

Check your traffic systems equipment complies with Regulations

ADEPT members should check that traffic control and information equipment used on public roads conforms to relevant Regulations, including equipment that may be used by others working on the highway in the authority's area. This equipment includes permanent, portable and temporary traffic signals and associated detection, pedestrian demand units and tactile indicators, and variable message signs, including vehicle-activated warnings signs.

The traffic technologies used to manage our roads are increasingly complex electronic systems and with this comes a similar complexity in the Regulations for these systems. Top of the list is the Traffic Sign Regulations and General Directions (TSRGD) that stipulate the lawful use of traffic signs, which includes signals. Other Regulations cover things like Electromagnetic Compatibility, Radio Compatibility, and basic electrical safety. The onus is on the user to verify products comply with all relevant regulations.

Prior to 2016 this was simple, as products used on public roads needed to be Type Approved. This requirement was withdrawn, transferring responsibility for assuring compliance from manufacturers to purchasers. At the same time, the equipment standards against which products had been Type Approved, were discontinued, meaning purchasers would need to update their own procurement requirements with changes in Regulation.

To manage the implications for local authorities and to continue the benefits for manufacturers of consistent procurement requirements, ADEPT and the Association for Road Traffic Safety and Management (ARTSM) joined forces, and with the support of DfT and the devolved administrations, formed TOPAS - Traffic Open Products and Specifications Limited. The key focus of TOPAS has been to manage and update the suite of specifications for traffic control and associated equipment and to provide a Register of TOPAS compliant products.

The TOPAS Registration process offers a simple means for Purchasers to verify that products they purchase have been declared compliant with the specifications.

To make use of this provision, Purchasers simply need to require that traffic Products supplied against their tenders or other purchasing contracts are TOPAS Registered to the latest TOPAS specifications.

While the majority of local authorities have simply updated their procurement documents to require TOPAS registered products in this way, not all users of this equipment have. This may include contractors working for developers and utility companies, who may, in the case of portable and temporary traffic signals and variable message signs, hire this equipment. It is possible that the client teams procuring works are not familiar with the Regulations controlling the use of this equipment. TOPAS is a voluntary system and users are free to use non-TOPAS registered products, but they should ensure those products comply with all relevant Regulations and are used in line with TSRGD; failure to do so exposes them to legal risk.

More detail on the role of TOPAS in procurement is contained in the attached paper, which was presented to the JCT conference in 2021. If you would like more information on TOPAS, please visit the website <http://www.topasgroup.org.uk/> or contact enquiries@topasgroup.org.uk.