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PASSIVE FIRE PROTECTION SPECIFICATION

Passive fire protection measures have a long history of helping limit the effects of fire in buildings, but specifying a robust system isn't straightforward.

There is seldom a time when a high-profile fire is not making news headlines somewhere in the UK, and this regularly focuses attention on the subject of providing effective fire protection. Of course, saving lives is always the number one priority, but with fire related losses at an all time high, the need to also save buildings and the businesses they house is another significant driving force. The Arson Prevention Bureau estimates that up to 80% of businesses never fully recover from a fire.

The term passive fire protection generally covers such things as fire-resisting partitions, barriers and ceiling systems which are actually built into the fabric of the building - elements which play a key role in helping to achieve these aims. They help control the spread of a fire, buy time for a building's occupants to escape, help fire fighters tackle the blaze and also limit the damage wherever possible.

Yet buildings continue to become more complex in their design and this places extra pressure on the designers of fire protection systems. They must implement fire engineering principles and balance the use of passive fire protection against other measures, such as alarms and sprinklers, to create an integrated, effective and reliable solution.

Naturally there is a raft of guidelines, Building Regulations and certification schemes relating to fire protection that specifiers should be aware of and, in some cases, conform to. The increasing depth and complexity of these requirements can easily overwhelm the specification process and make the selection of the most appropriate solution a daunting task.

Fortunately, help is at hand. By selecting a well-established manufacturer who is able to offer a wide range of fire protection products and systems the architect, specifier or contractor can gain a great advantage in the race to comply with all the relevant regulations and best-practice guidelines. The more prominent fire protection manufacturers are ideally placed to provide all the necessary advice and technical guidance on the design of a passive fire protection system and the earlier they become involved, the easier it is to arrive at a cost-effective solution that does not compromise on performance. Those same manufacturers will also be able to provide all the required components needed so that a fully integrated and effective system can be sourced from a single supplier.

There are many passive fire protection options that the manufacturer can help the system designer to consider, including fire compartmentation systems. A robust fire compartmentation system can help to contain the spread of flame and heat, but to be effective it must also be able to withstand other factors such as water pouring from sprinklers or the impact of falling debris or fire-fighting action.

Fire-rated ductwork is another element that has a vital role to play in commercial and public buildings, but again care must be taken. Fire dampers situated where the ductwork passes through a compartment or wall can be very effective in sealing the ductwork should a fire break out, but this system has its drawbacks. Used on dedicated smoke extracts or kitchen extracts, the dampers may impede the ductwork's ability to safely remove smoke and other combustion products from the building.

Smoke extract ductwork must maintain full fire integrity, provide an appropriate cross-section that will allow smoke removal and also contain the fire without transferring sufficient heat to spread fire to other areas. Choosing the most appropriate fire-rated ductwork will result in a virtually maintenance-free 'fit-and-forget' solution that provides the required amount of protection. Again, the manufacturer can provide invaluable advice here.

The characteristics of the fire protection materials themselves are also important. Materials that are easy to handle and which require no additional foundations or other construction work will simplify the installation process. This can pay particular benefits on refurbishment or upgrade projects where the contractor has to work within the existing building framework, and a "dry" installation process will help further by minimising disruption to other trades working in the same areas, allowing faster project completion.

Fire protection is an area where specifiers and building owners simply can't afford to take any chances. Faced with the requirements of the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order, the Building Regulations, increasingly stringent demands of insurers and the devastating effects of an incorrect specification, architects, specifiers and contractors should give themselves the significant advantage that guidance from a manufacturer that specialises in passive fire protection is able to provide.

Promat DURASTEEL[®] is the market leader in fire barriers and fire rated ducting, providing a complete fit-and-forget containment system that has been tried and tested under the most extreme conditions. This has led to its specification on a number of prestigious projects such as Heathrow Terminal 5, the Westfield Shopping Centre and the Wood Lane Tube Station in London, and other projects for such clients as EDF Energy, the British Museum and the Ministry of Defence.

**Sean Appleton
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Editors' Notes

1. Promat UK Limited is the UK's only dedicated manufacturer of passive fire protection products and systems. Promat's product portfolio also includes high performance calcium silicate boards Promat SUPALUX[®], Promat MASTERBOARD[®] and Promat VERMICULUX[®], as well as the Promat PROMASEAL[®] range of fire-stopping products. The company is renowned for its technical expertise and draws upon the resources of a worldwide research and development network and over 50 years experience in passive fire protection. Promat is a subsidiary of Etex, the Belgian building materials group present in over 40 countries

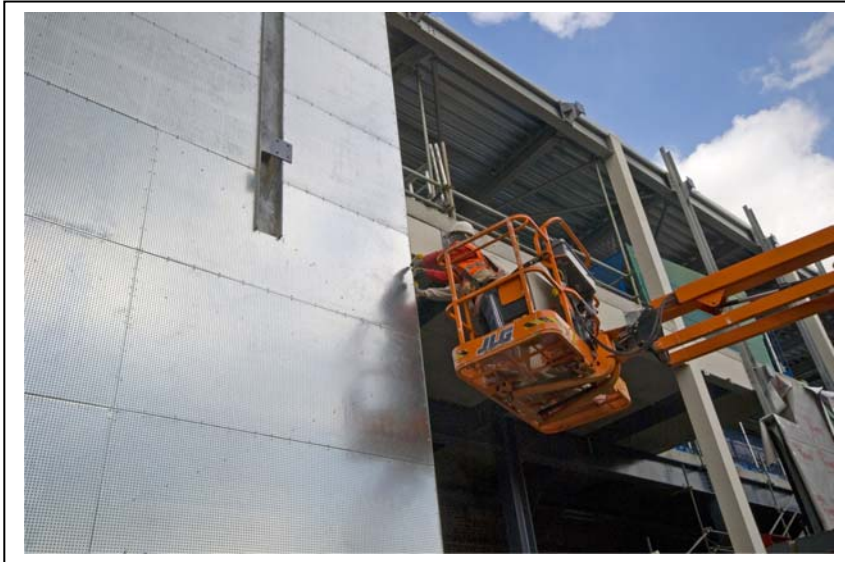
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Pic 1: The increasing complexity of the guidelines, Building Regulations and certification schemes relating to fire protection can easily overwhelm the specification process and make the selection of the most appropriate solution a daunting task.



Pic 2: The term passive fire protection generally covers such things as fire-resisting partitions, barriers and ceiling systems which are built into the fabric of the building.



Pic 3: Passive fire protection methods control the spread of a fire, buy time for a building's occupants to escape, help fire fighters tackle the blaze and also limit the damage wherever possible.



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