



STANDARDS

ISCVE Manifesto for UK Voice Alarms

Part 1

Voice Alarm Standards



The UK prides itself on having world leading standards in fire protection, leading to a safe environment for everyone living and working in the country. As we travel the world, the standards that fire protection systems are required to meet are often the British Standard and even where the European fire protection standards are invoked, we can see that many of the fundamentals of those regulations started in the British Standard many years earlier. This adoption of UK standards is great to see, for UK manufacturers and service companies, who are perceived to always work in compliance with a standard that is fundamentally their own, and, are also assumed to have the clearest understanding of that standard. Therefore, it is also concluded that as a British professional in fire prevention, any project you are involved in will deliver a safe outcome for the building users.

Taking the area of deployment first, where is Voice Alarm currently installed in the UK?

There are no laws requiring Voice Alarm to be installed anywhere in the UK. Fire detection in general must be 'appropriate' but this isn't defined. A licensing authority can insist on VA as part of the planning permission requirements, but mainly the take-up is 'where it makes sense.' Voice Alarm is installed in underground railway stations, shopping malls and high-rise office buildings. The original GLC section 20 requirement was to include a secure public address for any building of six stories or more but this has been withdrawn, and selections are made on a case by case basis, and the experience of our respondents was that even in large buildings in London, VA would be dropped to save budget if that was deemed advantageous by developers. Voice Alarm is rarely found in schools, universities, mid-size shops, residential properties, smaller offices or factories.

How is the activity of Voice Alarm implementation controlled in the UK?

In the UK, it is evident that we have an unaligned policy on fire alarm in general. As a manufacturer, you are not allowed to place goods on the market for sale unless they are fully tested by an independent laboratory. This is because the European Law requires this through the Construction Products Directive. This, however, is where certainty ends.

These well tested materials can be installed by any 'competent' person – a phrase which isn't really defined – and, as already mentioned, the fire detection system needs to be 'appropriate'.

To put this in context, we then have our code of practice, BS 5839-8 which covers the design, installation, commissioning, testing and maintenance of the VA system. Again, although the documents refer to 'responsible' and 'competent' persons, there's no clear confirmation on qualifications to be held by a competent individual.

Even where companies have experience of providing services in Voice Alarm and Fire Detection and Prevention generally, the knowledge is held in the individual employees who can and do change jobs, taking their skills with them.

In Summary

Voice Alarm is under-utilised and under-regulated in the UK compared to many other countries. Our findings are, unfortunately, in line with other expert observations of the fire industry, including the RIBA Journal that states : "A comparison of fire safety regulations across Europe shows that on the whole, most are more prescriptive than the UK's".

It is therefore beholden to industry bodies like the ISCVE to lobby for a firmer line from government and the UK legislature on this vital aspect of fire safety. It is not to ask for the UK to be the most prescriptive environment, but simply to bring it into line with international practices.

Part 2



The vision for the future – what should the ISCVE be lobbying towards?

If we start to examine what we believe to be best practice internationally, we could develop a code that all countries could then measure themselves against and it would be good to start with the UK. Looking again at the way we have divided this so far, we could consider the important elements to be:

1 Where will Voice Alarm be mandatory?

Any building of six or more floors that has public occupancy.

Any building where 100 or more visitors unfamiliar with the evacuation policy of the building may congregate.

2 Who will design the system?

A qualified designer, with a third-party certification showing they understand BS 5839-8 and EN54, and have sufficient acoustics skills to design an intelligible system.

3 What equipment will they use?

EN54 equipment in accordance with the European Construction Products Directive (CPD).

4 Who will install the system?

Person(s) qualified by a professional body, such as ISCVE, BFPSA or FIA.

5 Who will commission the system?

The system should be commissioned by an ISCVE Member and should be independently confirmed by the licensing authority or their representative using a checklist of tests to include basic functionality, cause and effects of the system, fault monitoring and full function of the secondary power supply.

6 And how will the system be cared for in the future?

The Voice Alarm is an essential part of the fire protection system. It must be regularly maintained in accordance with BS 5839-8 and all maintenance carried out by a company approved by ISCVE and/or BFPSA.

Part 3



ISCVE Manifesto for UK Voice Alarm - Where should SSEP's be installed?

We believe that the use of a Sound System for Emergency Purposes, enabling voice messages and warning signals to be broadcast for the safety of occupants in a building, broadcast either by an operator or after receiving a signal from a fire alarm system, according to the current version of **BS 5839-8**, is required in the following building types:

- 1** Retail, commercial or exhibition buildings:
 - a. single-storey with an area of over 3000m²
 - b. multi-storey, with an area exceeding 1500m²
- 2** High-rise office buildings of six stories or more or designed for occupancy by more than 500 people.
- 3** Entertainment and sports facilities with more than 1500 seats.
- 4** Cinemas and theatres with more than 600 seats.
- 5** Hospitals and health facilities with more than 200 beds in the building.
- 6** High-rise public buildings of six storeys or more.
- 7** High-rise collective residential buildings and hotels with more than 200 beds or with six storeys or more.
- 8** Metro and underground rail stations in accordance with Section 12 definition.
- 9** Stations and ports, intended to hold more than 500 people or DfT classified grades A-C.
- 10** Airports, intended to hold more than 500 people.

No other acoustic fire alarm devices should be used to alert users of the building types listed where a voice alarm system is installed, unless necessary.

The requirement referred to in point 6, does not apply to buildings located in closed areas serving the MOD and HM Prison Service accommodation.