

Installation of Fire Safety Systems in Existing Residential Care and Shared Accommodation Buildings

PRACTICE NOTE 13A-2018

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Purpose

This practice note provides guidance to practitioners and building owners on the amendments to the requirements for automatic fire suppression systems and other fire safety measures in existing residential care and shared accommodation buildings as a result of the introduction of Building regulations 2018.

Background

Smoke detection and alarm systems and automatic fire suppression systems can significantly reduce the risk of injury or death to occupants, or damage to property, in the event of a fire. These systems are required in residential care and shared accommodation buildings because the occupants of these buildings are potentially vulnerable and require assistance to safely evacuate in the event of emergency.

There are many residential care and shared accommodation buildings that were built some time ago when the building standards were different to those required today.

After 2006, the building regulations required all existing residential care and shared accommodation buildings to have smoke detection and alarm systems and automatic fire suppression systems.

Correct installation of these systems combined with proper maintenance greatly lessens the risk of a fire spreading beyond the room of its origin. Early fire detection enables occupant warning, evacuation and can also allow for manual extinguishment of a fire in its initial stages.

The Regulations governing the installation and maintenance of fire safety systems in existing residential care and shared accommodation buildings are contained in Division 3 of Part 9 of the Regulations.

Which buildings must have automatic fire suppression systems

The requirement for existing buildings to have automatic fire suppression system applies to class 3 buildings that are shared accommodation buildings and class 9a buildings that are residential care buildings.

Shared accommodation buildings and residential care buildings must also have smoke detection and alarm systems. Further guidance on the requirement for smoke detection and alarms system in existing residential buildings is found in Practice Note 27A.

The terms 'shared accommodation building' and 'residential care building' are defined in the Victorian Appendix to the BCA.

These definitions are set out below but within these definitions are terms also defined in the BCA. Therefore, when determining whether the requirements for

fire safety systems apply in an existing building, close regard should be had to the definitions in the BCA, including the Victorian Appendix to the BCA.

Shared accommodation building means a Class 3 building having-

- more than one sole-occupancy unit of which any sole-occupancy unit has sleeping facilities capable of accommodating 3 or more unrelated persons; OR
- sleeping facilities capable of accommodating 13 or more unrelated persons,

that is a boarding-house, chalet, guest house, lodging-house, backpacker accommodation or the like, or a residential part of a hotel offering shared accommodation but does not include a residential care building, a motel or a residential part of a school, health-care building or detention centre.

Residential care building means a building which is a place of residence where 10% or more of persons who reside there need physical assistance in conducting their daily activities and to evacuate the building during an emergency (including any residential care service, State funded residential care service or supported residential service as defined in the Supported Residential Services (Private Proprietors) Act 2010 and an aged care building) but does not include –

- hospital; or
- dwelling in which 2 or more members of the same family and not more than 2 other persons would ordinarily be resident; or
- a place of residence where only one resident needs physical assistance in conducting their daily activities and to evacuate the building during an emergency.

Summary of the Regulations

The requirements for fire safety systems in shared accommodation and residential care buildings are summarised below.

Smoke detection and alarm systems

Regulation 145(3) requires hard-wired smoke alarms or smoke detection systems to be installed in Class 9a residential care buildings and Class 1b or 3 buildings constructed or approved before 1 August 1997. (see Practice Note 27A)

Automatic fire suppression systems – Class 9a residential care buildings

Regulation 146 applies to class 9a buildings that are residential care buildings constructed before 1 August 1997. It requires an automatic fire suppression system complying with E1.5 of the BCA Volume One or an ‘approved’ automatic fire suppression system to be installed.

An ‘approved’ automatic fire suppression system, means a system approved by a relevant building surveyor appointed to issue a building permit for the building.

Automatic fire suppression systems – class 3 shared accommodation buildings

Regulation 147 applies to class 3 buildings that are shared accommodation buildings constructed before 1 July 2003. It requires an automatic fire suppression systems complying with E1.5 of the BCA Volume One be installed.

These shared accommodation buildings do not require an automatic fire suppression system provided:

- they have certain other fire safety features in the building including fire hose reels, fire extinguishers, fire blankets, emergency lighting, exit signs, fire resisting building elements and/or emergency management

plans; or

- they have an 'approved' automatic fire suppression system, which means a system approved by a relevant building surveyor appointed to issue a building permit for the building.

To determine if these exemptions apply refer to regulation 147(4), (5) and (6). Some examples of scenarios when the exemptions will apply are set out below.

