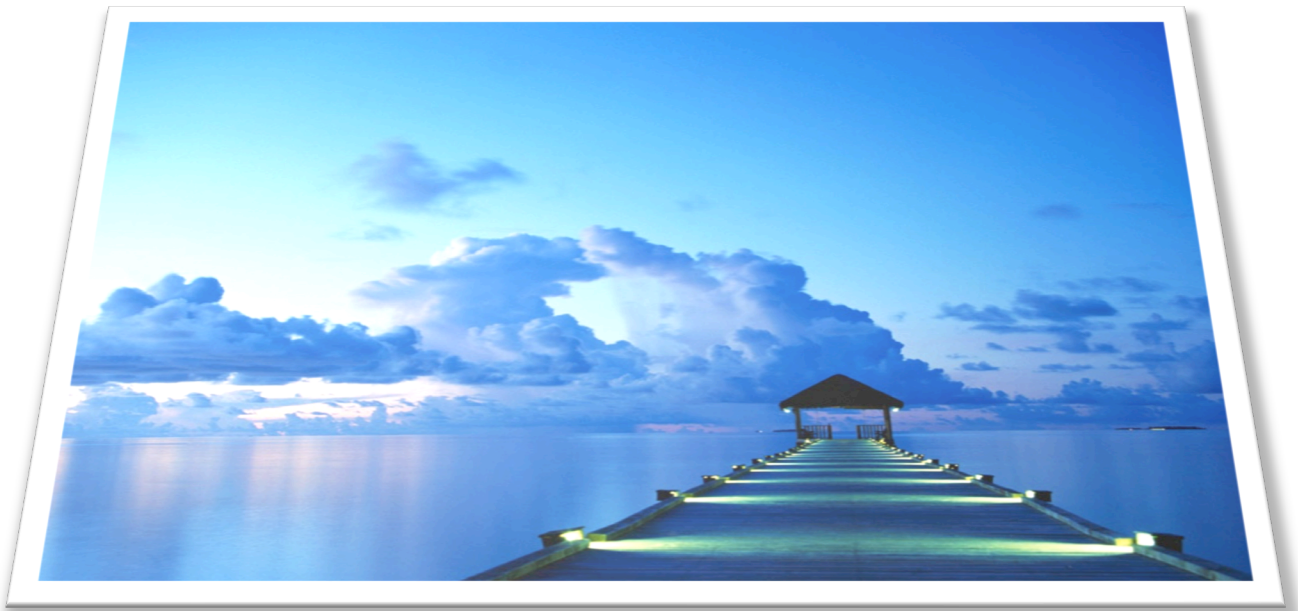


Alan Cox

# Travel Safe-Europe



## Introduction

At present there is no structured system for improving tourism accommodation safety in Europe and this proposal offers a simple cost effective proposal that has many benefits for tourism in Europe and will also help to raise safety standards across member states.

Anyone that understands safety and travels within Europe at present cannot help but notice the great variance of safety standards that are in operation across the EU and if you look at fire safety as a prime example you will see that some countries have very high standards that are well regulated and understood and other countries where standards are none existent. It is easy to say that we should have one standard across the EU and make regulations accordingly, but whilst this may be a long term goal, it is unlikely to work at present and therefore we need an approach that takes into account existing standards and methods of enforcement, financial constraints, existing laws and codes of practice together with having a financial advantage to those individuals and companies that are stakeholders.

One of the biggest problems that we have at present is the fact that when you visit or book an establishment you have no indication whether or not that establishment has complied with the safety standards of that country and no easy way of easily identifying responsible owners from those that ignore standards. In addition to this the current practice of owners carrying out their own risk assessments means that a building could be left with poor or non existent safety standards for years until the enforcement procedure or a serious accident identifies the failings.

This is seen as a major failing of safety standards in tourism accommodation services in Europe and this proposal offers the EU a cost effective system that gives the traveller within Europe a way of identifying accommodation where the owner has certified that the safety standards meet the requirements of the member state and that has a procedure where failings can be identified and action taken to remedy the problem.

I therefore offer this proposal for Travel Safe Europe as a positive step forward to improving the safety of tourism accommodation in Europe.

