

Successful Passive Fire Protection Group Workshop

Author Greg Baker, Chairman FPANZ Passive Fire Protection Group

On Wednesday 15th November 2006 the FPANZ Passive Fire Protection Group hosted a one-day workshop at Fire Industry House in Auckland. Approximately 40 people attended the Workshop, representing the fire engineering design community, local authorities, passive fire safety product manufacturers and distributors, installation contractors, the Fire Service, the insurance industry, research organisations and the regulatory sector.

The Workshop was an opportunity for the key stakeholders in the passive fire protection industry to share their insights and experience and to become better acquainted with the main issues facing the sector as well as to contribute towards developing pan-industry strategies to effectively address areas of concern.

The Workshop had two main sessions. The morning session consisted of five presentations from invited speakers addressing topics relevant to the attendees.

The first presentation was given by Michael Simpson, a partner with well-known Auckland fire and structural engineering consultancy, MacDonald Barnett. In his presentation Michael gave a summary of the development of performance-based fire safety engineering and the application of passive fire safety features in the building industry.

The second presenter was Nick Saunders, Senior Technical Advisor in fire safety with the Department of Building and Housing in Wellington. Nick's presentation summarised the basic aspects of the building code compliance system that operates in New Zealand as well as insights into proposed changes.

The third presentation was made by Greg Baker, Chairman of the FPANZ Passive Fire Safety Group and Manager of Fire and Structural Engineering at BRANZ Ltd in Wellington. This presentation focused on the widespread use of test reports as evidence of building code compliance for manufacturers and distributors of passive fire safety products and systems.

The fourth presentation was from John Kitchen, Marketing Manager for Building Systems with Forman Building Systems in Auckland, suppliers of passive fire safety products to the New Zealand building industry. John's presentation highlighted a number of practical detailing and construction issues that are present on many of the building sites.

The fifth and final presentation in the morning session was made by Hans Gerlich, Technical Manager for Building Systems with Winstone Wallboards in Wellington and immediate past Chairman of the Passive Fire Protection Group. Hans' presentation highlighted previous initiatives by the Passive Fire Protection Group to successfully amend the fire resistance ratings in the New Zealand Building Code compliance documents. He also identified areas for the Group to focus attention in the future.

The afternoon session consisted of a workshop where participants addressed four questions:

- What are the major issues facing the passive fire protection industry currently in New Zealand?
- How can these issues be dealt with?
- What role does the FPANZ Passive Fire Protection Group have to play?
- Where to from here?

The workshop session stimulated lively debate and discussion among participants. The four major topics to be identified during the workshop session were:

- Industry training and education
- The quality of documentation
- Effective representation in the Standards and Building Code process
- Promotion of the Passive fire protection industry

A meeting to further discuss various options for industry training and education will be held in Auckland on December 5th 2006. Regular quarterly meetings of the Passive Fire Protection Group will commence early in the New Year.

Overall the Workshop successfully achieved its aims by firstly attracting very good participation from a wide cross-section of the passive fire protection industry but secondly, and most importantly, by gaining a strong level of support for future industry-wide initiatives that is ultimately intended to reduce the impact of fire in New Zealand.

A report on the Workshop would not be complete without acknowledging the significant contribution made by Bob Taylor, Kathryn McKeown and Britta Badenhorst from FPANZ in organising, promoting and staging the event. ■