Management Plans for Shared Accommodation Buildings

Shared accommodation buildings that are exempt from the requirement for an automatic fire suppression system must have a management plan complying with regulation 147(7)

What is a Management Plan?

A management plan is a document which sets out instructions to help occupants of a building to deal with situations that could possibly be a threat to their safety.

The following information is the minimum that a management plan must contain. Each premises must be assessed individually and should there be specific site requirements, these must be identified and added to the management plan.

What must be included in a Management Plan?

Emergency Contact Details

Emergency services contact details such as the 000 number to be listed indicating that this is the number to call for Fire, Ambulance or Police assistance. Managers contact details and location on or off site should also be provided.

Fire Protection Equipment

The plan must indicate what type of fire protection equipment is provided within the building. There must also be an attached plan showing the location of such equipment so that the occupants can easily identify it. The plan must also have a brief statement which instructs occupants/employees that the equipment must be kept clear of obstructions at all times.

If staff are employed, a program of annual training must be set in place to ensure employees are capable of using the fire protection equipment installed within the building; e.g. portable fire extinguishers, fire hose reels, fire blankets, WIP (Warden Intercom Phone), call-points etc.

Evacuation Procedure

The evacuation procedure must include a plan that clearly identifies the location of all exits and the assembly point at which the building occupants are to meet. The procedure must also detail the actions staff (if employed) are to take in notifying occupants of the building in the case of an evacuation.

Where an evacuation warning system is installed throughout a building, the procedure must clearly detail the stages of the warning system and what actions must be taken during each stage.

Training drills must take place on a regular basis to ensure efficacy of the evacuation procedure.

Compliance with these requirements by owners

The above requirements must be met by the owners of these types of buildings and/or the owners of each sole occupancy unit within one of these types of buildings.

The time for bringing an existing building into compliance with the requirements in section 145, 146 and 147 has passed. Therefore, any owner that has not installed the required fire safety systems in a shared accommodation or residential care building is in breach of these laws and could be issued with an emergency order or building order requiring compliance. The failure to comply with an emergency order or building order is an offence.

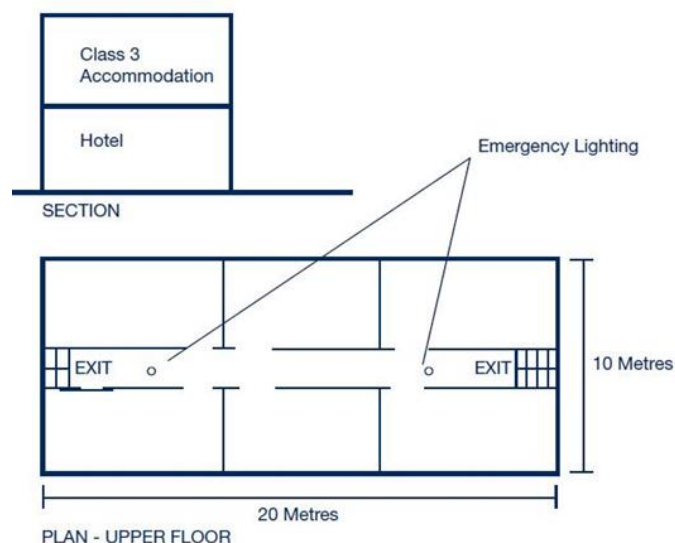
Examples of when exemptions under section 147 apply

The following examples illustrate how a shared accommodation building could be exempt from regulation 147

Example A: A pub with hotel style accommodation is a common scenario. The hotel accommodation part of the building would be classified as Class 3.

In this instance it has been determined that the accommodation is of a shared nature as a bed can be rented by an individual and the rooms (sole occupancy unit) are capable of accommodating 4 unrelated persons.

