



From the Editor

Time to get serious about fire

In recent years, there has been disquiet regarding the professional conduct of some sections of what is broadly referred to as the 'white collar sector'. Public officials, hospital consultants, barristers and solicitors have come in for particular criticism and serious damage has been done to the credibility of these professions as a result.

The recent Primetime investigates programme on 'fire in the home' raised the prospect of professionals and professional bodies in the construction industry being similarly damaged. The programme portrayed many apparent examples of professional incompetence, reflecting badly on the construction industry as a whole.

In Ireland we have one of the worst records in the world for fire deaths in the home with an average of 45 lives lost each year. Most, if not all of these deaths are preventable!

One of the key issues addressed by Primetime is that the 1981 Fire Act, introduced as a result of a detailed and hugely expensive investigation into the Stardust tragedy, has effectively never been implemented. Policing of the legislative requirements relative to compliance with fire regulations is highly deficient – to say the least. The full implementation of the 1981 Act is surely a prerequisite for any progress in reducing the unacceptable number of fire deaths.

Ireland has a very poor record in relation to the implementation & policing of Building & Fire Regulations. This may be partially related to the fact that, generally speaking, we do not create standards or write Building Regulations – we typically copy U.K. and or other nations standards. There may be benefits to copying well drafted regulations made by others, but there is clearly also a downside. Failure to set aside resources to deal with things 'from first principles' inevitably contributes to a lax attitude which in turn leads to a lack of cohesion. This lack of cohesion & consensus between responsible authorities and industry professionals was perhaps the most evident factor in the Primetime Investigates programme. As a senior fire consultant put it – 'nobody is responsible'.

Numerous editions of Concrete Today have addressed the issue of fire in the home. In particular, and in accordance with the interests of our membership and the general public, we have reported on the dramatic failure of the 6 storey Timber Frame 2000 Fire Test in Cardington, as well as highlighting the numerous examples of poor fire performance of timber frame homes in practice. Concrete Today has also recently addressed concerns in relation to the poor performance of 'compartment walls' in houses and apartment blocks, subsequently highlighted in the Primetime programme.

In this edition, we have decided to publish the list of criticisms/accusations made by Primetime. If the accusations are true – and many would appear to be – the construction industry has a problem on its hands which it should deal with, quickly and effectively. Turning a blind eye, or sweeping issues under the carpet is no longer an acceptable course of action in Ireland. If the many tribunals of investigation have established anything – it is this fact.

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