

EN1279: Frequently Asked Questions

Why do we need a new Standard?

BS 5713 was, at the time of its introduction, a good starting point, and helped to improve the quality of products in the UK. Unfortunately, UK industry did not keep pace with international developments, and our standard became the lowest performance standard in Europe.

With the advent of the European Economic Area, the politicians wanted everyone to trade on an equal technical basis. As a result the concept of harmonized standards was introduced. This, together with the Construction Products Directive (CPD), became the cornerstone of the European move towards a standardised construction industry. The new Standard EN 1279 is one of several that will influence the construction industry in the UK. Many of these Standards are already published.

What must I do differently?

EN 1279 is designed in such a way that control of the manufacturer of units forms a more stringent part of the Standard. In the current BS 5713, the dew point of units is measured to -40°C. Therefore units can have a dew point from - 40°C to - 100°C and still pass. With EN 1279, all units must be within 10°K of the stated value. Similarly, your gas concentration must be close to the level stated. If you make only 20mm cavity units, then these can be submitted for type testing - you do not have to make special 12 mm cavity units for test purposes only.

I currently have a Kitemark to BS 5713. What do I do now?

You will need to have your units tested to the new Standard. As the holder of the Kitemark, you will already have received a letter from BSI explaining the new arrangements. You will also need to modify your scheme protocol to bring it into line with Part 6 of EN 1279 - BSI will supply you with the relevant documents. You will be able to retain your Kitemark to show that your product has been assessed independently to the Standard. However, care must be taken with your labelling to avoid confusion.

I import units into the UK. How does this affect me?

All products placed on the market, including the home market, must comply with the CPD. If you import from within the European Economic Area, you will require a copy of the test certificate relating to the product. If you import from outside the EEA, you must have the product tested, and carry out a finished product factory production control procedure to demonstrate ongoing compliance.

I only sell locally. Do I need to meet the Construction Products Directive (CPD)?

The CPD became part of UK construction law on 1 June 1996. The fact that your product will be used in a building, whether domestic or commercial, will require you to meet the CPD requirements. This is true for local sales as well as export. Control will be maintained through building control officers, and trading standards officers. All materials for the construction industry will eventually be covered by the CPD. The window industry will have to respond to that challenge and meet EN 1279.

I am told I do not have to CE mark, so why worry about EN 1279?

Although at present UK legislation does not require your product to be marked for the home market, it does require that you comply with the essential requirements of the CPD. The only practical way of meeting this obligation is to comply with EN 1279.

Why are Trading Standards involved?

Trading Standards Officers will be responsible for ensuring that manufacturers comply with the requirements of the Standard. They will have powers to examine the manufacturer's FPC records, and to check the validity of the test certificate. They will work with Building Control Officers, who will ensure that only goods which comply are used on site.

I am not a member of the GGF. How does this affect me?

The new Standard and the CPD affect everyone. Membership of a Trade Association is not in itself necessary to meet either the CPD or EN 1279. However, the GGF has worked hard for many years on behalf of UK industry, to prevent the introduction of an excessively onerous Standard. Without the input of the GGF, the UK would be facing substantially higher manufacturing costs than will now be the case.

The CPD has no relevance to me, so why should I do anything different?

The CPD affects everyone supplying goods to the construction industry, including bricks, cement, timber and windows. It also covers the supply of goods to home improvements as well as new build. Therefore the CPD does have relevance to your work.

I make my own units. Do I need to meet the CPD?

If the units are sold for use in a construction, whether for new build or home improvement, domestic or commercial, you will need to meet the CPD.

I currently carry out high humidity testing. Do I need to carry on?

Although high humidity testing is not called for in EN 1279, and therefore strictly speaking you do not have to do it, you would be well advised to carry on. EN 1279 is based on the premise that, if all the ingredients are controlled and covered by certificates of conformity, and the manufacturing process is fully controlled then the end product will be satisfactory. If you have any doubts about either the ingredients or the process, then high humidity testing, described in the Standard as the 'periodic test' (see Part 6), will give a degree of confidence which would otherwise not be available.

Can I still gas fill?

Yes, gas filling is covered by Part 3 of EN 1279. You should be aware that the Standard for gas filling is stringent, and requires the manufacturer to monitor the factory environment, in order to allow the test house to calculate the gas loss rate accurately.

I gas fill. What extra must I do under the new Standard?

Gas filling is covered by Part 3 of the Standard. First, however, you must meet Part 2, and have a FPC system in operation. You will have to keep records of the atmospheric temperature and pressure in the factory at the time the units were gas filled. You will also need to calibrate whatever system you use to check your gas fill levels. Many systems are too erratic for the purposes of EN 1279, and you could fail by having a fill level outside your specified level. See Part 3 for more details.

Is it true that single seal units will not meet the Standard?

No. The pass/fail criterion is based on the amount of water vapour which penetrates the sealed edge. This will depend on the sealant thickness, the amount of desiccant used, and the quality of the corners, among other considerations. In general, some of the single seal polysulfides, polyurethanes, and silicones may have difficulty in meeting the requirements. However, you should also bear in mind the use of the product, in respect of its size, location, and the chosen glazing method. While hot melt butyl and PIB based systems will pass more readily as single seals because of their low Moisture vapour transmission rate, there is a limit to the size which can be safely made.

I make units for structural glazing. Do they have to meet the Standard?

Structural glazing is a special application. Units intended for this purpose must not only meet EN 1279, but must also meet additional requirements. It is better to obtain advice from either the GGF or your sealant supplier, to establish what regime is required. A new European Standard covering structural glazing will be published shortly.

I want to dual source. Is this possible?

Yes, but first you must have a type test carried out on your main products. Then you must check with the supplier of the alternative product to ensure that its properties are within the limits laid down. If you cannot obtain this information, you will be obliged to have type tests carried out on all the combinations you envisage using. The substitution rules are set out in Part I of EN 1279.

I only make 6 mm cavity units. What effect will the new Standard have on my business?

In the short term, the same as for everyone else - you must meet the CPD, and have your units tested by a third party which is a notified body. In the longer term, 6 mm cavity units will be phased out. The NHBC already stipulates 12 mm units; and the forthcoming Part L of the Building Regulations will probably have the effect of making 12 mm cavities a minimum requirement. The only exception likely will be for steel windows in conservation areas.

Do I have to go to BSI for the tests?

Not necessarily. You must go to a notified body for the type test - a list of these bodies appears on the DETR website. You can use any notified body in Europe; and you can go to the one you deem most suitable for your requirements.