

# Safety wins as GCC gets first fire testing tunnel

Thomas Bell-Wright brings rare Steiner model to region to fight flames

by *Cathal McElroy* June 24, 2012

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The first fire testing tunnel in the GCC, based at Thomas Bell-Wright International Consultants in Dubai, has received international accreditation from the United Kingdom Accreditation Service (UKAS) following its recent commissioning.

The Steiner fire tunnel, which is 7.3m long and 60cm wide, is one of only seventeen in the world and is capable of testing a vast array of construction materials for flame-spread and smoke generation.

The tunnel works by digitally measuring the rate at which the material, laid along the length of the tunnel, burns while also recording the amount of smoke that is generated from the reaction.

UKAS, which assesses against internationally agreed standards organisations that provide certification, testing, inspection and calibration services, accredited the tunnel its Reaction to Fire testing ASTM E 84.

Speaking to *Construction Week*, Tom Bell-Wright, CEO of Thomas Bell-Wright International Consultants, said, “We’re very happy to have received the accreditation. We are the only fire testing laboratory in the whole region and with the Steiner tunnel equipment we can adopt the American approach to testing materials’ reaction to fire.”

“In terms of British and European standards, there are other standards, other approaches, but we felt this one [the UKAS accreditation] was more universal for this region,” he added.

While significant progress on fire safety has been made in the region in recent years, Bell-Wright says the industry needs to be given greater encouragement by the authorities to ensure building materials are of the requisite standard.

“It is a requirement [to have materials tested] but it is perhaps not enforced as much as it could be. I think that is partly because people are not aware that we are here. When testing is available locally then people take advantage of testing.

“If they don’t know it’s available and they think they have to go the UK or the US to meet the requirements of the standard or the code, then consultants and building regulators are less likely and less inclined to force manufacturers to meet those requirements.

“But once they know that it’s here then it’s easy for them to say that they’ve got to get it tested. We say that our testing facility helps regulating bodies, architectural consultants and contractors make fewer compromises because they can actually get stuff tested here,” he added.

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