

## Building Practice Note **ESM-01: Fire Safety Systems for Residential Care and Shared Accommodation Buildings**

This Practice Note provides guidance on Part 9 Fire Safety Requirements of the Building Regulations 2018.

The content below provides guidance for:

- Fire safety requirements for residential care buildings and shared accommodation buildings built before 1 August 1997
- Management plans
- Owner responsibilities

### Abbreviations & Definitions

The abbreviations and definitions set out below are for guidance only. They are not intended to vary those set out in the Building Act 1993 (the Act), Building Regulations 2018 or the National Construction Code (NCC).

- **Act** – The Building Act 1993
- **BCA** – Building Code of Australia (Vol 1 and Vol 2)
- **Emergency plan** – as defined in regulation 147(8)
- **Management plan** – as defined in regulation 147(7)
- **Regulations** – The Building Regulations 2018

### Fire Safety Systems and Legislation

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.

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

### Residential Care Building

The Victorian Appendix to the BCA defines a residential care building as 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. This includes 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 –

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

Whilst the definition of a residential care building does not specifically mention particular building classifications, the smoke detection and alarm systems and automatic fire suppression systems requirements are only applicable to a Class 9a building that meets the definition of a residential care building (Vic).

## Requirements for Residential Care Building

### Smoke detection and alarm systems

Regulation 145 applies to a Class 9a building that is residential care building that was constructed, or for which a building permit was granted before 1 August 1997. It requires that an automatic smoke detection or smoke alarm system or a combination of both, be installed in accordance with Specification E2.2a of the BCA Volume One.

### Automatic fire suppression systems

Regulation 146 applies to a Class 9a building that is residential care building that was constructed, or for which a building permit was granted before 1 August 1997. It requires a fire sprinkler 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 an RBS appointed to issue a building permit for the building.

## Shared Accommodation Building

A shared accommodation building is defined in the Victorian Appendix to the BCA as a Class 3 building having:

- a) more than one sole-occupancy unit of which any sole-occupancy unit has sleeping facilities capable of accommodating 3 or more unrelated persons, or
- b) sleeping facilities capable of accommodating 13 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.

## Requirements for Shared Accommodation Building

### Smoke detection and alarm system

Regulation 145 applies to a Class 3 building that was constructed, or for which a building permit was granted before 1 August 1997. It requires that an automatic smoke detection or smoke alarm system or a combination of both, be installed in accordance with Specification E2.2a of the BCA Volume One.

Refer to ESM-09 Self-contained Smoke Alarms for Existing Residential Buildings for more information.

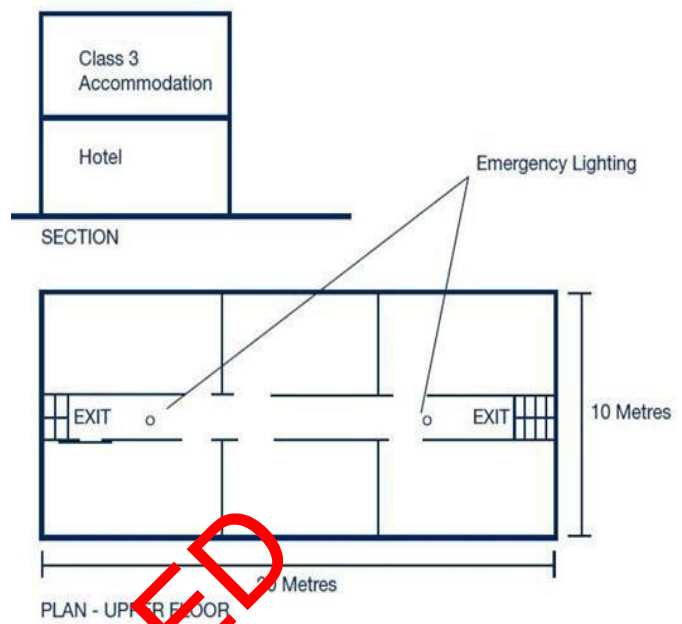
### Automatic fire suppression systems

Regulation 147 applies to a Class 3 buildings that are shared accommodation buildings constructed, or for which a building permit was granted before 1 July 2003. It requires a fire sprinkler system complying with E1.5 of the BCA Volume One to be installed unless the building meets the exemptions under regulation 147(4), (5) and (6). Some exemption examples are given below.

