Statement by CARES regarding concerns over the quality of imported reinforcing steel

There has been panic spread about the compliance of reinforcing steel to BS 4449, manufactured in China, and imported into the UK. To date, despite much investigation by CARES, no evidence has been found to indicate that the physical product placed on the market did not comply with the product standard, BS 4449 2005.

CARES operates by granting certification to individual Steel Mills at specific locations. As a consequence, the certificates that it issues to Steel Mills are product standard specific, size specific and location specific. It is therefore unreasonable and unrealistic to denigrate all reinforcing steel manufactured in a specific country. In the event a Steel Mill fails to comply with the requirements of the CARES Steel for the Reinforcement of Concrete Scheme, then CARES have a number of sanctions at its disposal in seeking to secure compliance with its Scheme. It must also ensure a proportionate response to any infringement. In any investigation, the confidentiality that exists between CARES and the approved firm shall also be preserved.

The CARES product certification scheme for steel for the reinforcement of concrete utilises staff, and auditors, who are expert in the areas of reinforcing steel, including the product, processing and the supply chain. It audits manufacturers, processors and traders of the product. It audits companies of this type twice in every twelve-month period against a particular set of criteria that are created by a set of committees designed for this purpose. These requirements are amended from time to time, and the turnaround time can be very short. Such committees include construction clients, designers, manufacturers, processors and contractors, and, hence, are balanced in terms of sector representation.

CARES certification cannot guarantee the compliance of every piece of rebar that comes out of a manufacturer’s factory, but, rather, it vastly reduces the risk of a non-compliance happening. The manufacturer retains all product liability, leaving CARES with the responsibility for the correct application of its scheme.

As an accredited body CARES must react to, investigate and correct any complaints that it receives from any area. This includes complaints against its approved firms from other parties and complaints against itself from various sources, including from its approved firms. It has received relatively few complaints since its operation began in 1984.

Recently there have been two separate complaints from both a CARES Approved Firm and its Trade Association. These complaints have both been in regard to the height of the Longitudinal Rib on reinforcing steel imported into the UK from China. The Trade Association has insinuated that there could also be the same concerns for steel imported from Turkey. CARES has taken both complaints very seriously. In the first complaint, received from a CARES Approved Firm, CARES concluded that the steel was perfectly satisfactory. However, as a result of its investigation, CARES wrote to the Chairman of the BSI reinforcing steel committee regarding the repeatability of the test related to the measurement of the Longitudinal Rib. The investigation into the second complaint is on-going.
In order to reassure itself that it is not acting in a commercially unjust and irregular fashion, CARES is now consulting with other certification bodies throughout Europe regarding how they would have acted in a similar situation. Whilst still in the midst of this exercise, correspondence received to date from other certification bodies has indicated that CARES has acted in a responsible and professional way, and that other certification bodies would have acted similarly to CARES.

26 August 2014