



## **MOBBTA paper for STA members following NHBC section of 16Apr20 Webinar**

24<sup>th</sup> April 2020

Following a recent Webinar held by the STA where NHBC spoke about its current position in relation to MgO boards, Mobbta members have repeatedly asked to expand on some of the comments made. Mobbta have therefore found it necessary to produce the following:

### **Introduction:**

Various MOBBTA members of STA accepted invitations to the STA Webinar on Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> April, which included a short report by Mr Richard Smith the Head of Technical & Innovation at NHBC, who are one of the largest warranty providers for UK new-build housing. Mr Smith had agreed to STA's offer to explain to the membership the reasons behind NHBC's unexpected banning of Magnesium Oxide boards from projects covered under their warranties.

NHBC had posted a Technical Note on their website dated 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020, advising that NHBC would no longer accept such boards on buildings where the foundations have started on or after 30 Apr 2020.

(Premier / LABC one of the other major system-build and warranty providers to the sector, posted a similar Directive on 8<sup>th</sup> April, with an even shorter deadline of 15<sup>th</sup> April. Other insurers do not understand NHBC's action.)

This short report has been prepared by Mobbta, the Magnesium Oxide Building Board Trade Association ([www.mobbta.com](http://www.mobbta.com)), to expand on some of the statements by NHBC in the Webinar, and hopefully answer some of the questions no doubt on everyone's minds. The original NHBC update suggested that there are serious issues with boards. You would expect that NHBC must have had compelling evidence to lead to a ban of all MgO boards immediately.

As MOBBTA we wish to provide factual information, which may provide additional clarity for the STA membership.

We base our report on the following key statements made in the Webinar by NHBC:

- A Richard Smith is relatively new to this position. He has relied on knowledge of others at NHBC to an extent.
- B NHBC are looking into two claims at the moment which might be related to MgO "moisture" performance. At this point NHBC could not state where these buildings were, or whether they were the same board, or an identical problem.
- C The concern is, however, serious enough to demand immediate action
- D NHBC do not now have faith in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Party verification process for MgO boards (BBA and KIWA BDA)
- E They considered the Danish (MgO) 2016 report as a key document in their deliberations.
- F They felt Mobbta had not made or maintained the progress they (NHBC) had hoped for in terms of proving the quality and performance of the boards, over a long period of discussions.
- G They still hope to work with Mobbta and support the proposed BSI PAS standard for MgO boards, a programme currently being set up.
- H Whilst their concerns are mostly to do with facades, ie Service Classes 2 and 3, they are also banning MgO use internally at present.
- J They plan to continue having a dialogue with the Industry on this matter. (It did not appear that they were going to re-consider the ban, however.)
- K NHBC were unable to talk fully on certain matters because they are involved in a court case at present.





**Magnesium Oxide  
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### **MOBBTA background**

Over a period of 17 years MOBBTA members have collectively supplied in excess of 15,000,000m<sup>2</sup> of MgO boards into the UK market in semi-exposed/exterior conditions (defined as service class 2 & 3 conditions according to Eurocode 5 – design for timber structures).

Primarily as sheathing board, render board, tile backer and within fire resistant systems, MgO is a highly versatile product where applied correctly. There are many examples of experienced multi-repeat users of well sourced product and the prospective use of the material moving forwards is good given the requirement for non-combustible materials.

Mobbta believe that its members represent approx. 80% of MgO boards sold in UK markets and the Association was formed to promote high-quality standards for this material

### **Problems in Denmark**

It is well known that in Denmark in the early 2010's serious building failures were being discovered in recently completed lightweight construction projects, generally rainscreen. A major report was commissioned, now typically known as the Bunch-Neilsen Report, to explore the issue. This report has been found to be scientifically flawed, for example no good quality boards were tested for comparison against the failures to state just one.

'Denmark' experienced serious building failures due to MgO sheathing board moisture-related failures from the use of very low quality boards with a high timber / organic content.

### **3<sup>rd</sup> Party Agreement**

Prior to the new Technical Note of 31<sup>st</sup> March, the industry was working to NHBC's 01 Jan 19 Note, which allowed Agreement-supported MgO boards to be offered for NHBC inclusion on their 'acceptable boards' list.

BDA/BBA Certificates are checked for compliance with Building Regulations across the entire UK, and they carry out management, factory audits and independent testing. Agreement certification is an extensive process.

By rejecting these Certificates and forming their own opinion about the quality of MgO boards, NHBC have presumably now considered that they do, indeed have the in-house expertise to review all boards offered to them, and have declared that none of them now satisfy their (so far) unwritten standards.

NHBC have not offered any explanation as to how their perspective has changed -and so urgently other than the aforementioned 'failures' the details of which have not been shared with MOBBTA for review so presumably relate to other boards.

KIWA and BBA stand by their verification processes, and the quality of their work. BBA have just renewed one of the MOBBTA member's certificates.

### **Pending Court Case**

The court case referred to by NHBC is an action taken against NHBC by one of Mobbta's members, it is not an NHBC-generated case. The details of the case are private between the two parties at this point and Mobbta will not comment.





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### **Mobbta role re. NHBC**

Mobbta have been in dialogue with NHBC for the past three years and more in regard to the provenance, performance and quality of MgO boards. Mobbta have included BBA, KIWA and STA representatives at meetings with NHBC, as well as academic testing experts. Mobbta have carried out extensive testing on members boards, have developed long-term testing programmes with Bangor Bio-Composites Centre, and are currently finalising the framework of a BSI PAS standard, with the blessing of the warranties market.

MOBBTA is gravely concerned that fear and knee-jerk reaction is being allowed to prevail over scientific logic, evidence, and tried and tested UK certification bodies, and that the consequence will be to halt development and deployment of timber frame building systems that offer substantial advantages in performance, cost, speed of construction and environmental benefits.

MOBBTA places its trust in UKAS approved test bodies that are then assessed by leading recognised Agrément certification bodies. All MOBBTA members either carry or are working towards third party accreditation (Agrément provided by BBA or Kiwa BDA).

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MOBBTA remain committed in working towards the creation of an industry standard in addition to its own standards and wish to involve leading construction insurance companies as part of the process. In previous meeting between MOBBTA and key industry stakeholders both insurers had stated that they wished to be part of this body of work, which is a BSI PAS standard.

24<sup>th</sup> April 2020



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