

Simple but innovative

The need to provide building information to the fire and rescue service has long been recognised and formalised – it is the question: how is this information uniformly provided in order that it is there, ready to use in the event of an incident, which has remained unanswered... until now, writes Fiona Critchley, Marketing and Communications Manager, Gerda Security Products.



Whether meeting current fire safety regulations such as the Fire Precautions (Workplace) Regulations 1997 or at such time when the RRFSO (Regulatory Reform Fire Safety Order) becomes law, with the emphasis on fire prevention, there is the need to provide the fire and rescue service with reliable information on building layout structure and hazards/risks. This has been recognised in the recently published BSI guidance: BS5588 part 12 'Management of Fire Safety' Annex Q, and formalised as a recommendation to provide plans to the fire and rescue service.

The fire and rescue service have characterised an incident as consisting of three phases with differing information needs:

- 1. First response** The Golden Hour Plans, life risk, firefighting equipment and hazards
- 2. Consolidation** Building plans – wider scale, structural information, areas of special operational need, other risks, fire manual
- 3. Recovery** Business recovery, salvage

(Jim Golt, Group Commander, Fire Engineering Group, London Fire Brigade, Fire Times Jan 2005 p.35)

How should this information then be provided?

London Fire Brigade's Fire Engineering Group had established a need for a system, and set certain criteria: the system needed to be simple to use in fireground conditions, reliable

and available at the point of delivery.

London Fire Brigade initiated the design of the Premises Information Box system, working with Gerda® Security Products to a system that met these criteria. Developed over a period of 18 months, the innovative Premises Information Box system™ harnesses the advantages of Gerda's tried and tested lock and key management technology to allow fire brigade access to on site plans.

The acronym KISS (Keep It Simple Stupid) was the basis for the practicality of the system:



not reliant on individuals (in case the first line of defence, ie security staff, were to be compromised during an incident) nor reliant on power – yet an innovative system, providing a secure location for building information at the point of delivery and permitting immediate access for the attending fire crews.

In situations where crews from a neighbour-



ing area may be attending an incident, they can still obtain access to the Premises Information Box system without having anyone present to hand over keys – thereby allowing immediate access to plans to assist with the incident at hand. This has obvious advantages for organisations that may be sited in several locations.

The Premises Information Box (PIB) system continues to meet demand in a diverse range of market sectors.

Formalised system

Peter Bishop of Mersey Tunnels, explained the need for such a system to be in place. He said, "We have had a similar system for the last five years using 'Wayfinder Boxes' which contain information in a straight forward format specifically for the needs of the fire brigade."

However, the Premises Information Box system, a more formalised system, has now been adopted by Mersey Tunnels. "We have a huge subterranean world to consider including eight ventilation buildings serving the two tunnels – so it is important that the fire brigade, with whom we work closely, have plans specifically to advise how they navigate this area, which may involve the isolation of gas protected



sumps and pumphouses," said Mr Bishop.

With the danger of fires in road tunnels highlighted by disasters such as the Mont Blanc Tunnel incident in 1999, Peter Bishop underlines the need for effective communication with the fire and rescue service and views the Premises Information Box system as an important tool in assisting with this.

Roy Lavender, Facilities Manager for Hawker Pacific Aerospace, said, "Ensuring the availability of on site information to assist in the event of on site problems is crucial. The Premises Information Box system is readily identifiable and accessible to the fire service and assists in this important task."

Consolidation and recovery phases

In addition to the first responder information for the 'Golden Hour' as A3 plans, the PIB system has been designed so that it can also accommodate the detailed information that the

fire and rescue service could use as an incident enters the consolidation and recovery phases. The CD-ROM pockets on the reverse of the door can provide storage for this information. Each business/organisation will identify during the risk assessment process the information specific to their type of building to provide to the brigade in this way, which could include: mechanical and electrical details; safety file; asbestos register; contingency plans; fire safety manual; as fitted drawings; structural drawings; and business continuity information

The Premises Information Box system provides a uniform, secure and easily recognisable system for the provision of information that becomes a focal point for emergency action.

There is a strong commercial need to protect vital business equipment or, as the Business Continuity Institute calls them, 'Mission Critical Assets'. Even with the greatest of care, serious fires will probably also incur some degree of fire fighting water damage. Plans that highlight specific equipment or systems identified as a single point of failure give firefighters the opportunity to protect or move these during fire fighting operations.

Kingston Hospital NHS Trust is one of several organisations in the hospitals sector, already using the system. Allan Morley, Head of Estates, said, "We take fire safety and the organisation's continuity in the event of an incident very seriously and information to assist the fire service in attending an incident is of great benefit. As part of the fire risk assessment process the information is drawn up with the fire safety officers. The Premises Information Box system is an ideal means of providing this securely whilst allowing direct access to the fire brigade."

Business resilience

The insurance companies are also positive about the benefits of the system. Allister Smith, Property Risk Manager of Norwich Union Insurance, is 'fully supportive' of the Premises Information Box system. He said, "It does provide an advance in safety management and security to fire crews attending incidents, it also has the potential to assist with business resilience."

The Premises Information Box system, which has been developed by London Fire Brigade and Gerda Security Products, is being rolled out across the London Metropolitan area and is being adopted by fire and rescue teams across the UK, both regional and metropolitan.

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