ULC Reissues Bulletin on Field Programmable Fire Alarm Control Units

By Dennis Weber – Vipond Systems Group

Underwriters Laboratories of Canada (ULC) recently reissued the Bulletin on “Field Programmable Fire Alarm Control Unit”, Certification Bulletin No. 2003-05. This Bulletin was issued previously in 1993, and again in 1996. Given the dates of these previous editions of the Bulletin, in the field it was often overlooked, ignored, or felt that it was no longer applicable, due to its age. The CFAA had requested that ULC update and reissue the bulletin so as to once again reaffirm their position, and the ongoing importance of this bulletin to all.

In brief, the primary function of the bulletin is to act to ensure the ongoing intended operation of a field programmable Fire Alarm System, as required by the Building Code. Thus providing the level of protection and life safety required by the code.

The correct functionality of field programmable fire alarm control units, is reliant or predicated upon the ongoing operation of a correctly installed, programmed, and verified, set of software programs and typically a site specific database which defines the fire alarm system device input, and device output correlation or sequence of operation, for that building. Without the correct functioning of these software programs and database, the system would be incapable of operating as intended. Given the sensitive nature of these software programs and databases, and the ease with which their correct operation can be altered or corrupted, the bulletin acts to reinforce requirements stated in CAN/ULC-S527 the “Standard for Control Units for Fire Alarm Systems”. Table 7, in the CAN/ULC-S527 standard defines the three access levels and what functions can be performed under each. Access level 3 allows changes to the software and all it’s programmed parameters (i.e. full programming mode), and is restricted by password control. Hence in point 1.3 and point 2. of the bulletin, it acts to guard or restrict access to the Access Level 3 password, to the Manufacturer’s Authorized Representative. Thus ensuring that the person creating or altering the Fire Alarm System program is trained, knowledgeable, and kept abreast of updates/revisions etc, by the Manufacturer, as their Authorized Representative. The bulletin further states, “Any use of this access level by unauthorized individuals constitutes a possible hazard and voids the ULC label on the product”.

This Bulletin is of primary importance to individuals, and companies performing work on Fire Alarm Systems. To a great degree, this Bulletin is about transfer of liability. It is about the transfer of liability, for injuries or damages that may occur as a result of a Fire Alarm System which did not perform it’s intended function, due to programming changes which have been made by unauthorized individuals or companies, from ULC or the Manufacturer, to those performing the changes. It would be safe to assume that this resultant liability would extend to those Authorized Representatives releasing the Access Level 3 password to unauthorized individuals or companies.
Protect yourself, and your company. Consult your local Authority Having Jurisdiction for further information, and clarification.

Adobe Acrobat Reader required to link to “Field Programmable Fire Alarm Control Unit”, ULC Certification Bulletin No. 2003-05”