Alan Cox



## 1. What Are The Problems?

The problems highlighted in the Green Paper - Improving Tourism Accommodation Services in Europe are as follows:

- Fire safety
- Carbon Monoxide safety
- Balconies
- Glass doors
- Rooms
- Accessibility and vulnerable consumers

### Other Safety Problems

Whilst those areas outlined in the Green Paper have been identified as the major problems in Europe there can be very little doubt that there are many other safety issues that need addressing in some member states'. As with the list in the Green Paper there will be some countries that have very robust legislation and standards for these other problem areas and some that have very few.

These are some of the other problem areas of tourism accommodation safety that exist both in Europe and around the world:

- Asbestos
- Water safety
- Security
- Food Hygiene
- Play areas
- Electricity
- Hazardous substances

As can be seen the problems related to safety are vast and trying to solve all of the problems in Europe in one go is impossible and therefore we need a system that gives countries the freedom to use their own standards and enforcement services but at the same time allows the traveller the flexibility of being able to choose and pay for the standard of safety that they wish.

### Lack of Data

One of the other major problems that exists is the lack of credible data that can be used to identify areas of concern and this makes it very difficult to define the areas where standards are required to be improved and whilst this Green Paper will help to identify some of these

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areas it is unlikely to provide it in a unified format that can be used to identify all the major safety problems in tourism accommodation.

## 2. Fire Safety Problems

When we stay in a hotel we all expect it to be safe and that in the event of a fire we will be able to leave the building safely – but can we be sure of this and who is looking after the guests' interests?

If you are staying in a hotel or guest house in the UK or Europe in the first instance you are in the hands of the hotel who have a legal obligation to carry out a Fire Risk Assessment and to act on the findings but how good this assessment is depends on a number of factors including:

- The fire standards of the country.
- How good the enforcement is.
- How good the fire risk assessment is.
- How good hotel the management is.
- How well both the active and passive fire safety measures are installed and maintained.



As can be seen there are many variable factors to consider and simply looking at the fire statistics of individual countries does not give you an accurate view of how safe you are likely to be as there are no standard statistics to compare and no standard fire risk assessment for each country. If you just look at how things are in the UK it is reported that fire authorities find around 51% of hotels that they inspect are found to be unsatisfactory and remember this is just

the hotels that they inspect and not all hotels and guest houses that are open for business. The inspection figure for the UK is between 5% and 8% of the total number of properties each year.

### **What are hotels doing about it?**

So what are the hotels doing about it? HOTREC, which describes itself as the trade association representing the hospitality sector in Europe has published the HOTREC MBS Methodology – Guidelines to fire safety in European Hotels and claim that *“Eighteen months after the release of the MBS methodology, we see a strong rising interest from our membership to promote this instrument across Europe. Starting with six countries, we are now reaching a total of 13 European countries in which our scheme is being endorsed by hotel associations, and we are confident that even more will join that club very soon”*.

ANEC, which is the European consumer voice in standardization, claims that *“Twenty-five years after the EU Recommendation 86/666/EC on fire safety in hotels, and 20 months after the adoption of the HOTREC MBS Methodology – guidelines for fire safety in Europe, consumers are still waiting for a more binding instrument able to achieve their expectations on safety. ANEC questions the claim that hoteliers are using the MBS Methodology and welcomes the recommendation of the European Parliament to look for regulatory solutions if self-regulation fails”*

Whilst the HOTREC MBS Methodology is better than nothing the document is not as good as it could be and has a number of flaws and does not give any guidance on smoking, portable electrical appliance testing, fixed electrical wiring tests and does not contain any reference to having a fire policy but relies solely on the provision of a Fire Register but there is no example of what this Fire Register should look like or an example of what a Fire Risk Assessment should contain.

The HOTREC Charter contains seven main points:

- Designate a person to be responsible for fire safety in the hotel.
- Maintain a Fire Safety Register containing information relating to fire safety systems, management procedures and training.
- Prepare an Emergency Response Plan.
- Ensure that every member of staff receives information, instruction and training in fire safety in accordance with their duties.
- Organize a planned and documented fire evacuation drill in the hotel at least once a year.

- Ensure that all fire safety systems are regularly inspected and maintained by suitable qualified persons.
- Have a regular Fire Risk Assessment carried out and take corrective action.

It should also be remembered that HOTREC does not represent all of the tourist accommodation in Europe and does not represent many establishments. A small survey that was carried out in the UK indicated that the vast majority were not aware of the MBS Methodology.