**Example - Exemption under regulation 147(4):**

A pub with hotel 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) can accommodate 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 400m<sup>2</sup> 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 AS 2444 as a management plan.

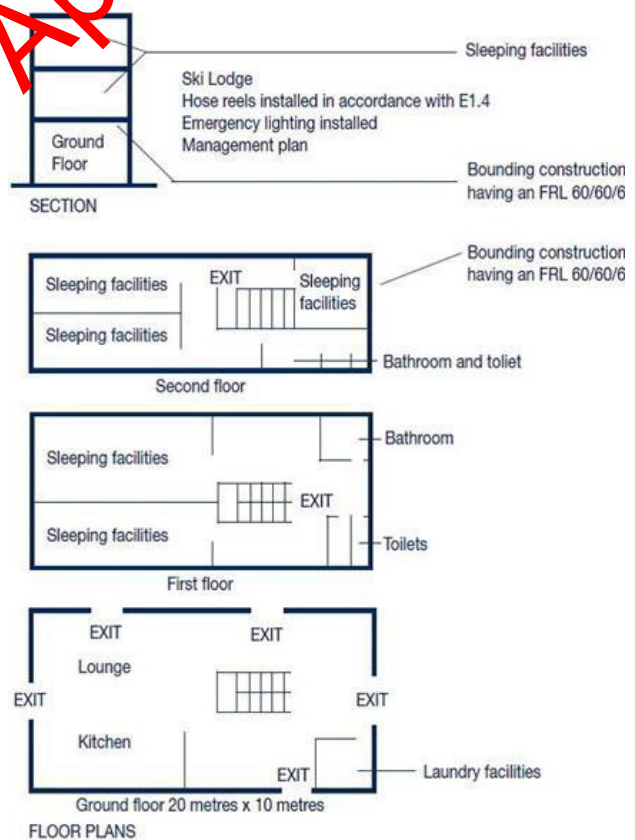


In this instance the owner of the hotel accommodation is exempt from installing a fire sprinkler system as the building meets the requirements of regulation 147(4).

**Example - Exemption under regulation 147(5):**

An existing ski lodge with a rise in storeys of 2, where the ski lodge has sleeping facilities that can accommodate 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 FRL -/30/30 fire doors and each sole occupancy unit has bounding walls and floors with a fire-resistance level no less than FRL 60/60/60. Hose reels exist within the building in accordance with clause E1.4 (of BCA Volume One), emergency lighting, exit signs and a management plan are also provided.

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).



SUPERSEDED  
24 April 23

## Related Documentation

- Building Act 1993
- Building Regulations 2018
- AS 2444 Portable fire extinguishers and fire blankets - Selection and location
- Practice Note GE-06 - Classification of residential care buildings

## Contact Us

If you have a technical enquiry, please email [technicalenquiry@vba.vic.gov.au](mailto:technicalenquiry@vba.vic.gov.au) or call 1300 815 127.

### Victorian Building Authority

Goods Shed North  
733 Bourke Street  
Docklands VIC 3008

[www.vba.vic.gov.au](http://www.vba.vic.gov.au)

## Version

Version 1.0, published (December 2021), supersedes Building Practice Note ESM-01 Installation of Fire Safety Systems in Existing Residential Care and Shared Accommodation Buildings issued June 2021

## Copyright

© December 2021 Victorian Building Authority (VBA).

This Practice Note has been prepared and published by the VBA for general educational and information purposes only. This publication must not be copied, reproduced, published, adapted, or communicated by any person without the VBA's prior written consent or as permitted by the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth). The VBA makes no warranties or representations whatsoever about the accuracy, reliability, suitability, completeness or authenticity of any information or material contained in this resource. Any use or reliance on such information is at a person's own risk. The VBA accepts no liability whatsoever for any direct, indirect, or consequential loss or damage any person may suffer arising out of or in connection with the access or use of this resource (including any third-party material included in this resource).

**SUPERSEDED**  
on 24 April 23