



Glenn Talbot

The case for documented evidence of compliance

It is generally thought that the new Standard for Fire Protection, AS1851, is a sizable step forward in ensuring the provision of fire safety measures. But what does it actually mean for facility managers and contractors charged with ensuring regulatory compliance? Max Winter asked an industry expert who should know – Glenn Talbot from Verified.

Facility Perspectives: Can you tell me about your service, and the sort of issues you have found with compliance testing and maintenance requirements in the field?

GT: Verified has been in operation for 5 years, with 30,000 sites on our database and millions of client records. Annually we send over 30,000 reports to facility managers and building owners. It is alarming to see how many tests are not being completed, tests one could assume, that have been paid for. Unless the facility manager has a sophisticated tool like Verified, it would be near impossible to confirm what tests have been completed, or more importantly, not completed.

For example, we generated a compliance report for one of our clients, based on 700 sprinkler systems they had contracted out for a 3 year period. The report showed that only 60% of the valve overhauls had been completed, yet 100% had been paid for. There are a number of different testing frequencies for a Fire Systems, from weekly to 30 yearly. We tend to find that the high frequencies such as weekly or monthly, have a relatively high completion rate. They are done by the same person week-in / week-out (or each month). When it comes to the lower frequencies, it generally takes a higher skill set, the contractor may need to arrange parts, or the job needs to be scheduled. Generally these frequencies are overlooked or neglected. Lower frequencies also carry most of the cost within a maintenance contract.

Insurance companies are particularly anxious to ensure that all tests, including the lower frequencies, are completed correctly. These major tests are the most rigorous and will show defects and system failures that the lower frequencies will not. You can test a sprinkler system every week and it is not until the annual test is done that it is identified the system would never have worked correctly in fire situation.

Once the test is performed and relevant paperwork has been completed, you have documented evidence of compliance. If you do not have evidence of compliance as per the relevant standard or regulation, YOU ARE IN TROUBLE. Whether it leads to criminal or civil litigation, you need to be able to produce the documented evidence that you have performed the test.

On a number of occasions Verified records have been used as evidence, to shift some of the responsibility when a loss has occurred. One of our clients had a major loss when a sprinkler system failed to work properly. From the Verified records it was found that the contractor failed to test the system correctly. As such some of the liability and cost was borne by the contractor's insurance company. Others have used Verified records to enforce KPI's and/or apply penalties when the service standards not been met as per the contract.

It is important for both the contractor and client to know that now there is a tool available to accurately measure a contractor's performance. We are able to notify our clients of any test that has been missed or defects found. The client then has the ability to measure what is being delivered.

Coles Group have now included in their Fire Safety Measures contracts that the service delivery will be measured. Should something be missed, it is the contractor's responsibility to ensure delivery or they will not get paid. In addition, Coles Group stipulates that the contractor must provide the documentation to Verified – as this is their only surety that the job has been done.

Understanding that facilities managers are time poor, we have automated the process of generating reports and statistics, providing them in either Excel or PDF format. At the push of a button periodic reports can be generated automatically. The report(s) query is set up once and forgotten about, yet received monthly, or a frequency defined by the client. The report(s) can be configured with numerous

query items such as tracking contractor jobs, type of works completed and/or geographical areas the work was performed in. The report is represented graphically and is color coded so key items are easily recognized. This makes for easier analysis and follow up of key issues or defects.

Recently we have provided report access to contractors, inviting them to understand how they are being measured, and to assist them in delivering their contracted service. They are now able to see what their clients are being notified of (such as missed tests or defects). It has proven to be a powerful tool for the contractor, with the results being an increase in the service level for their clients.

Initially our system was not seen favourably by contractors, as they were being held accountable for their actions. Over time, and with education, we have found an uptake from major contractors because they now see that the system can work for them too. They are able to monitor and manage their employees and sub-contractors, be pro-active in rectifying defects, ensure tests don't get missed, and generally provide a better service to their clients.

Facility Perspectives: What has been the reaction to the new Standard AS1851 in the field?