### **What Should the Consumer Expect?**

The consumer in Europe has the right to expect a consistent standard of hotel fire and other safety when staying in any type of accommodation in Europe.

Council Recommendation 86/666/EC on fire safety in hotels adopted more than 25 years ago had the aim of defining a clear minimum fire safety standard in all hotels in the EU but unfortunately it has not fully achieved this aim because of:

- Inconsistency in its application.
- Changes in thinking and standards.
- Lack of understanding.
- Voluntary acceptance.
- Poor media coverage.

Unfortunately, during this time there have been a number of serious hotel fires that have:

- Resulted in a number multiple deaths.
- Resulted in serious injury and property loss.

There have also been a number of studies that have confirmed these problems including:

- The 2001 Commission Report on the Application of the Recommendation.
- The 2008 European Parliament Study on Hotel Safety.
- The FTO /ABTA Analysis on the Implementation of 86/666/EEC

A different approach to the problem is needed if the consumer is to get and identify a level of safety that is consistent with modern day safety and not be put at risk by the levels of poor safety that they are experiencing today.

### **The SAFEHOTEL Scheme**

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The SAFEHOTEL Scheme <http://safehotel.org/en/> is a scheme, has been developed with financial support of the European Commission and uses the MBS methodology for fire safety in European hotels published by the European umbrella organization of the hospitality industry HOTREC.

The certification is done in a multistep process as follows:

1. Self-audit by the hotel using the interactive checklist – registration is free of charge.
2. Hotel places order for certification.
3. Deployment of an independent expert by the Safehotel-Star Office, who reviews the hotel using the checklist system, e.g. checking the fire safety register followed by an inspection of the premises.
4. Storing audit results in the Safehotel database.
5. Review of results by the Safehotel-Star Office and awarding the Safehotel award.

The cost of the award is currently 200 euros and there is also a training CD available for 110 euros.

The current list of 70 hotels in 6 countries indicates that the scheme has not proved very popular in member states with Germany showing the majority of approved hotels. Compare this with over 45,000 entries shown on the Fire Safe Hotel list in the USA. There are also around 59,000 hotels in Europe registered in a commercial database which could be used following discussions with the company that own it.

### **Making a Complaint Under Existing UK Fire Legislation**

At present if a complaint is made under existing UK fire legislation the fire authorities will not divulge:

- If the complaint is justified.
- What action has been taken.
- If the problems have been rectified.

If you require any information on a complaint you are required to submit a Freedom of Information (FOI) request, which you may be charged for. This does not encourage the public to make complaints about premises that do not meet the required fire standards.

### **Online Review Sites**

Many travellers use third party hotel review sites to make bookings and in some reviews there are references to fire and other safety – but how reliable are these?

For many years I have posted reviews and photographs on Trip Advisor (TA) and these have been well received by travellers that have read my reviews but recently I had my account suspended and when I enquired why I was informed “Please be sure to only post travel related

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information to avoid your account from being disabled in the future. Posting about whether a hotel is up to fire code is not considered travel related.” If review sites like these control fire safety – what other information do they prevent from being included?

The general public urgently requires access to an independent accommodation database that is reliable, truthful and transparent so that they can make decisions based on facts.

### **3. Can We Learn From The USA?**

If you want to book a hotel in the USA they have the Hotel and Motel Fire Safety Act of 1990, which is an Act of Congress aimed at improving fire safety in hotels, motels, and other places of public accommodation. The Act states that Federal employees, when on official travel, should stay in fire-safe accommodations. Each Federal agency must ensure that at least 90% of travel nights are spent in such properties. Some agencies, such as the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), require 100% of travel nights to be spent in approved accommodations. <http://www.usfa.fema.gov/citizens/hotel.shtm>

For the purposes of this Act, every guestroom in a hotel or motel and each apartment/condominium must have an AC-powered smoke alarm. These are commonly called hard-wired. The alarm must be installed in accordance with National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Standard 72. An alarm that is solely battery-powered is not acceptable. An AC-powered alarm with battery backup is desirable, but not required. If the building is more than three stories in height, it must also have a full automatic sprinkler system. Systems installed before October 25, 1992, and meeting whatever local code was in effect at the time are acceptable, provided there is at least one sprinkler head in every guestroom. Sprinkler systems installed on or after that date must meet NFPA Standard 13 or 13R.

