



Understanding Product Accreditations and Why They Matter

With product claims and performance coming under increased scrutiny, Sarah Spink, CEO of the Liquid Roofing and Waterproofing Association (LRWA), explains the importance of understanding accreditations

Following the Grenfell tragedy and recommendations in Dame Judith Hackitt's report, product verification is becoming crucially important. No longer will it be acceptable to revert to old specifications. Everyone involved in a construction project, from manufacturers and procurement managers through to specifiers and contractors, will have a responsibility to ensure that products have been appropriately tested and are suitable for the application.

Third-party accreditations provide the data that is needed to confirm that individual products will meet specified requirements and perform as expected. For the liquid waterproofing industry, agrément certificates and European Technical Approval (ETA) certificates are commonly used.

There are, however, key differences between the two and it is vital that accreditations are fully understood to avoid the risk of inappropriate products being used and a project potentially failing.

What is an Agrément Certificate?

Agrément certificates are issued by independent organisations to confirm that building products and systems are fit for purpose. To achieve an agrément certificate, products and systems must pass a series of comprehensive assessments, which verify that the product performs as expected based on the parameters given by the manufacturer.

Importantly, the certificate will list different factors that demonstrate compliance with UK Building Regulations. For liquid waterproofing products, these include weathertightness, fire related properties, adhesion, resistance to foot traffic, and durability.

The BBA is the UK's leading construction certification body. There is a very similar, but less well-known, accreditation available through Netherlands-based Kiwa, called a BDA Agrément. Manufacturers would usually have one or the other, but not both.

For domestic work, the certificate will also confirm whether the product meets the standards required by the National House-Building Council (NHBC).

Agrément certificates are reviewed every three years, so when specifying or installing a product, the most recent certificate must be referred to. If a manufacturer changes anything in the formulation of a liquid membrane, it has to be declared to the certification body and may need re testing.

Agrément Certificates: What to Look For

One of our biggest concerns is that people don't read agrément certificates properly, and therefore make inaccurate assumptions or rely too heavily on manufacturers' own product claims, some of which are misleading.

It is important to read the detail thoroughly and understand what the product has actually been tested for, and what is covered by the certificate.

For example, it is not uncommon for a list of accessories such as primers, insulation boards, carrier membranes and vapour control layers to be listed on the certificate but that does not always mean they have been tested – just that they can be used in conjunction with the tested product.

Similarly, it may be that a certain liquid waterproofing system is required in a particular thickness to meet the accreditation.

Another important detail to check is the substrate the liquid waterproofing has been tested on. Some products entering the UK market from abroad have only been tested on concrete and not on substrates commonly used for refurbishment work in the UK, so may not perform as expected.

There are also safety risks to consider. The certificate may show that the product has had a fire test relevant to Building Regulations, but again, it is essential to establish what substrate it has been tested on for fire resistance. Some may only have been tested on a non-combustible substrate. If in doubt, it is advisable to ask the manufacturer for their full fire test information.

The agrément certificate also provides information about the manufacturing process. It will state whether the manufacturer's quality management systems meet the ISO:9001 standard, one of the criteria which also has to be met for LRWA membership. This standard provides assurance that the product will be of consistently high quality.

What is an ETA?

An ETA is a certificate based on testing carried out to agreed European levels, and provides information about the performance of certain construction products, including liquid applied membranes.

An ETA can only be issued for products not covered by harmonised European Standards (hEN) and, in the case of liquid applied systems, those supplied by a single manufacturer as a kit; in other words, comprising of two or more separate components that need to be put together to be incorporated into the construction works.

Confusingly, the BBA as a notified body, can issue ETAs, but this does not necessarily mean the product also has a BBA certificate.

ETA Certificates: What to Look For

As well as providing details of the manufacturer, the product and its intended use, the ETA document includes a table outlining performance in relation to several areas such as reaction to fire, service temperature, roof slope, and load resistance.

A rating is given which enables products to be easily compared. For example, a liquid membrane with a user load categorised as P1 can only be used on roofs that are non-accessible whereas a product which has been rated P4 will be robust enough to be approved for roof gardens, inverted roofs and green roofs.

From an end client's perspective, ETAs offer a good way of easily comparing liquid waterproofing products, but does not declare that the system conforms with national building regulations, so should not be seen as a replacement to BBA or BDA certificates.

ETAs and CE Marking

A CE mark is effectively a statement that a particular construction product complies with the relevant EU legislation, providing the manufacturer with free access to markets in all the different countries within the European Economic Area (EEA).

CE marking of liquid applied membranes is voluntary, however, a system must have a CE mark if the product is ETA certified. So, it is up to the manufacturer whether they obtain an ETA certificate or not.

Stepping Up to The Plate

Understanding agrément and ETA documents can be challenging, but we all have a role to play in ensuring the right products are specified and installed.

There is already work underway to help prevent misleading product claims. The Marketing Integrity Group, which was recently set up by the Construction Products Association (CPA), is developing a common language for specifiers that is clear, accurate and verified.

The LRWA, working in partnership with the Single Ply Roofing Association (SPRA), is also part of the CPA's Industry Response Working Group 12 (Products) to ensure people can make competent and more informed decisions.

Manufacturers are key to this process, but anyone involved in the selection or installation of liquid applied membranes must also take responsibility for raising standards. It is crucial that all available product information is read, and that people have the knowledge to understand accreditations and the impact they could have on a building's future performance.

For more information or advice, please contact us at technical@lrwa.org.uk