

# FIRE SAFETY IN AN OFFICE ENVIRONMENT

For businesses operating in an office environment, your legal obligations are no different to those occupying industrial properties. There are, however, many day to day operational differences that must be considered to ensure your fire protection systems, processes and responses adequately meet the hazards present.

Even the smallest fire in an office setting, if unattended, can pose a risk to life and safety as building occupants can swiftly be overcome or disoriented by both smoke and the radiant heat produced by combustion. In an office environment a fire or emergency situation may result in full scale evacuation and will often see significant downtime for a business. In many cases, as just one section of a multi-tenanted office building, your business operations can be significantly affected by the operations of others in either not servicing equipment or in causing false alarms.

The significant majority of office properties (and attached carpark) will fall into the class 5 & 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 response 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 office occupiers to consider 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 affected businesses in an emergency 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?
- What is the potential impact to your business from extended downtime following a fire related incident?
- Does your insurance policy include a provision that negates coverage in the event that fire and safety equipment is not maintained to regulations and standards?

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](http://www.incendia.com.au) for further details.