

FIRE SAFETY FOR CHILDCARE PROVIDERS

Childcare businesses, by the nature of their operations, require consideration of a wide variety of fire and emergency response related issues. There are many day to day operational differences that must be considered to ensure the fire protection systems, processes and responses adequately meet the hazards present.

Even the smallest fire in a childcare setting, if unattended, can pose a risk to life of a vulnerable group. In a childcare environment, a fire or emergency situation may require a full scale evacuation which if conducted poorly can easily upset and frighten young children whose behaviour can often be unpredictable. Childcare businesses should ensure there is sufficient focus and awareness of fire and emergency response related issues at all times so that their legal obligations to act in the best interests of children in their care can be met.

The significant majority of childcare properties (and attached car parks) will fall into the class 9b & 7a building categories under the *National Construction Code* (known as the BCA). As a consequence, occupiers 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*.

REQUIREMENTS

The **occupier** must:-

- (1) Maintain the means of escape from a building in an emergency. This means that there is a positive obligation to maintain exit pathways and stairwells, final exit doors, fire rated doorsets, emergency lighting and other elements that assist with egress in an emergency;
- (2) Maintain the means to fight the fire during an emergency. This means the reliability and useability of all fire protection equipment (ie sprinklers, hydrants, extinguishers, fire hose reels, fire blankets 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; and
- (3) Maintain the means to alert others, of an emergency situation and appropriately co-ordinate an evacuation. This encompasses the maintenance of any detection or alarm system, as well as ensuring a plan of action exists to be taken by persons within the building to ensure their own and other persons' safety (an emergency plan, compliant evacuation diagrams & regular training) in the event of an emergency.

MEETING THE HAZARDS

Adequate fire safety and emergency preparedness is only achieved if the occupants of a building are aware of potential hazards and risk is managed appropriately. Questions for operators of childcare businesses include:-

- What are the primary hazards in your premises? What is the relative risk (or likelihood) of an incident occurring? Is there adequate protection from equipment, systems or training to reduce the risk?
- Are exit pathways and doors kept clear at all times? Are you and your staff knowledgeable in how the building will respond in a fire emergency? Are they knowledgeable in how to communicate with other team members and rooms and are they prepared to take control and manage an evacuation?
- Are there specific processes in place during an evacuation to ensure all persons are accounted for?
- Are your staff appropriately trained to use fire equipment?
- Is your emergency assembly area in a safe location?
- Does your emergency response plan cater for a variety of different emergency situations and responses?

Incendia Fire Services can assist you with managing issues of this nature to ensure that your premises or workplace maintains a compliant level at all times.

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 for further details.