

Stepping up

Introducing the BWF Stair Scheme

The Problem in the Stair Market

Stairs remain one of the most common areas for accidents with over 800 recorded deaths attributed to slips, trips and falls on staircases every year in the UK. BWF members continue to report problems in the staircase market which undermine them as quality manufacturers.

The technical requirements for timber stairs are complex and difficult to interpret, and so prone to being ignored. The fact that the main British Standard is now obsolescent only makes things worse.

There is no straightforward method for Building Control or NHBC to verify that a stair has been manufactured correctly and complies with the relevant standards and building regulations.

The increasing use of timber stairs in multi-storey, multi-occupancy buildings (blocks of flats) brings this into sharp focus. If a stair failed during an emergency evacuation, the consequences would be devastating.

The Solution: The BWF Stair Scheme

The BWF Stair Scheme is the only accreditation and certification scheme of its kind in the UK. The scheme is focussed on promoting effective design, reliable manufacture, and developing guidance where standards and regulations are in conflict. It ensures best practice advice is passed to installers to reassure that products made by BWF accredited stair manufacturers consistently meet the relevant performance requirements for:

- Loading
- Deflection
- Fire Resistance

Accreditation

Accreditation means that every Scheme member's design process and manufacturing operation has been independently verified. All members are required to meet the standards laid down by the BWF Code of Conduct. Members receive an audit visit on application and are audited biennially from then on.

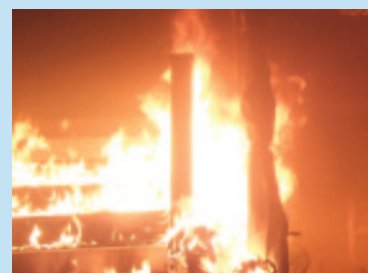
Fire Testing & Certification

In medium-rise buildings, the common flight stair may act as one of the routes of escape in the event of fire. So it is vital that it is able to resist the effects of the fire and maintain its integrity. This demands a higher level of accreditation. Members offering fire protected stairs have to demonstrate that their stairs comply with the requirements for fire protection under the test method set out in BD2569 Fire Performance of Escape Stairs – Guidance Document (Department for Communities and Local Government, 2009).

Independent third party certification via BRE's Loss Prevention Certification Board (LPCB), which tests and verifies design, performance, manufacturing process and quality assurance throughout manufacture, should be the minimum requirement for every passive fire protection product.



Stair prior to test



Stair burning under test



Protected stair after test



Unprotected stair after test

Factory Production Control System

Companies must have a suitable Factory Production Control (FPC) system in place to ensure that the products are manufactured consistently. FPC is an essential part of the accreditation, and will eventually become a necessity for anyone who is obliged to CE mark their products. ISO 9000 certification can provide a useful basis for FPC.

Auditing

All accredited manufacturers are audited biennially via the BWF and if they are certificated manufacturers of fire protected stairs, by the Scheme's certification partner.

The audit confirms that the company complies with the BWF Code of Conduct (for example covering customer care and dispute management, contractual dealings etc), that stairs continue to be manufactured according to the appropriate standards and that an appropriate factory production control system is in place.



It's All On The Badge

Every stair manufactured under the Scheme will carry the BWF Stair Scheme badge. The badges are self-adhesive and tamper-evident. They clearly identify the manufacturer and the level of accreditation and carry a unique serial number to ensure traceability.

The BWF Stair Scheme badges are located in one of three places:

- In a 3mm deep recess on the lower newel post immediately under the handrail.
- If the stair is supplied without baluster assembly, or is for installation between walls, on the top left hand corner of the lowest riser.
- Where the stair has open treads with minimal risers, or where the customer insists that the badge should not be visible, beneath the lowest tread in such a position as to enable it to be viewed using a mirror.

Members are required to keep records of labeled stairs for a minimum of ten years.

Accredited Domestic Stair

Domestic stair. To achieve this level of accreditation, a company must comply with the BWF Code of Conduct, and formally declare that their stairs comply with the relevant standards for manufacture by test, or other evidence that they comply with the Building Regulations. The declaration and the FPC System will be assessed by the BWF's Technical Manager, as the Scheme's auditor.



Accredited Common Stair

Stair in the common parts of buildings. Again, a company must comply with the BWF Code of Conduct, and formally declare that their stairs comply with, or have been tested to meet, the relevant standards, and the declaration and FPC system has been assessed by the Scheme's auditor.



Certificated Protected Stair

Usually applied to escape stairs in the common areas of buildings where, in addition to the general requirements for the stair, the manufacturer will have to demonstrate that their stairs comply with the requirements for fire protection under BD2569. This will involve product testing and will be subject to independent third-party certification by the Scheme's certification partner.



Further information on stairs

The Next Step in Technical Guidance for Timber Stairs BWF 2006

www.bwfstairscheme.org.uk