GT: The changes that come about due to the implementation of Australian Standard AS1851-2005 make it far more onerous for the building owner and facility manager to ensure fire safety maintenance gets delivered correctly. There are significant changes to the structure, regime, control, reporting, and documentation requirements of the new standard. These changes impact on the role of the facility manager and they must have good systems in place to measure and control the work of the specialist providers in this area. Some changes include; new test frequencies with specific tolerances for each period, anniversary dates for frequencies are now based on the original test date for that frequency (dates that were in the past), physical records are required on site, surveys of back of house safety systems need to be carried out, and condition reports (noting missed tests and outstanding defects) need to be generated annually, to name a few.

AS1851-2005 definitely demands a more rigorous testing regime for your critical safety systems and should be embraced because of it. We must be aware of the impact it has on the workload, the costs to deliver these services, and the resultant reporting and performance expectation. To compare the workload I need only to compare the Verified test sheet from the old to the new standard. The old single test sheet covered frequencies from weekly to six yearly and contained 30 test questions. The new Standard requires us to have three separate test sheets covering the same frequencies, with a total of 197 test questions. That is a significant increase in the test regime and does not include all the additional recordings for pressure, temperatures, flows, and so forth.

Although the new Standards are onerous, Verified has adapted their systems to ensure the reporting and recording process is automated. The facility manager will know if something has been missed, that the frequencies have been completed within tolerance, that the service provider has completed the test as required, and have the ability to produce a condition report at the click of a button and have all the original records to back it up with. All this will happen without any direct day to day involvement from the facility manager.

Facility Perspectives: Are there any other applications the service is used for?

GT: It seems every time we present or implement the

product our clients come up with other items that they have trouble controlling. Verified has invested significantly in back end systems recently to allow the rapid development and implementation of additional products that use the same proven process. Now it really is a case of Verified becoming a technology process company rather than a company that provides a specific product in the fire safety arena. There are already many examples of new product initiatives.

We have off the shelf products for electrical testing, water treatment, general maintenance, RCD testing, testing and tagging of leads, mechanical surveys, and a few more currently in development.

Some specific client forms include:

- ▶ Coles Express (700 sites) tracking delivery of general service including refrigeration, LPG testing, auto doors, carwash etc.
- ▶ NSW Department of Commerce for security, MATV, cold & hot water systems, telephone cabling, and other general services.
- ▶ Department of Housing – smoke alarm forms
- ▶ Coles Group – Store Responsibilities form measuring some safety and OH&S monthly requirements.

There are endless uses for our product, with interest being shown in the food handling & cleaning industries, large property portfolio surveys, scientific research data collection and OH & S reporting.

As clients change their contractor from time to time, historic records are usually lost when the contract ends. From a risk management point of view it can be quite exposing to lose compliance data, which often forces clients to remain locked into the one contractor. Verified hands that power back to the client, as the data is the property of the client, not the contractor and not Verified. It makes no difference if the client changes contractors on an annual basis, as the compliance data is always in the hands of the client.

Some facility managers can be wary of a system that is enacted externally, usually because they have a considerable investment in their own systems/software. Often they don't realize that Verified collects the original document from the field. The document is then scanned and made available electronically via the internet for future use, should it ever be needed. These documents can be integrated with their own systems quite easily, with clients using Verified in conjunction with their own ERP system to close the routine job loop automatically.

There is no other system out there that actually grabs the information from the field, and secures the original document for future should it ever be needed. VERIFIED DOES.

About Glenn Talbot

Glenn Talbot is the founder and Managing Director of Verified, a company that provides state of the art management processes for the control of fire protection and building maintenance. Glenn holds an Associate Diploma in Applied Science (Fire Technology) and has been in the fire protection industry for over twenty years. His roles have included State and General Manager of some of the industries largest service providers.

He has been an active Fire Protection Association (FPA) State committee member of the FPIA/FPAA for over 15 years, holding the position of Vice Chairman of the Victorian division from 2003 – 2006. In 2006 he was elected to the board of the FPA. He is a current member of the FMA.