

Building and Technical Fact Sheet

Building audit - advisory

Building fire safety

The Department of Planning Transport and Infrastructure (DPTI) is leading a building audit in response to concerns regarding the use of Aluminium Composite Panels (ACPs).

ACPs are frequently used as external cladding on buildings, insulation and signage, and can be produced in a range of finishes. They usually consist of two thin foil-coated aluminium sheets bonded to a non-aluminium core.

The material is not unsafe or dangerous when installed in accordance with the National Construction Code (NCC). Incorrect use or installation may compromise the safe use of ACPs and render them non-compliant, which may pose a risk in the event of a fire.

Building construction

All new buildings in Australia are required to be constructed in accordance with the NCC.

The NCC sets very high fire safety standards that include a range of measures and specific construction requirements to help ensure building and occupant safety.

Fire safety measures in high rise buildings may include

- smoke detection & occupant warning systems
- fire isolation of exits - stairs
- multiple exits for each storey
- sprinkler systems
- fire resisting construction
- features to aid fire brigade - hydrants

Building fire safety

All multiple storey buildings are subject to a range of fire safety measures including physical systems and procedures that can help reduce the impact of an incident on a building and occupants.

Owners and occupiers are responsible for contributing to building fire safety by ensuring properties are maintained in accordance with relevant legislation and fire safety procedures.

Building management

Effective building management is a combination of good housekeeping and the regular servicing and maintenance of all building fire safety systems.

Essential Safety Provisions (ESP) requiring the mandatory servicing and maintenance of all fire safety measures helps to ensure systems are operational and effective during an emergency.

Building owners and occupiers should be familiar with emergency evacuation plans and procedures in the event of a fire.

All relevant emergency instructions, evacuation plans and safety information should be readily available and displayed prominently on each floor.

Housekeeping

Good housekeeping is a key part of building fire safety and it is the responsibility of all owners and occupiers to ensure appropriate standards are maintained.

Occupants and residents

Some basic fire safety measures that occupants and residents should be aware of include:

- making sure smoke alarms are present and not obstructed
- ensuring combustible waste and materials are stored and disposed of appropriately

Building fire safety

- making sure self closing fire doors are not obstructed and escape routes are clear from any obstructions
- keeping balconies clear of flammable materials, with all furniture and combustible items away from exterior walls and air conditioning units
- if barbeques are permitted, they should be at least 50cm away from any balcony wall, ignition source or combustible material
- smokers should use heavy high sided ashtrays on balconies and ensure all items are fully extinguished.

Building owners, strata groups and managers

Building owners, strata groups and relevant management bodies are responsible for ensuring building fire safety is maintained.

Specific information regarding building fire safety measures can be found in building approval records including compliance with relevant building standards.

Building owners, groups and relevant bodies should review and consider:

- if any material changes such as a facade or cladding upgrade been conducted
- if any refurbishment work has been done, does it comply with NCC requirements
- does the building have a fire evacuation plan and has this been communicated to occupants
- are residents disposing of combustible material appropriately and keeping flammable material away from external cladding
- if barbeques are permitted on balconies, that residents are keeping them away from external walls, cladding and combustible materials

- are all fire safety measures in place with all systems maintained, serviced and operational including:
 - smoke alarms
 - fire doors
 - sprinklers
 - hoses, hydrants and extinguishers
- are all facilities and systems accessible by firefighters at all times.

Building works

All building or refurbishment work must comply with the NCC and associated fire safety requirements. Any plans to upgrade an existing building must have the safety of the occupants as the first priority above any cost or aesthetic considerations.

Proposed upgrade or refurbishment work should consider the potential impact on the building and existing systems including:

- the provision of appropriate fire protection through fire rated constructions and walls if permitted
- ensuring all building materials are certified as suitable for their intended purpose
- that materials used are installed in compliance with manufacturers recommendations and the NCC
- that any building work undertaken does not compromise existing fire safety measures and systems.

Building owners and managers should review their buildings to ensure any previous building work has not compromised any fire safety systems.

Older high rise buildings and more complex buildings that comprise material and performance solutions may benefit from review by a suitably qualified fire safety engineer.

Disclaimer: This information is provided as general information only and should not be relied upon as legal advice or an accurate statement of relevant legislation. Seek independent legal advice if you are uncertain as to your legal obligations.