

COMMENT

Regulation and guidance

The by-line of our newsletter in recent years has been 'The price of freedom is eternal vigilance!', the relevance of which will be obvious to those who have been following the plot. The vigilance and intervention of a very small number of people has brought about the removal or mitigation of some of the sillier requirements which might otherwise have crept unseen into our 'self regulation' over the last ten years or so. Once these things get into approved codes of practice they are, like computer viruses, extremely difficult to remove. Some excellent work has been done too in mitigating the impact of new legislation on our freedom to pursue our hobby, and we must be thankful especially for the concession under the Pressure Equipment Regulations, without which amateur boiler making would now be a thing of the past, and for the landmark seminar with the HSE in 1998 to overturn an arrangement whereby the hobby would have come under the Fairgrounds and Amusements Parks Regulations wherever the public were involved.

The new boiler code covers only examination and testing, it does not cover the design of boilers, or indeed the many other aspects of producing a miniature boiler. There is pressure now for a boiler design code for the benefit of those who want a 'one stop shop' telling them how to design or adapt a boiler to suit their own purpose. Such a code would certainly be useful, both in bringing together the distilled wisdom of the literature over the years, in promoting modern good practice, and in reducing the scope for argument as to what is acceptable and what is not. But the aspirant authors must resist the temptation to introduce constraints without a clear and demonstrable purpose, like material certificates for copper used in boilers, and there must be 'grandfather rights' for designs that have stood the test of time, even if they contain design features which some might consider unsafe. If a design has worked safely for fifty or a hundred years then it is safe! Sadly the immutable logic of that statement will be lost on some of our Philadelphia lawyers.

The minor deficiencies that have shown up in our new boiler examination and test code will no doubt be put right or worked around in due course, but it's key elements will be with us forever. Let us make sure the design code when it comes supports the hobby rather than suppressing it, and let us ensure that it gets the widest possible consultation and support before it becomes part of our self regulation.

'Promoting the King of Hobbies'