

PRACTICE NOTE 40-2018

This updates the previous Practice Note-2016-040 issued February 2016.

Reference to the Building Code of Australia (BCA) in this Practice Note means Volumes One and Two of the National Construction Code Series.

Purpose

Fire authorities no longer monitor fire alarms in Victoria — private alarm monitoring service providers now operate in a competitive environment. In many instances, this change has also involved replacement of the existing hardware system link or AIU (alarm interface unit), with alarm signalling equipment (ASE).

The relevant building surveyor (RBS) is responsible for issuing building permits for the conversion or disconnection of fire alarm systems. The RBS must also ensure that all compliance requirements are met.

Background

The Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board (MFESB) and the Country Fire Authority (CFA) have ceased to operate fire alarm monitoring services. This has allowed a competitive environment to develop, where private sector service providers monitor fire alarms and transmit alarm signals to the relevant fire brigade. Direct fire brigade alarm connections using an AIU, or other types of links, may have been replaced with ASE to comply with AS 1670.3-2004.

Building Permits

Under the Building Act 1993 (the Act), a building permit is required for the following work:

- Conversion of an existing fire alarm monitoring system (AIU or other link) to another approved monitoring system (ASE);
- Disconnection from an alarm monitoring service.

Non- Required Systems

A building permit is necessary for this building work, whether the fire alarm connection is a required system or not. No exemptions apply under Schedule 5 of the Building Regulations 2018 (the Regulations), as undertaking such work could adversely affect the safety of the public or occupiers of the building.

Permit Application

Each application for a building permit should include:

- allotment plans;
- details of the building work proposed;
- location of the work within the building; and
- details of any penetrations or fixings through, or into, the existing building.

A stated time period within which the existing alarm system will be non-operational (if at all), so that protection for occupants of the building can be considered under regulation 116.

Details of the proposed system to be installed, does it comply with the BCA, or is it at least equal in its in-service application to the existing system?

Once this information is received, the RBS must consider whether the work will comply with the Act, the Regulations and the BCA.

Compliance Requirements

The BCA requires that ASE complies with AS 1670.1-2015 Fire detection, warning, control and intercom systems — System design, installation and commissioning — Fire. The Standard refers to a number of other Australian Standards that the monitoring system must comply with.

If the proposed new system does not comply with the BCA, then the RBS has discretion under regulation 233 to allow partial compliance. Alternatively, an application may be made to the Building Appeals Board for a modification.

Reasonable provision needs to be made for the safety of people using the building. If the new system is at least equal in its in-service application to the existing system being replaced, this may be considered acceptable.

Advice about managing a monitored automatic alarm system is provided in the MFB/CFA Guideline No. GL-46 Managing Monitored Automatic Alarm Systems in accordance with fire services legislation, available at www.MBF.vic.gov.au/fire-safety-guidelines

Necessary Inspections

Due to the minor nature of the work, the RBS may determine that a final inspection is the only mandatory inspection required.

Section 34 of the Act requires the RBS to cause the building work concerned to be inspected. The RBS may consider this requirement to be satisfied if a statement of compliance is issued pursuant to AS 1670.1

by a person with suitable qualifications and experience.

Required fire alarm monitoring systems are an essential safety measure and subject to the provisions of Part 15 of the Regulations. This means that if the building work is approved after a final inspection is carried out, and a certificate of final inspection is issued, the RBS must make a maintenance determination under regulation 215.

Accreditation

Systems which do not comply with the Deemed-to-Satisfy provisions of the BCA may still be accredited by the Building Regulations Advisory Committee. Accreditation, if granted, verifies system suitability.

Information on accreditation and accredited products can be obtained from the Victorian Building Authority.

Further information

Want to know more?

If you have a technical enquiry, please email technicalenquiry@vba.vic.gov.au or call 1300 815 127.

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