



Fire Industry Association

Third Party Certification:

What does it mean for customers?

Introduction

If you are a purchaser of goods and services, you probably want to be confident that the product or service you're purchasing is fit for purpose. If it should fail and there are no safety or financial consequences, you're probably not going to worry too much. However, fire safety is all about protecting life and property. Furthermore, it is a legal requirement for the purchaser of fire safety services to ensure that the person or organisation carrying out the work is 'competent'. As most people commissioning this work are unlikely to be experts in fire safety, how can they be sure that the individual or organisation they are hiring is competent to do the job?

Third Party Certification (TPC) is evidence that a service or product adheres to certain standards. An independent expert, the third party, has assessed the service or product and certified that it complies with those standards. TPC can cover the technical qualities of what is being provided, but it can also relate to environmental, ethical or other qualities. This allows purchasers to be confident that what they are purchasing is 'fit for purpose' or that the supplier is capable doing the job. This white paper is concerned with the TPC of fire safety services, showing technical competency in areas such as the installation and maintenance of products and systems or the provision of professional services.



How does TPC work?

A Third Party Certification Body (or CB for short) assesses the qualities of a supplier organisation by comparing them with the requirements of a particular scheme. If the supplier organisation meets these standards then it is issued with a certificate detailing the scope of its certification. This process is called an Audit and is carried out when the organisation is first certificated and then periodically (typically every six months) to maintain the certificate.

The Certificated Organisation (the supplier) is permitted to claim compliance with the scheme, display copies of their certificate and, in most cases, display the logos of the scheme and the CB.

Depending on the scheme, the Certificated Organisation will also issue certificates of conformity for the product/service they provide, such as a complete fire alarm system or extinguisher service.

In the UK anyone can write a scheme document and anyone can set up a CB. For TPC to have value to the Certificated Organisation and to you, the CB and scheme must have a high degree of credibility.

In the UK, the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) validates the authority of the CB. It is an internationally recognised organisation appointed by the government to accredit certification bodies and the schemes they deliver. Anyone can set up a CB. Therefore, only those accredited by UKAS have proven credibility. This can be verified by checking claims on the suppliers' certificate and ensuring the CB is listed on the UKAS website for the relevant scheme.

The schemes are written and administered by recognised authorities. These include standard setting bodies such as British Standards Institution (BSI), CBs such as the Loss Prevention Certification Board (LPCB), or independent organisations such as British Approvals for Fire Equipment (BAFE). UKAS will only accredit a CB to deliver a scheme where UKAS are satisfied that the schemes comply with international quality standards.

Most schemes have a provision for the supplier to issue a Certificate of Conformity for each new system. It is that certificate that you, as the end customer, should be looking for. The Certificate of Conformity should provide Building Control, your local Fire & Rescue Service and your insurance company with convincing evidence that the system is of good quality and fit for purpose.

What schemes are available?

There is a wide range of TPC schemes covering such diverse areas as the installation and maintenance of fire alarms, extinguishers, sprinklers, emergency lighting, fire risk assessments, fire doors and passive fire protection.

The simple table below details which schemes are relevant to the service you are commissioning and where to go to ensure that the supplier you are using is certified.

Area of Work	Schemes	Where certified companies are listed
Fire Risk Assessment	IFC Fire Risk Assessment Scheme	
	BAFE SP205	
Fire Detection and Alarm Systems	BAFE SP203-1	
	LPCB LPS 1014	
Fixed Gaseous Extinguishing Systems	BAFE SP203-3	
	LPCB LPS 1204	
Emergency Lighting Systems	BAFE SP203-4	
Portable Fire Extinguishers	BAFE SP101	
Sprinkler Systems	LPCB LPS1048	
	Warrington FIRAS	
Fire Doors	IFC	
	Warrington FIRAS	

The majority of fire safety related schemes are produced and owned by the CBs. The exceptions are those produced by national and international standard setting bodies such as BS EN ISO 9001 and those produced by independent bodies, which includes BAFE.

How do you identify and select Third Party Certificated suppliers?

When purchasing fire safety services you should make sure that you have done your homework so that you are aware of the relevant scheme or schemes. You can do this by checking Appendix 1 to identify the right scheme owner or certification body for the product or service you are looking to commission. Once you've identified this you can visit that scheme owner or CB's website and draw down a list of potential suppliers.

An alternative approach would be to go the Fire Industry Association (FIA) website (fia.uk.com) and draw up a shortlist of FIA members in the relevant product and geographical area. TPC is a requirement of membership to the FIA as we strongly believe that TPC is the only effective way of ensuring the quality of products and services provided for fire safety.

However you select your supplier, don't be afraid to ask to see their certificate; if they have one they will be very pleased to show you. When your supplier produces a certificate examine it closely. Look at the 'scope'. Does it describe the service you are purchasing? If not, reject it. Verify the validity by checking with the CB - this can often be done online in seconds. It is worth remembering that certificates do have a limited life span and might be forged by a less reputable company. This simple check will give you added peace of mind.



Conclusion

Ensuring you use competent suppliers is both a legal requirement and a practical necessity. With such a range of schemes available, you can make sure your specific needs are met. Getting it wrong can be very costly through fines, legal costs, loss of property and loss of business. By seeking out suppliers with TPC, the risk is substantially reduced.