

Essex County Fire & Rescue Service

Chief Fire Officer: David Johnson LL.b(Hons), BSc, MA, MSc, FCFI



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18 June 2010

Councillor Knapman

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Dear Councillor Knapman

Surface Spread of Flame within Common Areas

Further to our conversation regarding surface spread of flame in common areas at the recent Fire Authority meeting, I can confirm the following definitions, which are referred to within various guides, including the Building Regulations and Approved Document B.

In essence, the choice of materials for walls and ceilings can significantly affect the spread of fire and its rate of growth, even though they are not likely to be the first materials ignited. The flame spread over wall and ceiling surfaces is controlled by providing for the lining materials to meet given performance levels in tests appropriate to the materials or products involved.

The national test for establish the surface spread of flame is British Standard 476. This tests all materials, and gives a grading of between 1 and 4, with 1 as the least flammable. The Building Regulations describe a Class 0 material, which is a totally non flammable material (i.e. gypsum plaster or a brick). Whilst accepted within the guides, these are not covered by the British Standard.

The above provisions do not apply to the upper surfaces of floors and stairs because they are not significantly involved in a fire until it is well developed, and thus do not play an important part in fire spread in the early stages of a fire that are most relevant to the safety of occupants, and therefore any floor covering that may be in place.

However, should the fire risk assessment for the premises show that the floor covering presents an excessive risk of exacerbating the spread of fire, it would be deemed as not complying with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety Order) 2005, and the Fire Authority may take action to address this element.

I hope this is of some help; however should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me at the above address.

Yours sincerely

Paul Bowers

Senior Divisional Officer

Prevention, Protection & Community Risk Management