The U.S. Fire Administration compiles a list of such properties. For purposes of the Act, fire-safe means listed in the National Master List of Fire Safe Hotels and Motels. The List is available on the World Wide Web at <http://www.usfa.fema.gov/hotel/>. You can also phone for a list of which hotels are available in the area where you require accommodation.

Listed properties can put up Federal government employees and host federally funded conferences. This should provide a significant incentive - to be eligible for a share of the Federal government's annual \$25,000,000,000 travel expenditures. This business is not available to non-listed properties.

To get listed a hotel must apply for listing and there is no charge for listing, which can be applied for, online.

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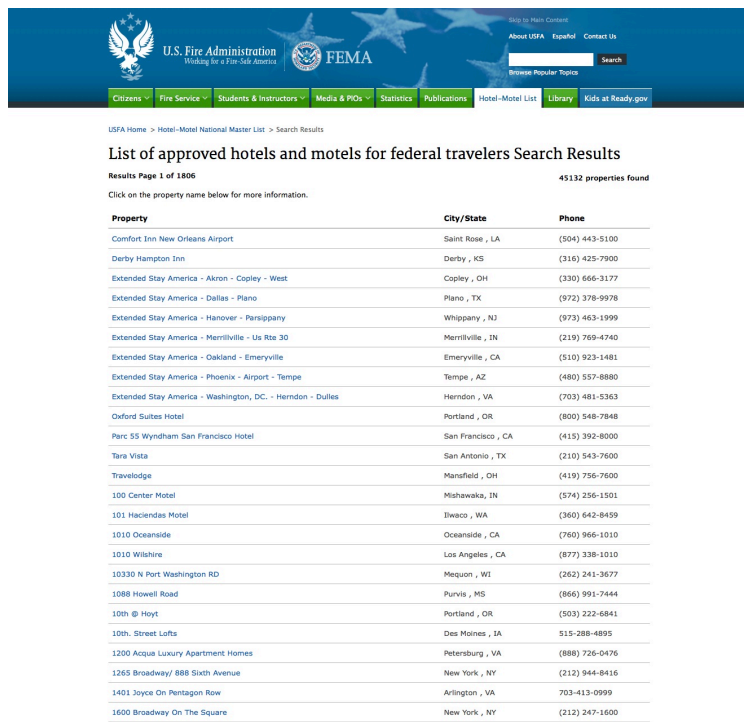


In each State, the Governor has appointed an official to give or deny approval for a property requesting to be included in the Master List. Usually, this official is the state fire marshal or his designee. A list of State Project Officers is also available at the USFA Website. If approved by the State Project Officer, USFA will add the property to the Master List.

This Act does not replace State or local fire safety requirements; rather it complements them and would certainly help improve the general level of fire safety in hotels in Europe if it was introduced. Whilst this system has some faults it is undoubtedly a lot better than what we have in Europe at present because there is also provision for guests to report hotels that are non compliant.

Whilst this system was intended to be a register of Fire Safe Hotels for state employees it has been expanded and is now available to all people looking to book accommodation that meets a certain level of fire safety in the USA.

If this scheme were adopted in the EU it would be a major incentive for accommodation owners to join the scheme and would also be a way of showing that organizations have shown a responsible attitude in looking after the safety of their employees who travel on EU business. Extending the scheme to the other areas of safety identified in the Green Paper would provide a pioneering approach to safety that could provide the traveller with complete peace of mind.



The screenshot shows the USFA website interface. At the top, there are logos for the U.S. Fire Administration and FEMA. Below the logos is a navigation menu with options like Citizens, Fire Service, Students & Instructors, Media & PIOs, Statistics, Publications, Hotel-Motel List, Library, and Kids at Ready.gov. A search bar is visible on the right side of the header.

