

Getting the fire safety message through to government

Fire safety audits of government buildings have uncovered so many non-compliances that the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service will take a stand and run a seminar at the Queensland Safety Show from June 21 to 23 to get the attention of government workers.

"We will be at the Queensland Safety Show to get the message through that fire safety is an essential part of running any government department," says the Fire and Rescue Service's John Harrison. "Workplace Health and Safety Queensland has a zero harm policy that also applies to our fire-fighters. If your hydrants aren't working, for example, you're putting them at extra risk."

"One of the fire safety installations that cause the service most concern is the fire door, which must be serviced by a licensed person every six months. People don't realise they have to get them serviced or that they are fire doors. The tags come off, they are painted over, or locksmiths fit non-compliant locks."

On the other hand, fire safety installations with much longer service intervals can also catch building occupiers off-guard during an audit. Sprinkler systems have a 24-year maintenance cycle and while keeping records for such a period can be a challenge, the Queensland regulations have almost every eventuality covered. Records must be handed over when there is a change of occupancy and kept safe in the event of fire and an extra copy stored off-site.

"Queensland has Australia's most rigorous fire safety legislation. Other states aspire to match it and look to us as a model," says John Harrison.

Forged from the horror of the Whisky au Go Go fire that killed 15 people in 1973, the State's *Building Fire Safety Regulation 2008*, together with the Queensland Development Code, are demanding.

At the Fire and Rescue Service's Queensland Safety Show seminar, John Harrison will explain three of the main principles underpinning the regulations:

- the maintenance of fire safety installations;
- fire evacuation instructions to the occupants of a building; and
- fire evacuation plans and diagrams.

Maintenance of Fire Safety Installations

The Queensland Development Code sets out the maintenance requirements for all fire safety installations, such as sprinklers, alarms, extinguishers, exit signs and hose reels. In Queensland, Mandatory Part 6.1 of the Code overrides the requirements of Australian Standard 1851 – 2005 for passive fire safety installations.

Fire Evacuation Instructions to Occupants of a Building

The regulations, which have similar but more specific requirements than AS 3745, describe the training needs that apply to different fire safety roles, beginning with workers.

Workers must receive a fire safety orientation (general evacuation instructions) within the first two days of working in a building and receive first response evacuation instructions involving use of fire extinguishers and reels within one month and then every two years. At the other end of the spectrum, a fire safety adviser must be assessed by a registered training organisation against eight competencies every three years for high occupancy buildings.

Fire Evacuation Plans and Diagrams

Evacuation signs/diagrams must be displayed at certain points along evacuation routes and must be included with the evacuation plan.

The Queensland Fire and Rescue Service audits buildings every one to five years, according to a risk assessment. The implications for non-compliance of government buildings can be severe. Multiple non-compliances generally result in a notice being served on a building, which is passed up through the Service's Director-General to the Minister, who communicates with the Minister responsible for the building. The Service may also issue on-the-spot fines.

To aid compliance, the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service has created a two-page checklist supported by 15 pages of advisory notes, which can be downloaded from its web site at www.fire.qld.gov.au.

The Queensland Fire and Rescue Service presentation is part of a line-up of very practical free workplace safety seminars at the Queensland Safety Show. Experts will explain how to attract funding, what to expect from new OHS laws, how to meet obligations manageably and within budget.

Sponsored by myosh, the Queensland Safety Show, Materials Handling Show and co-located Queensland Manufacturing Show run from June 21 to 23, 2011, at the Brisbane Convention & Exhibition Centre. For more information, visit qldsafetyshow.com.au, email safetyvisitor@aec.net.au or phone Australian Exhibitions & Conferences Pty Ltd on 03 9654 7773.

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