Buying a Window

1. Buying a Window

Once you have decided to improve your home by having new windows and/or doors fitted you will be faced with a number of very important choices, all of which would have a significant impact on your satisfaction with the final outcome.

We hope that by reading through the information supplied below and taking a little time to do some research you will get the windows and doors you want with the minimum amount of fuss.

The points listed below should all be considered one-by-one, as they can all impact on the look and durability of the windows/doors you have fitted:

- What are the Benefits of PVC-U Windows? - PVC-U has been used in the fabrication of windows and doors for around 30 years in this country and more than 45 years on the continent with great success.

- Which Design Should I Choose? - The design of window you choose is very important as the wrong design might not suit your property.

- Should I be Worried About Security? - Security is a very important issue and for many people it is the prime driving force for changing their windows and doors.

- Glass is Glass, Isn't it? - The selection of appropriate glazing can significantly affect the appearance and performance of your windows and/or doors.

- Is the Guarantee Really a Guarantee? - Not all guarantees are the same and you must ensure that the guarantee will give you adequate protection.

- What about the doors? - Many people who are considering replacing the windows in their property will also want to have the doors replaced at the same time, to save time and money.

- Find a trusted supplier - Find a trusted supplier of PVC-U Windows and Doors from the members of the BPF Windows Group.

Hopefully the information above has helped you to make a more informed choice and given you the confidence to have new windows and/or doors fitted. However, if you do have a specific question which has not been answered above, then please contact the British Plastics Federation now.
2. Windows Issues

One of the most important considerations is the design of the windows and doors. Within the UK there is a vast number of different architectural designs of houses, flats, maisonettes, bungalows, etc. and windows that would suit one design, might look extremely out-of-place in another.

Therefore the first thing to consider is the design of the existing windows. If the existing windows are not original, then try looking at similar surrounding properties for the original windows. By doing this you will see the structure as originally intended by the architect and you may want to follow that design. Whilst you are outside try envisaging what your property will look like with different types of windows. Taking a photo of the property, which you can use to compare with the pictures in brochures may also be a useful exercise.

2.1. Window Design & Color

The PVC-U profile can be extruded in almost any colour. However, most systems opt for applying a decorative laminate layer to the profile after it has been extruded. This coated profile is then fabricated into a window, or a door, in the normal manner. Decorative laminate layers can also be applied to PVC-U profile to give a textured finish, e.g. wood grain affect.

Special paint-type systems are also available, which can be used to apply a paint finish before or after fabrication of the window or door. However, such systems should only be applied by appropriately trained or qualified personnel as incorrect application can severely damage the window profiles.

To find out more about how PVC-U windows are made please visit the BPF Windows Group website.

2.2. What about Security & Safety of PVC Windows

In today's world it is important for windows and doors to be secure against the opportunistic burglar. In order to provide a measure of whether a window is secure or not, the window and door industry developed standard tests based on high loads being applied in various ways to simulate the attacks an opportunistic burglar would carry out. In addition, attempts are made to manipulate locks and glazing beads to gain entry.

These tests and requirements are given in two standards; BS7950 for casement and tilt/turn windows and PAS24 for single doors. If enhanced security is important to you it is essential that windows and doors are made in accordance with these standards. Ask your installer for evidence.

Independent tests by the Fire Research Station show that PVC-U windows do not exhibit any aspects of performance which could create new hazards in building fires.
For more information on the performance of PVC in fires, please go to [www.bpf.co.uk/Press/PVC_Explained.aspx](http://www.bpf.co.uk/Press/PVC_Explained.aspx)

It is important, however, that increasing security does not compromise the ability to escape in case of fire. If you lock a window or a door that is intended to be an escape route in case of fire with a key that is subsequently removed, then make sure everybody in the house knows where the keys are kept. Additional advice is available in BS 8213-1.

### 2.3. Glass is Glass Though isn't it?

When it comes to glass there are two main issues to consider, namely the appearance of the glass and the performance of the glass.

The appearance of the glass can be altered extensively and be used to add to the character of a property. Features such as Georgian bars and lead can be added to glazing panels to match the period styling of the property. Other ornamental features can be added, including bevelled and colour glass, to give the look of a classic "stained glass" window. All of these features are increasingly common, in a wider variety of styles and are no longer as costly as they once were.