The main content area displays the following information:

USFA Home > Hotel-Motel National Master List > Search Results

**List of approved hotels and motels for federal travelers Search Results**

Results Page 1 of 1806 45132 properties found

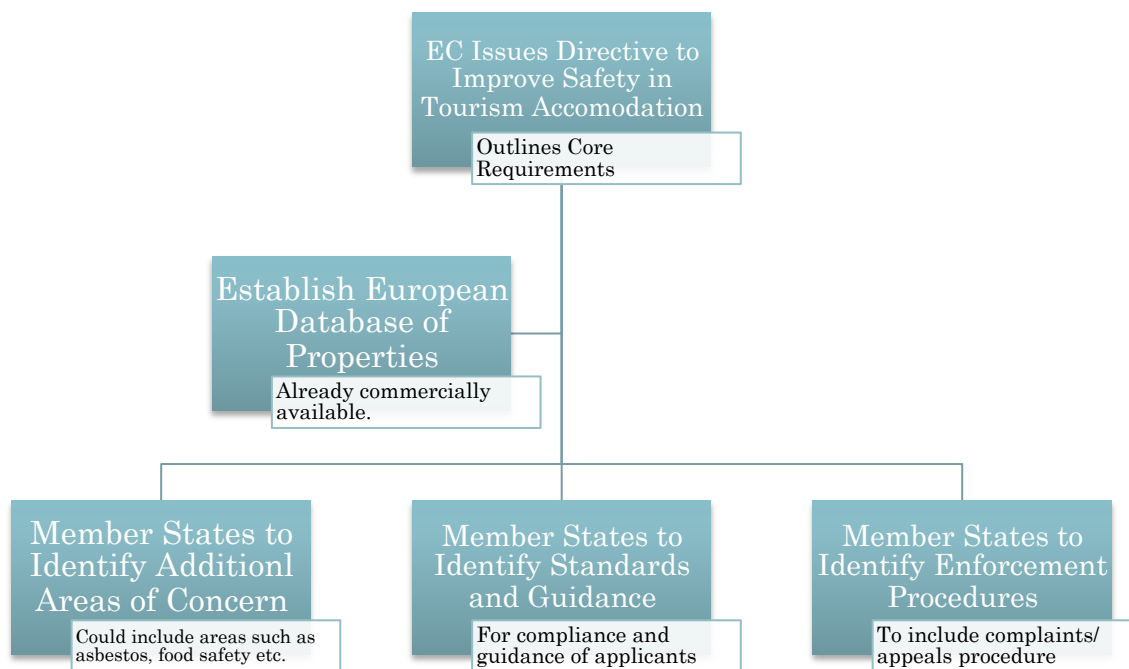
Click on the property name below for more information.

Property	City/State	Phone
Comfort Inn New Orleans Airport	Saint Rose , LA	(504) 443-5100
Derby Hampton Inn	Derby , KS	(316) 425-7900
Extended Stay America - Akron - Copley - West	Copley , OH	(330) 666-3177
Extended Stay America - Dallas - Plano	Plano , TX	(972) 378-9978
Extended Stay America - Hanover - Parsippany	Whippany , NJ	(973) 463-1999
Extended Stay America - Merrillville - Us Rte 30	Merrillville , IN	(219) 769-4740
Extended Stay America - Oakland - Emeryville	Emeryville , CA	(510) 923-1481
Extended Stay America - Phoenix - Airport - Tempe	Tempe , AZ	(480) 557-8880
Extended Stay America - Washington, DC - Herndon - Dulles	Herndon , VA	(703) 481-5363
Oxford Suites Hotel	Portland , OR	(800) 548-7848
Parc 55 Wyndham San Francisco Hotel	San Francisco , CA	(415) 392-8000
Tara Vista	San Antonio , TX	(210) 543-7600
Travelodge	Mansfield , OH	(419) 756-7600
100 Center Motel	Mishawaka , IN	(574) 256-1501
101 Haciendas Motel	Ilwaco , WA	(360) 642-8459
1010 Oceanside	Oceanside , CA	(760) 966-1010
1010 Wilshire	Los Angeles , CA	(877) 338-1010
10330 N Port Washington RD	Mequon , WI	(262) 241-3677
1088 Howell Road	Purvis , MS	(866) 991-7444
10th @ Hoyt	Portland , OR	(503) 222-6641
10th. Street Lofts	Des Moines , IA	515-288-4895
1200 Acque Luxury Apartment Homes	Petersburg , VA	(888) 726-0476
1265 Broadway/ 888 Sixth Avenue	New York , NY	(212) 944-8416
1401 Joyce On Pentagon Row	Arlington , VA	703-413-0999
1600 Broadway On The Square	New York , NY	(212) 247-1600

