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Welsh Slate and Fire Safety Approved Document B

In the last few years, the building industry has re focussed its attention to fire safety and the spread of fire within and between buildings. This focus and review led to an update of the Building Regulations 2010 and revisions to Approved Document B which came into effect at the end of August 2019.

Some of the most significant changes were the ban on the use of combustible material for external cladding in some applications and the method of assessing how combustible a construction build-up is.

The amendment called for physical tests to determine fire risk instead of the “assessment in lieu of test” or “desktop” assessment of the combustible nature of design details.

Approved Document B Volume 1 2019 provides information on the assessment of fire risk in dwellings. Section 12 of this document specifically covers the risk of the spread of fires over roofs. The distance between buildings is recommended by the classification of the roof covering. These classifications are BRoof(t4), CRoof(t4), DRoof(t4), ERoof(t4) and FRoof(t4), with BRoof(t4) allowing building to be in the closest proximity.

These amendments have caused some confusion within some design and building control departments when assessing the use of natural slate as a roofing material. Welsh Slate have had a recent spate of queries regarding the use of metal battens and fixing systems to ensure that the slate detail can achieve a classification of BRoof(t4).

Welsh Slate is non-combustible and has a general fire classification of A. Within Approved Document B the classification of roofing materials refers to an EU document “Council Directive 89/106/EEC”. Within this directive, natural slate is classed as non-combustible and is exempt from testing. This means that natural slate can be used as a roof covering in all situations without restriction.

In summary, Welsh Slate can be used in all situations as a non-combustible roof covering in line with the recommendations of Building Regulations Approved Document B 2019. This is based on slate fixed in a traditional manner to treated, graded timber battens. No special fixing systems are required.