

Minutes of the Safety Group Fife

Held on Monday 8th October at

**Dunfermline Building Society, Caledonia House
Carnegie Avenue, Dunfermline, KY11 8PJ**

Present

David Cant	Lauder College
Catherine Welsh	Fife Council
Sam Dimeck	Self
Peter Ager	Fife Council
Tom Heath	Self
Glyn Beech	Phoenix Safety Services
Andy Martin	Fife Health & Safety
William Miller	Strath Safety
Richard Wilson	Queen Margaret University
David Jones	Velux Company Ltd
Ian Norton	North British Distillers
Alan Harwood	FMC Technologies
Tom Canning	Babcock
Chris Dron	Self
John Johnston	FMC Technologies
John Auld	Quaker Oats
David Latto	Fife Fire and Rescue Service
Neil Holden	Forbo Nairn

Apologies for Absence

There were apologies from Sally Eddington, John O'Rourke, Andy Fowler and Ann Marie Smith.

Chairman's Opening Remarks

In Andy Fowler's absence, Davy Cant chaired the proceedings, DC opened by welcoming along three new members Glyn Beech of Phoenix Safety, John Auld of Quaker Oats and Neil Holden of Forbo Nairn to their first meeting.

Minutes of last Meeting

The minutes of the last meeting dated 11th September were approved.

Presentation

DC introduced Station Officer David Latto of Fife Fire and Rescue Service who was going to talk about the Fire Scotland Act 2005 and the issues that the Fire Brigade have had in enforcing it.

DL started by saying he could hardly believe it was a year already since he had presented last to the Group. He started with two quotes, one from Edward J Smith, the Captain of the Titanic;

“When anyone asks me how best I can describe my experiences in nearly 40 years at sea, I merely say, uneventful..... I never saw a wreck and never have been wrecked nor was I in any predicament that threatened to end in disaster of any sort.” 4th April 1912.

and

From the owner of a Joinery Shop, somewhere in Fife in July 2007 (after his premises had been raised to the ground).

“I’ve worked here since 1947 and owned the place since the 60’s. Nobody ever told me about Fire Regulations – anyway I’ve never had a fire up until now so why should I comply? Surely one fire every 60 years is not too bad?”

DL stated that the Fire Service had audited 700 premises in Fife, four enforcement notices had been served and three prohibition notices (DL stated that he could not enter into specifics as some of the notices were pending prosecution). He went on to state that 90% of the premises have had letters issued covering deficiencies in their Fire procedures.

He went on to state that there were no trick questions when the enforcement officer carries out an audit (in this case the Fire Brigade). Their role was to gather and collate all of the information available and reach a conclusion. The outcome of which would result in either an enforcement letter or deficiencies letter.

DL commented that for companies obtaining a letter with a satisfactory rating on it now, it was not enough to sit back and file the paperwork. The new legislation has allowed for improvements in technology, as systems are improved these may need to be adopted by the businesses to maintain compliance.

Most deficiencies letters are issued as a result of individual’s reluctance to take ownership of the legislation. They think that the moment they get a piece of paper everything is fine. The reality couldn’t be further from the truth. If there were recommendations on the letter then action plans needs to be formulated and deficiencies addressed. A timeline should be set and progress reviewed on a regular basis with action points signed off as they are completed.

DL commented that another problem that he regularly comes across is ignorance of the legislation. This is not a defence in a court of law. He commented that there appears to be a hardcore of individuals out there who make the choice to ignore the law and take the risk of not being caught.

DL commented that Fife Fire and Rescue Service had conducted an extensive programme to advertise and promote the changes in legislation up to and during the implementation of the legislation; he stated that the Scottish Government has issued five guidance booklets to help businesses comply.

- Factories and Storage Premises
- Care Homes
- Offices, Shops and Similar Premises
- The evacuation of disabled persons from buildings
- Education and Day Care for Children – Premises

All of these documents are available to download from www.infoscotland.com/firelaw

DL stated that he had in conjunction with other enforcement officers made a top ten list of deficiencies and excuses that they had encountered during their work, these are listed below.

10. My risk assessment has been carried out by a competent company – I don't need to do anything else!
9. Risk Assessment carried out by an incompetent person. We have a fire certificate and the extinguishers are all in order, so everything is fine!
8. I'm new here, I only started one week/month/year ago and I am working on it!
7. Fire Scotland Act? What's that then?
6. The records are not up to date because Tam/Wullie/Bob is on holiday and it's his job.
5. The Janitor/Trainee office person is the responsible person for fire safety in this building, not me I'm far too busy (Managing Director).
4. A fire risk assessment? How do I do one of them?
3. The fire risk assessment is kept at head office/has been sent to head office it should be back next year!
2. The owner is responsible, I'm just the manager. I can give you an address in Brazil or Spain?
1. The risk assessment should be here, in the risk assessment folder. The person clearly doesn't have a clue as to what it is or what it contains.

DL commented that the risk assessment process is continuous; the paper process is part of it, not the end of it. DL closed his presentation and offered to take questions from the floor.

A question was asked about when Fire prohibition notices would be displayed on line as the HSE do. DL commented that he thought that it would be some time before the brigade was in a position to do this. It is being reviewed by the C4 Group (Chief Fire Officers Group).

CW asked what the most common failure was; DL commented that it was "responsibility" someone in every organisation needs to take responsibility for compliance with the legislation.

DL commented that from now on in Fife all false alarm activations would be investigated by the brigade and recommendations made. He also raised the question of Competence, stating that he considered the NEBOSH Fire course to be a minimum standard.

DL commented that going forward the fire brigade and the police would no longer hold key holding information on businesses. Any fire alarm activations out with business hours would be visibly investigated from outside the building but if there is no sign of a fire, the premises would be left with the bells still ringing. He commented that 98% of incidents that the brigade turn out too are false activations.

Schools don't fall under the remit of the Fire Scotland Act but the fire brigade will work with Head Teachers to produce a plan of action with timescales.

DL stated that there was a database of 15,000 businesses in Fife, the high risk premises are being tackled first with the medium risk premises being tackled over the next couple of years. He closed by stating that the role of the fire brigade in an investigation was to gather information for the PF to prosecute.

DC thanked DL for his presentation, CW presented DL with a small token of thanks on behalf of the Group.

DC talked about the success of the recent site visit to Exxonmobil and thanked them for hosting an excellent visit. He opened the floor to any other business.

MR raised the ARCO event that was due to be held at Hoptoun House over the 10th and 11th October, anyone wishing to attend should complete the slip sent out with the last set of minutes. Several members of the group mentioned that they would be attending.

AH raised the subject of the SCOS Conference, the date had been set at 26th February 2008, the venue would be Dynamic Earth in Edinburgh, an attempt has been made to breathe new life into the conference which has lost its sparkle over the last number of years. The format has been completely revamped with some interesting speakers being lined up.

The local groups would be offered subsidised tickets for their membership; this was to encourage new members within groups.

John Johnston commented that his work on the website was ongoing, although he stated that it had been difficult to spend a lot of time on it due to other commitments.

DC closed the meeting, thanking every one for attending and announced that the next meeting would be held on Monday 12th November 2007 and that the speaker would be Mr Brendan Reid of the Carbon Trust.

Mark Russell
Secretary