## 4. How Can We Improve Safety in Europe?

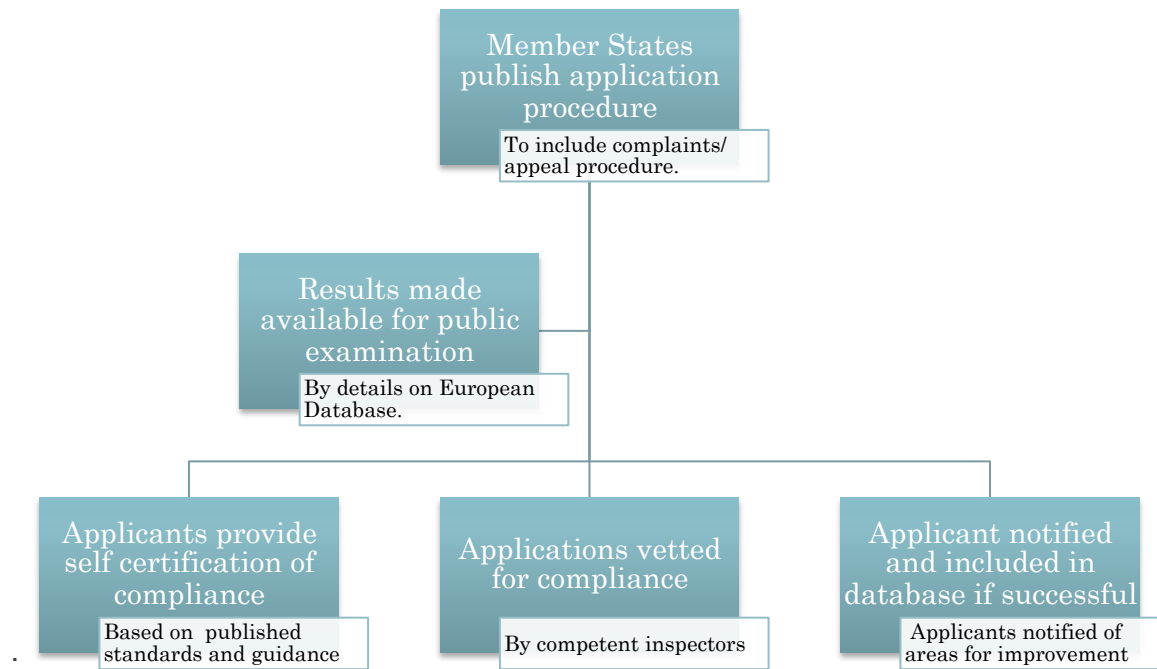
Using part of the methodology from the USA Fire Safe Hotel system together with those areas identified in the Green Paper a system could be established to cover all of the major areas of safety that have already been identified. The system could also be flexible enough to include other areas of safety that were of particular concern to individual member states.

**The system could then function as follows at EC and member states' level:**



A great deal of this is already in existence at member state level and will only need identifying and consolidating into a compliance and enforcement package to be made available to applicants. A database of the vast majority of tourism accommodation already exists and could be utilized to reduce the initial workload of setting up the scheme. There may also be lists in member states that could be used.

### At the application level this could function as follows:



Each year member states would be required to publish results of how the system has worked and to identify any areas that have not been previously included.

### How might the Travel Safe Europe Proposal work in a country like the UK?

1. The UK Government and local government identify areas of safety to be included in the Travel Safe Europe scheme. This would include the entire core areas identified by the EC together with other areas of concern including as example food hygiene.
2. The areas of tourism accommodation safety to be covered would be published together with an outline of the scheme and the method of compliance and associated standards to be complied with. It would be important at this point to indicate that this was a free scheme and to include the advantages of being on an approved list of tourism accommodation that complied with member states' safety codes and was available to all travellers and travel organizations. In addition people travelling on government or EU work could be encouraged to use the system.
3. The areas to be covered and compliance standards may be as the following example:

