not be considered for commercial applications or in any location using unlatched doors.”

This was amended in Issue 4 and now states “they should not be considered for fire doors which require a self-closing device according to Approved Document B 2006.”

This change in the guidance document has caused some confusion in Scotland as it appears to rule out the use of such devices on internal fire doors within dwellings. The confusion has arisen because there is no requirement for self-closing devices to fire doors within dwellings in the building regulations for England and Wales and as such there was no reason to mention dwellings in relation to uncontrolled closing devices (see research paragraph above).

This is recognised in issue 4 under clause 3.1 where it states “Dwelling houses and flats granted planning permission before April 2007 fall under the recommendations of Approved Document B 2000 edition, which required any internal fire doors to be self-closing. This requirement will continue for such buildings, and self-closing devices should still be provided on such internal domestic fire doors in any refurbishment. In these circumstances, uncontrolled closers are permitted, including rising butt hinges. Dwelling houses and flats granted planning permission after 5 April 2007 fall under the recommendations of Approved Document B 2006 edition. In this case, any dwelling houses and flats fitted with hard-wired smoke sensors may have internal fire doors without self-closing devices.”

CONCLUSION

The Technical Handbook Domestic continues to recognise that uncontrolled door closers may be used on internal fire doors within dwellings in accordance with the guidance given in the Code of Practice, 'Hardware for Fire and Escape Doors' Issue 2, June 2006. Issue 4 of the above Code of Practice will not be cited in the TH until it has been amended to reflect the guidance in Scotland. The authors of the above Code of Practice have indicated that this will happen at the next available opportunity.

“Householder interaction with self-closing devices on doors”. Report by Andrew Irving Associates for ODPM.