

What's in a Name?

By Dr Bob Docherty



I had a great time at the NEC a couple of weeks ago supporting the IFSM stand and speaking to hundreds of people about all things fire over the two days I was there! This is the part of the fire world I like, a bit of banter, exchange of information, talking technical stuff and also having healthy debates from Grenfell to competency and 'all ports' in between!

Interestingly, a few visitors to the stand posed me a question, 'what's the difference between you, the IFE or the IFPO'?

Now, those of you who know me will know that I had an answer fairly quickly, but it did get me thinking a bit more about what the names of Institutes and Institutions in our industry actually mean, what they reflect, and more importantly how they are perceived in the present day world of fire.

If we take the Institution of Fire Engineers (IFE) first, then several years ago it was seen as a bit of a chief fire officers club and certainly a home for local authority fire and rescue service personnel from all over the world. There were a number of people on the IFE Council in the late 80's and 90's who tried desperately hard to fade out that image and they had partial success. It was also a time when the role and legitimacy of formal examinations was being questioned, the Fire Service Examination Board was disbanded, and the IFE only hung on to its own examinations by a slender thread thanks to the great work of a hard-faced examination committee and certain individuals on IFE Council at the time. Thankfully, the examinations continue as a core activity of the Institution.

However, the perception has changed with the coming of fire engineering degrees and the recognition given via the Engineering Council to the IFE. That change makes a twofold impression with one side heavily weighted towards fire and rescue (especially local

authority and public fire and rescue service personnel) and on the other, 'hard' engineering (big sums and loads of calculations stuff). I don't think it ever lost its direction as such, but the perception from 'outside' seems to show that its movement is definitely towards these two groups which leaves a bit of a gap in between. That gap is filled, I suppose, by the 'generalist' fire safety people. Might that leave this group feeling a bit disenfranchised and overshadowed by the two mainstreams of the IFE?

The Institute of Fire Prevention Officers (IFPO) has a history as well. It was formed to give a 'home' to fire prevention officers in local authority fire and rescue services (mainly those who had done the old long course and similar at the Fire Service College) although its membership expanded out from there. However, its name still implies that their membership is formed from officers in uniforms with shiny buttons who work for fire and rescue services and go out to enforce fire legislation.

The Institute of Fire Safety Managers (IFSM) was formed out of the FPA and CFPA diploma holders who couldn't find a 'home' amongst either the IFPO and certainly not the IFE at the time, so those people set up the IFSM. Initially, it was only for FPA and CFPA diploma holders and catered, like the diploma itself, for those people in industry who had the job of, and/or needed to take on the role, of fire safety in their company/works etc. The diploma gave them a qualification (not recognised until later by the IFE when the concept of equivalencies was introduced) in managing fire safety in industry – hence the title!

The great foresight was the name, 'Fire Safety Manager'. It can cover a whole host of jobs and activities that are linked to fire right across the whole of the fire sector. If you look at the breadth and scope of the membership today, you can see we are a very 'broad church' and yet I reckon that every individual member can, in some way, fit their role into the name 'Fire Safety Manager'. My view is that it is also timeless. It wasn't until the IFSM Council set up the Institute as a corporate body that it set out its objectives in its Memorandum and Articles of Association, the term 'Fire Safety Manager' was mentioned in the Articles but again, there was no formal definition.

In fact, the only person to try and define the role of a fire safety manager was Ben Bradford in PAS 7 'Fire risk management system – Specification' and the definition used was '**a person nominated to monitor and control management of fire safety**'. PAS 7 goes on to mention fire safety management in some detail throughout the specification and links it into the concept of 'fire risk management'. In his paper 'Fire Risk Management is Evolving' Ben Bradford (2017) argues that 'fire risk management' is a much broader discipline than 'fire safety management' but places '*life safety and life safety management*' firmly in 'the ambit of fire safety management.' Ben also sees the evolution of fire risk management as a continuum with fire safety management as part of that continuum although I don't think the steps portrayed are that discreet. Much more, I feel the boundaries blend and blur into one another, a bit like this articles title, 'what's in a Name'.

The fact that these documents mention management of *'life safety'* and its direct link to fire safety management, and therefore fire safety managers, is an important one. It is good to know that the two are firmly linked and associated with each other and maybe our name should reflect this in some way.

I think that the Dame Judith Hackitt review will place great emphasis on *'life safety and life safety management'* and given the recognised linkage between life safety management and fire safety management, the IFSM will be in the best position to offer those people who will be tasked with life safety management a proper professional 'home' which understands the objectives and challenges of the discipline.

At the moment, I am trying to formalise a definition of 'fire safety manager' which also captures and combines the role of 'life safety manager' and position the Institute accordingly – watch this space!

References

BSI, (2013). PAS 7 'Fire risk management system – Specification' British Standards Institute, London.

Bradford, B. (2017). 'Fire Risk Management is Evolving'. Rochester UK.