

## FIRE SAFETY FOR A BODY CORPORATE

In a residential environment fire can occur at a moment's notice and its effects can be devastating.

Even the smallest fire, if unattended, can pose a risk to life and safety as residents can swiftly be overcome or disoriented by both smoke and the radiant heat produced by combustion. In addition to the obvious life and safety issue, for lot owners it is important to ensure that their property is protected and appropriately covered by insurance should the worst occur.

The significant majority of strata titled residential lots fall into the Class 2 building category under the *National Construction Code* (known as the BCA). As a consequence, owners of strata titled lots are subject to specific aspects of the fire safety compliance regime set out in the *Fire and Emergency Services Act 1990* and the *Building Fire Safety Regulation 2008*. In multiple storied unit complexes the requirements are more onerous than for those in townhouse or villa accommodation style complexes.

### REQUIREMENTS

The body corporate must maintain the means of escape from a building or complex in an emergency. This means that there is a positive obligation to remove obstructions from common areas that may be used for emergency evacuation including stairwells, pathways and final exit doors or gates.

The body corporate must also maintain any fire safety equipment located on common property (ie extinguishers, fire blankets, emergency lighting etc) to a standard of safety and reliability in the event of a fire. This is achieved by engaging an appropriately qualified fire services company to test any fire equipment to the frequency and requirements dictated by the relevant Australian Standard.

The body corporate must maintain a plan of action to be taken by persons within the building to ensure their own and other persons' safety (an emergency response plan) in the event of an emergency. In the instance of a multiple storied unit complex the requirement is to have a specific written plan in place which covers a range of issues from alerting others, evacuation protocols & procedures, through to dealing with disability and mobility affected persons, training requirements and recordkeeping. Where the lots are self-contained residences or townhouses, the process of evacuation is much simpler, however, there remains a need for a plan to be in existence and for it to be regularly reviewed.

The body corporate also must ensure that lot owners or occupants are provided with adequate instructions concerning the action to be taken by them in the event of fire. Although, this does not extend to a mandatory requirement on a body corporate to conduct fire and emergency response training, it is clear that doing so greatly increases awareness of fire safety and the improves the chances of self-rescue in an emergency, accordingly it is highly recommended.

### SMOKE ALARMS

Where a lot owner is engaged in leasing the premises to another person, they have an obligation under the *Fire and Emergency Services Act 1990* to ensure that an adequate number of smoke alarms are installed throughout the premises, and that they are tested prior to the commencement of (or renewal of) any tenancy, with batteries replaced as required.

Although smoke alarms have an effective service life of 10 years, the devices are prone to failure beyond this point, accordingly new devices should be installed. The stated preference of the Queensland Fire and Emergency Service is for interconnected 240v photoelectric smoke alarms to be installed in all residences. PLEASE NOTE - Queensland will also likely see a further tightening of residential smoke alarm regulation in the coming year, with a bill currently before parliament to mandate the installation of smoke alarms in all bedrooms in residences across Queensland.

Should you require further information or assistance with your fire services needs please contact **Incendia Fire Services** on 1300 747 080 or go to [www.incendia.com.au](http://www.incendia.com.au) for further details.