

EXPORTERS NEED MORE GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE INSISTS ASFP CHIEF

Wilf Butcher, Chief Executive of the **Association for Fire Protection (ASFP)** has criticised the Government for its lack of support to British construction industry product manufacturers who market their materials abroad-

Speaking at the All-Party Parliamentary Fire Safety and Rescue Group seminar at Westminster, he stated that recent research showed the fire protection market had grown from £2 billion in 2001 to £3 billion in 2006 with the active fire protection sector (e.g. fire alarms and fire extinguishing) representing £1.2 billion and 'built in' fire protection sector (e.g. structural protection and compartmentation) accounting for £1.8 billion. But he queried if the export of British manufactured fire protection products and systems meant a great deal in the order of things and if the Government was at all concerned by its diminishing investment in continued overseas business generation?

It could be argued, he claimed, that the fire industry has traditionally had a helping hand in the endeavour, since many of the major markets that the British industry sells to, such as the Middle East and the Far East, have based their standards on those developed in the UK. But whilst that may have been true in the past, he warned, it is by no means the case any longer. Progressively and systematically, he pointed out, British/European standards are losing ground to American standards. Not just in the markets that have unfolded over the past ten years, but also in established markets and the reason is a very simple. It boils down to whether overseas specifiers are prepared to pay for British Standards, which collectively can run into thousands of pounds, or whether they opt to take advantage of Standards which, in some quarters, are offered and supported free of charge.

This is the current choice presented to specifiers on major projects around the world, he claimed. Do they continue to adopt standards recognised over many years, or do they embrace the American model and take advantage of all they proclaim to offer at no 'apparent' cost? This is not a theoretical debate, he urged. The issue is real, happening now and it is affecting the whole of the British construction industry.

The British fire industry is playing an absolutely pivotal role in developing the UK's fire industry stance within Europe and it is investing millions of pounds in the testing process as it proceeds. The result is a unified European market where all member states can trade freely under a single

.... cont'd



Tournai Hall
Evelyn Woods Road
Aldershot
Hampshire GU11 2LL
Tel: 01252 357835
Fax: 01252 357831
Email: info@asfp.org.uk
Web site: www.asfp.org.uk



President:
Brian Robinson
CBE, QFSM, FIFireE
Chief Executive:
Wilf Butcher
Secretary:
John Fairley FSAE

ASSOCIATION FOR
SPECIALIST FIRE
PROTECTION

A Company Limited by
Guarantee. Registered in
England No. 1292282

European harmonised standard regime. Such significant investment, however, will count for nothing if American standards continue to erode the UK's international markets. The alternative will be that we will be forced to re-invest into testing to American standards, or lose these markets altogether and this applies to British industry as a whole!

So, he queried, how is government assisting in averting the problem?

Seven years ago the UKT&I (UK Trade and Investment) recognised the significance of supporting the UK fire industry and created the Fire Industry Export Council. By working in partnership with each other many successful export initiatives were developed. These, in turn, assisted many UK fire companies to move into the global marketplace. Following a recent government appraisal designed to evaluate the strategic importance of each facet of British Industry, however, the fire industry found itself in spot number 35 (second from bottom) in the pecking order of industry group importance.

In 2007 Government funding all but dried up and now we learn that there is to be zero funding in 2008! As if to exacerbate the situation, British embassies are now under extreme pressure to sell their services to British Exporters, so we now face the double whammy of no export support and any work undertaken on behalf of British industry, by our embassies, is chargeable.

A good method of assessing Government support, he suggested, is to compare the way in which European countries sponsor their industries at international exhibitions. Until very recently, the annual government investment in supporting UK companies at international exhibitions was in the order of £20 million. In 2007 the sum was reduced to £8 million and funding ran out within five months. In 2008 funding will remain at £8 million, but how long will it last this year? Germany's investment this year, for example, stands at £25 million to support some three hundred trade shows. Arguably, this may be a reason why the 2007 'Big Five' exhibition in Dubai witnessed over 300 German exhibitors, whilst less than 70 attended from the UK

What is suffering, he warned, is exposure of British manufacturers in the international arena. In fire technology, British manufacturers are renowned as worldwide market leaders, but such disparity in funding is simply encouraging our competitors to storm straight past us.

Exporting is a partnership between industry and Government and the two are inextricably entwined. The message is a clear one. If the Government is serious about supporting fire industry export initiatives, it needs to listen to the people who know and understand the market. Investing hundreds of thousands of pounds setting up new quasi bodies is not what this industry needs. Fire UK is not asking for preferential treatment. It is asking for an even playing field to let us get on with the job.

- ends -

Notes to Editor

- (1): For further information, or if you require the above text any accompanying pic by email, please contact: INITIAL CONTACTS, Tel/Fax: 023 8073 8953. Email: initialcontacts@ntlworld.com Contact: Laurie Perkis
- (2): Please arrange for a copy of any published item to be sent to: 21 Gannet Cl, Southampton SO16 8ET
- (3): Reader enquiries should be addressed to: ASFP, Evelyn Woods Road, Aldershot GU11 2LL