

# Media Release

Thursday, 9 September 2021



## VBA grant to fund fire safety system defect research

The Victorian Building Authority (VBA) is supporting research by Deakin University to better understand the extent of defects in passive fire safety systems in apartment buildings.

This important study is funded through the state building regulator's inaugural [research grant program](#).

A fire safety system in a building includes both active and passive elements that help keep occupants safe in case there is a fire.

Led by Dr Nicole Johnston, the research aims to provide improved understanding of the nature and extent of passive fire safety defects and the rectification costs associated with remedying them.

It will also review the regulatory system to identify any regulatory gaps and then recommend reforms and solutions to mitigate these types of defects, with the information to be provided to policy makers and government for consideration.

The VBA's CEO Sue Eddy said improving the installation of passive fire safety systems in buildings is important to the regulator.

"Dr Nicole Johnston has strong credentials in her field, we are excited to be supporting Deakin University with this research."

"This new program aims to boost the VBA's research capabilities by backing universities and TAFEs to find new and innovative solutions to challenges in the Victorian building and plumbing sector," Ms Eddy said.

An adequate level of fire safety requires all components of the building's fire safety system to function in a coordinated way.

While active systems such as smoke alarms and sprinklers are activated when exposed to heat, smoke and toxic gasses, passive fire protection systems don't need to be activated manually or automatically because they are built into the structure and fixtures of the building.

Passive elements include fire isolated stairways, fire-rated walls and separating floors, self-closing fire or smoke doors, door smoke seals and appropriate exit widths.

Dr Johnston previously conducted research that identified the types of defects in apartment buildings and how they impacted on buildings and their occupants. Her research also assessed how defects are managed within the residential property environment.

"From my [previous research](#), I found that defects in the fire protection systems were the second most common type of defect in residential construction" Dr Johnston said.

"Of note was the finding that due to the concealment of some passive fire elements from view, such as the inclusion of appropriate fire separation barriers, it is highly likely that passive fire defects were under-reported in the research."

This is the first successful research grant application funded by the VBA out of a total of 56 submissions from across Australia.

The VBA's research program helps the authority better understand regulatory issues and consumer needs, and how regulations can be shaped to improve public safety.