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Area of Safety	Compliance Standard	Guidance	Information
1. Fire Safety	Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005	HM Government, Fire Safety Risk Assessment, Sleeping Accommodation	<a href="http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2005/1541/contents/made">http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2005/1541/contents/made</a>
2. Carbon Monoxide Safety	The Gas Safety (Installation and Use) Regulations 1998	HSE Landlords' Responsibility for Gas Safety	<a href="http://www.hse.gov.uk/gas/landlords/index.htm">http://www.hse.gov.uk/gas/landlords/index.htm</a>
3. Balcony Safety	The UK Building Regulations	The Building Regulations Approved Documents Parts A and K	<a href="http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/buildingregulations/">http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/buildingregulations/</a>
4. Glazing	The UK Building Regulations	The Building Regulations Approved Document Part N	<a href="http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/buildingregulations/">http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/buildingregulations/</a>
5. Rooms	The UK Building Regulations	The Building Regulations Approved Documents Parts A,C,E,F, G, L & M	<a href="http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/buildingregulations/">http://www.planningportal.gov.uk/buildingregulations/</a>
6. Disabled Access and Vulnerable Consumers	1.The UK Equality Act 2010 2. The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995	The Building Regulations Approved Document Part M	<a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/equality-act-guidance">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/equality-act-guidance</a>
7. Food Hygiene	The UK Food Safety Act 1990	The Food Hygiene Rating Scheme	<a href="http://food.gov.uk">http://food.gov.uk</a>
Note 1: Parts 1 to 6 are added as directed from the EC and Part 7 is added to show an area of tourism accommodation safety concern that may be highlighted in the UK. This is purely for illustration and may not reflect an area of concern in the UK.	Note 2: Some of these standards are different in other parts of the UK	Note 3: Some of this guidance is different in other parts of the UK	Note 4: This is not intended to be a complete list of legislation and guidance available in the UK and some information has been omitted for clarity

**The Travel Safe Europe scheme could be published with the following advantages:**

1. One scheme for all of Europe that gives the traveller an indication of compliance as to how an establishment has complied with national safety laws.
2. One scheme for tourism accommodation owners to show their compliance with national safety standards.
3. A scheme that rewards responsible tourism accommodation owners by placing their accommodation on a EU vetted scheme database.
4. A scheme that is both free for the users and for the tourism accommodation owners.
5. A searchable country database for all travellers and organizations looking for an establishment that has committed to meeting and maintaining their tourism accommodation safety standards to the levels required by that country.
6. A simple scheme that does not involve additional inspections by local authorities and relies on the integrity of owners to self certify compliance with national/local standards.
7. A scheme that allows owners to display the Travel Safe Europe logo on their website, advertising material and in their premises.
8. A scheme that allows travellers to complain if standards are not as required and has the ability to remove accommodation from the database if the complaint is investigated and found to be justified.

**What would an applicant need to do?**

Many tourism accommodation owners will already comply with the required standards and so it will simply be a matter of revisiting the paperwork and making sure that all of the areas are still in compliance and if not making any changes required. Once this has been done a “compliance statement” is completed and sent to the nominated authority/organization for vetting.

When the vetting is complete and approved the applicant is notified and entered into the approved database. In the event of non-approval the applicant is notified of the reasons in writing and informed of the appeals procedure.

After approval an applicant is allowed to advertise the compliance both in advertising and on the premises.

**5. What Benefits Are There For The EU?**

1. A clear cost benefit of collating all relevant safety functions into one scheme. This could have substantial cost saving benefits for member states' that allow a multi skilled enforcement team that have the capability of inspecting more than one area of safety.
2. Access to a database showing all registered and vetted premises.
3. Availability of a list of vetted premises that can be used by officials on EU or member states' business.
4. A list of vetted premises that can be used by individual travellers and travel organizations around the world.
5. A scheme that both improves and focuses attention on safety standards and self certifies compliance and does not need a change in standards or additional inspections.
6. A scheme that raises safety awareness and offers clear benefits for both the traveller and accommodation owner.
7. A complaints scheme that is both transparent and fair.
8. A scheme that is both clearly identifiable and credible.
9. A scheme that is very cost effective to maintain. One part time employee maintains the Fire Safe Hotel Scheme in the USA on a yearly basis.
10. It provides a regularly updated list of accommodation together with a yearly report that identifies additional problem areas in member states'.

## Conclusions

This proposal, if implemented will give the EU a distinct clear advantage in promoting tourism accommodation safety in Europe and around the world.

It will give both the independent tourist and travel organizations a vetted list of publically available premises to select from.

It will allow member states' the ability to bring all relevant aspects of safety into one clearly identifiable scheme that has a credible and open complaints procedure.

The scheme will also provide a yearly update on progress and problem areas that will clearly identify where future action needs to be taken.

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