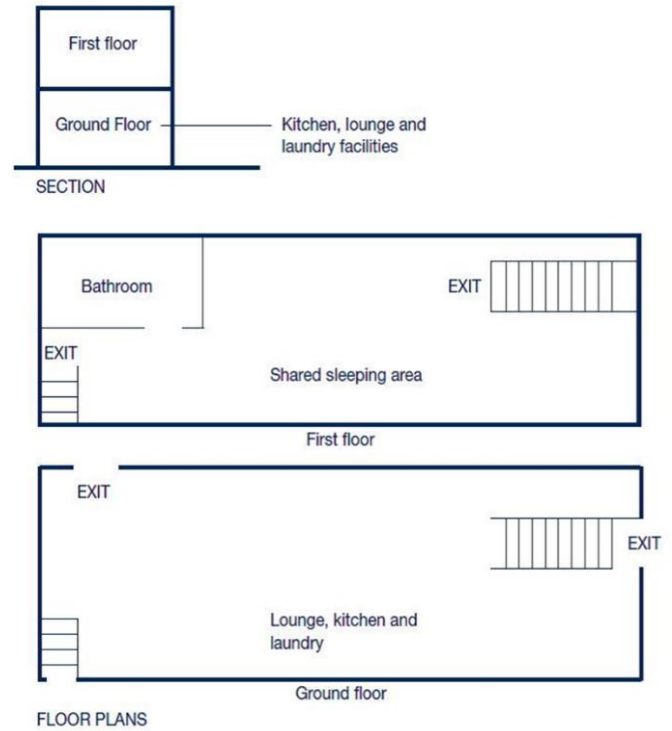
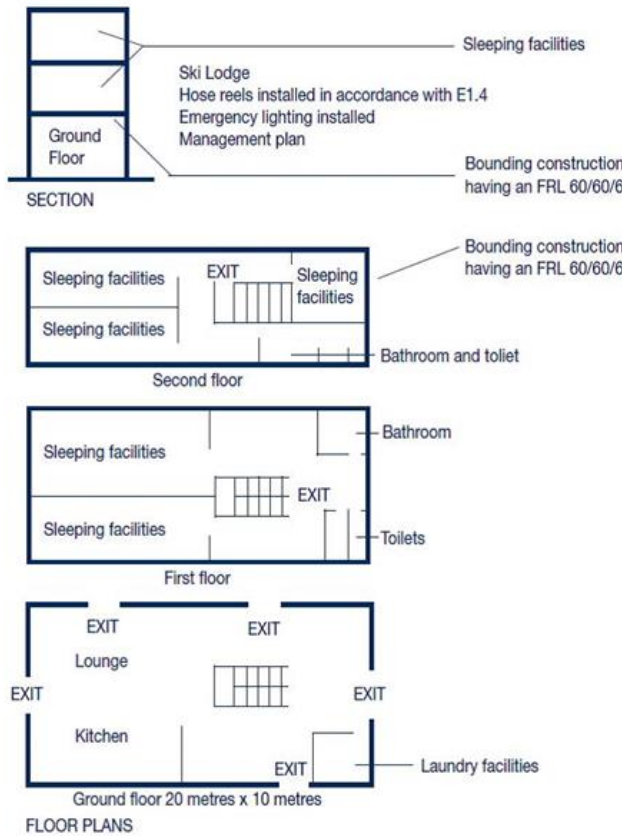
The hotel has a rise in storeys of 2 with the accommodation area located on the first floor. The hotel has a total floor area of 400m² and the distance of travel from the entrance doorway of each sole-occupancy unit is not more than 6 metres to the nearest exit or to a point from which travel in different directions to at least 2 exits is available. The building has emergency lighting, exit signs and portable fire extinguishers in accordance with AS2444 and has a management plan



Interpretation:

In this instance the owner of the hotel accommodation is exempt from installing a fire sprinkler system as the building meets the requirements of sub-clause (4).

Example B: - An existing ski lodge with a rise in storeys of 3, where the ski lodge has sleeping facilities that are capable of accommodating 4 unrelated persons per room. Each storey is provided with an exit that is no greater than 6 metres from the entrance door of each sole occupancy unit. The doorways from each sole occupancy unit that lead to the public corridor are self-closing -/30/30 fire doors and each sole occupancy unit has bounding walls and floor with an FRL of at least 60/60/60. Hose reels exist within the building in accordance with clause E1.4 (of BCA Vol. One) and emergency lighting and exit signs are also provided. The building has a management plan.



Interpretation:

In this instance the owner of the ski lodge is exempt from installing a fire sprinkler system as the building meets the requirements of sub clause (5).

Example C: Backpacker accommodation facility with a rise in storeys of 2, where accommodation is provided for up to 30 unrelated persons. The sleeping facilities are set up in a dormitory fashion. There is not more than 6 metres from the entrance to each sole-occupancy unit to a point from which travel in different directions to 2 exits is available. The building has an approved sprinkler system installed throughout the building.

Interpretation:

In this instance the owner of the backpacker accommodation is exempt from installing a fire sprinkler system as the building meets the requirements of sub clause (6).

Further information

Australian Standard AS 3745-2010 – Planning for emergencies in facilities

Want to know more?

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

Victorian Building Authority
733 Bourke Street Docklands VIC 3008

www.vba.vic.gov.au