

EFSAC position paper on
“Sustainability, fire protection and security, a challenge for EFSAC and its members”
24 June 2011

Sustainability is being discussed widely and becomes an issue to be dealt with on all levels of society.

Sustainability is defined as the development that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Brundtland report 1987).

Two central elements are of importance:

- * The long-term
- * The balance between economic, social and environmental elements.

The European Commission calls for active engagement in its working paper on “A European strategy for sustainable development” in saying “governments cannot deliver sustainable development on their own. Business, workers and civil society have an indispensable role to play.”

EFSAC, the European Fire Safety Advisory Council, gathering all stakeholders involved in fire protection and security, can and must as such be the voice of the combined fire protection and security “society”.

Active fire protection and security systems (portable extinguishers, automatic detection and extinguishing systems, mechanical protection) and passive (for example fire doors and component and equipment door sets) are in itself highly sustainable activities -since protecting constructions and buildings and as such extending the life-time - within the scope of sustainable buildings on condition that :

1. The right systems, products are in place both from a fire protection necessity and from an environmental point of view.
2. Systems and products installed are maintained to keep them “fit for purpose” for the whole of its operative life, which will be in many cases a very long time indeed.

Those stakeholders involved with fire protection and security industry generally accepts the need to work towards the goals of sustainability and already proved to be cooperative to achieve this in the years behind us. Examples are the ban of halon, the ban of PFOS containing foam agents, the introduction of inert gases in fire extinguishing systems, the introduction of environmentally approved portable extinguishers etc. Their input in writing norms, standards and best practice guidelines is supporting that even more.

The examples described called for a new way of thinking, a new approach of the fire and security business i.e. individual companies and the corporations towards sustainability by proceeding from stakeholder dialogue towards stakeholder partnerships.

Fire protection and security systems and products also contribute to “community sustainability” for the simple reason that they lower the cost for public fire protection and police.

The other elements of fire prevention and security -namely code enforcement and fire safety/security education- also help make communities sustainable. Effective codes, when coupled with quality plan review and inspections, can be a huge factor in reducing property loss, life loss and fire-fighter deaths and injuries. The same applies to fire safety and security education programmes designed to address increased risks.

In order to buy-in for sustainability of buildings/constructions the fire protection and security industry, represented within EFSAC, must be convinced that the “triple bottom line” i.e. financial, social and environmental value-added, is wholly compatible with the aim of enhancing shareholder value. This can be done by adjusting R&D, product development, supplier relationships etc. to standards that go well above compliance; they should anticipate future government actions and shifts in consumer behaviour.

EFSAC can play an important role in promoting the sustainability message amongst its members, in organising and coordinating actions in order to paving the road for shared commitment for sustainability. Convincing our members that sustainability will become a condition sine qua non to do business, that it is not a hype but the business model for the future.

On the other hand, bringing to the attention of all other stakeholders that our industry is committed and capable to fulfil its role in the sustainability debate is essential too.