The performance of the glass is a more complicated issue, with the different types of glass all looking the same to the untrained eye. There are really four main aspects of glass performance that you need to be aware of. These are:

- **Low emissivity glass** - The use of "low-e" glass has become almost mandatory since changes to the Building Regulation in April 2006. This type of glass has a microscopic metal or organic coating, which results in up to 30% less heat being lost through the window, by reflecting it back into the room. An energy rating scheme for windows has been developed using the A-G catagorisation commonly seen on white goods - [www.bfrc.org](http://www.bfrc.org).

- **Toughened glass** - This type of glass is up to seven times stronger than normal glass and is created using a special cooling process. Another advantage of toughened glass, is that in the unlikely event of it being broken, the pane will shatter into tiny, blunt pieces (similar to a car window), rather than the large razor-sharp shards ordinary glass breaks into. It is also worthwhile considering using toughened glass anywhere that the young or infirm may be able to reach.

- **Laminated glass** - This type of glass consists of a sheet of film sandwiched between two panes of glass. Because the film remains intact once the glass has been broken, similar to a car windscreen, it can help to prevent opportunistic burglars from climbing through without a lot of noise and wasted time. Safety glass must be used anywhere in a pane that extends below the height of 800 mm (31 inches) above ground level, and within 300mm (12 inches) of a door.
• *Acoustic performance* - For many people this will be one of the main reasons for have replacement windows fitted in the first place. Most people know that double-glazing keeps out more noise than ordinary single-glazing, however, not so many people know that the effectiveness of the double-glazing depends on the size of the air gap between the two panes of glass. Simply, the larger the gap the more sound it will keep out.

2.4. *Is the Guarantee Really a Guarantee?*

Everyone has heard stories of dodgy double-glazing firms who duck out of their guarantee obligations by folding the company and then starting it up again under a different name. In order to combat this practice and give consumers some come back "insurance-backed guarantees" have been introduced. Basically an insurance-backed guarantee works because the insurance company, and not the installer, takes responsibility for the guarantee and so will honour it if the installer folds.

Not all insurance-backed guarantees are the same however and you must ensure that the guarantee offered to you is underwritten with an insurance policy issued by a DTI authorised and approved Insurer, and rigidly subject to the following criteria. Any departure from any of those prerequisites will so weaken the entire cover as to render it worthless.

• There must be no cancellation clause since otherwise the Insurer will be able to "escape" the risk if so desired.

• The insurance must take the form of a direct contract between the Insurer and the insured without the involvement of any other party in the relationship.

• The ten-year term must be fully prepaid to the Insurer at the outset by way of a single premium.

• Any arrangement whereby a scheme administrator pockets the ten years premium and then renews an annual policy indemnifying him personally is not acceptable.

• Full documentation must be issued to the Insured and where this consists of a certificate of insurance issued by the administrator and a master policy issued by the Insurer, then both documents must be issued. Without this safeguard false claims and omissions in the administrator’s certificate of insurance will go undetected.

• The benefits of the insurance must be freely and automatically transferred to subsequent owners of the property.

• There must be no overall claims ceiling or limit since this sum could be exhausted thereby leaving later claimants without indemnity, and each installation (and particularly commercial installations) must be fully insured for its entire individual value, including VAT where applicable.

• All parties to the insurance - administrator, broker, insurer - must be clearly identified in the documentation.
No part of any claim (apart from minor excess, paid by the claimant) must be payable by any party other than the Insurer, and any arrangement whereby the administrator is responsible for the first tranche of claims is unacceptable. This avoids the situation where an administrator who is responsible for, say, the limit of £250,000 of claims ceases trading and avoids his liability, or simply "disappears" thus leaving no cover in force since the Insurer only becomes liable after the first £250,000 has been paid.

2.5. Window Costs

Whilst it is very difficult to generalise about costs which will vary for all materials in terms of product quality and market conditions, the Northern Consortium of Housing Authorities in the UK has carried out a regular survey of costs of window systems. The Consortium has accumulated a considerable amount of data for the in-use cost of window frames made from different materials. Their data shows that over a 30-year period, the total capital and maintenance costs for a softwood window will be 33% more than for a window in PVC-U, assuming a 10% bank interest rate in a scheme involving 30 windows (1).

An industry study compiled in Germany by AgPU (PVC industry organisation in Germany) has shown that the total investment and maintenance costs for hardwood systems over a 25-year period were 23% more than PVC-U, and aluminium systems were 57% more expensive (2). It is difficult to transfer the results of cost comparisons in one region to the situation in another. However, the marked success that PVC-U windows have enjoyed in the UK market clearly demonstrates their cost-effectiveness in relation to competing materials.

1. UPVC Windows in the 1990s, NCHA, 1991.