

# MFB COMMUNITY RESILIENCE RECOMMENDED PRACTICE



Metropolitan Fire and  
Emergency Services Board

Community Resilience  
Policy & Practice

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## MFB Residential Smoke Alarm Policy and Recommended Practice

### PURPOSE

The intent of this document is to define MFB policy regarding residential smoke alarms and MFB recommended practice in relation to residential smoke alarms.

### SCOPE

#### In Scope

This policy covers all residential dwellings, inclusive of owner occupied and privately rented properties, including:

- Houses
- Units
- Flats
- Bungalows
- Townhouses

#### Out of Scope

- Commercial and industrial properties
- Backpacker accommodation
- Rooming houses
- Guest houses
- Residential parts of a hotel or motel
- Residential parts of a school
- Facility based care, group homes
- Community residential units for older people, people with disabilities or children
- Acute health care
- Rehabilitation facilities which accommodate patients or workers
- Accommodation in detention centres

Public housing and community housing have their own policy and practice.

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## POLICY

### Legislation

- It is law in Victoria for all new residential buildings constructed on or after 1 August 1997 and any home that has undergone a major renovation or extension to have smoke alarms connected directly to mains power with a back-up battery on every level
- It is law in Victoria for all residential homes constructed before 1 August 1997, must be fitted with a 'stand-alone' battery powered smoke alarm on every level
- It is law in Victoria for all new homes constructed after 1 May 2014 and any home that has undergone a major renovation or extension, where there is a requirement for more than one smoke alarm in the home, all smoke alarms fitted must be inter-connected so "if one goes off, they all go off" as per the National Construction Code (NCC) Legislation AS 3786 – 3.7.2.4
- Smoke alarms must meet Australian Standard AS 3786 – 1993 required by the Building Regulations 2006 (the regulations)
- The Victorian State Coroner has also recommended (Coroners Case Number COR2008 002158) in line with the Aged Care Act of 1997 Packaged Care Guidelines
  - *"That during initial needs care assessment, community care providers advise community care clients that it is mandatory for all homes in Victoria to have a working Smoke Alarm"*
  - *"In homes where community care is to be provided and there is no Smoke Alarm, the installation of a Smoke Alarm is organised in line with service provision"*
  - *"That community care providers promote regular testing and maintaining of Smoke Alarms to the client, their family and/or friends or provide assistance for their clients to test and maintain Smoke Alarms if required".*

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## RECOMMENDED PRACTICE

1. Types of smoke alarms
2. Replacement of smoke alarms
3. Smoke alarms for people who are Deaf or hard of hearing
4. Smoke alarms linked to personal alarms
5. Placement and location of smoke alarms
6. Maintenance and lifespan of smoke alarms
7. Assistance to install smoke alarms and change smoke alarm batteries

### 1. Types of smoke alarms

Smoke alarms can be either *Photoelectric* or *Ionisation*.

**MFB recommends:** In line with Fire Services in all other states and territories that when installing, supplementing or replacing existing smoke alarms, photoelectric smoke alarms are used. This is because they are more effective at detecting slow smouldering fires.

### 2. Replacement of smoke alarms

1. Stand-alone smoke alarm powered by a 9 volt battery which requires replacing annually – these can be installed by yourself or a handyman
2. Stand-alone smoke alarm powered by a 10 year long life lithium battery that does not require an annual battery change over – these can be installed by yourself or a handyman
3. Smoke alarm connected to 240 volt mains power (hard wired) with a 9 volt battery backup – these need to be installed by an electrician
4. Smoke alarm connected to 240 volt mains power (hard wired) with a 10 year long life lithium battery backup that does not require an annual battery changeover – these need to be installed by an electrician.

**MFB recommends:** The use of smoke alarms (either stand alone or connected to 240 volt mains power) with 10 year long life lithium battery as this will not need to be replaced for the lifespan of the smoke alarm.

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### 3. Smoke alarms for people who are Deaf or hard of hearing

This type of smoke alarm comprises of:

- a. Smoke alarm with wireless transmitter
- b. Strobe light with receiver and 240volt power pack
- c. Vibrating bed pack

**MFB recommends:** People who are Deaf or hard of hearing purchase this type of smoke alarm to ensure they will be alerted to a fire in their home. Due to the increased cost of this specialised product (approximately \$400) MFB endorses and promotes the State Smoke Alarm Subsidy for Smoke Alarms for Deaf and hard of hearing. Contact [www.vicdeaf.com.au](http://www.vicdeaf.com.au) or TTY 9473 1199 or Ph. 9473 1111.

### 4. Smoke alarms linked to personal alarms

These types of smoke alarms:

- a. Link a personal alarm (an alert button usually a pendant or wrist band) monitoring system to smoke alarms
- b. In the event of the smoke alarm activating this sends a signal through to the alarm monitoring company who follow standard procedure as if the individual has pressed the alert button on the pendant or wrist band.

**MFB recommends:** For people with loss of memory or cognition this type of alarm is installed as an additional alert to ensure the affected person is aware and the alarm company can take appropriate action.

### 5. Placement and location of smoke alarms

It is vital that smoke alarms are correctly located and that there is an adequate number smoke alarms in the home to ensure the earliest possible warning of a fire.

- MFB recommends:**
- Smoke alarms are installed on every level of every home.
  - Smoke alarms are installed on or near the ceiling with care taken to avoid 'dead air space'.

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- In homes with more than one level a smoke alarm should be installed on the ceiling above the staircase to ensure the alarm will activate before smoke makes the common exit impassable.
- To protect any area used for sleeping, the smoke alarm must be located “between each area containing bedrooms and the remainder of the dwelling”.
- If bedrooms are not grouped in a common area or there is no connecting hallway, then an alarm must be located within 1.5 metres of the entrance to each bedroom.
- Where it is identified that an occupant sleeps inside a bedroom with the door closed, MFB recommends installing an additional smoke alarms inside the bedroom.
- For people with elevated risk such as older people, people with disability or home in which there is hoarding, additional smoke alarms should be installed throughout the home to increase early detection that gives the additional time required to escape safely.

## 6. Maintenance and lifespan of smoke alarms

Only working smoke alarms save lives. To ensure smoke alarms are working they must be maintained.

- MFB recommends:**
- Installation of smoke alarms with 10 year long life lithium batteries
  - Monthly testing of smoke alarms
  - Dusting around the smoke alarm annually
  - Annual battery change over at the end of daylight saving, if a 1 year battery is used
  - Replace all smoke alarms after 10 years.

## 7. Assistance to install smoke alarms and change smoke alarm batteries

MFB is unable to meet the demand to install smoke alarms and assist with changing batteries in smoke alarms. Assistance may be available through various government funded programs for eligible people. These include:

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Enquiry Situations	Advice
1. People who live in private rental accommodation are not responsible for the installation of smoke alarms or changing smoke alarm batteries.	Contact your landlord/real estate agent.
2. People who live in public or community housing are not responsible for the installation of smoke alarms or changing smoke alarm batteries.	Contact the Housing Call Centre on 13 11 72 or your community housing provider.
3. Veterans, their widows and widowers may be eligible to receive assistance through Veterans Home Care Home Maintenance.	Call Department of Veterans Affairs Assessment Line on 1300 550 450.
4. The Home and Community Care program (HACC and soon to be renamed Packaged Care Level 1) is provided through local government predominately for older people and some people with disability.	Contact your local council to ask about your eligibility for HACC Home Maintenance assistance.
5. Older people who receive a: <b>A.</b> Community Aged Care Package (CACP's/Packaged Care Level 2), <b>B.</b> Extended Aged Care At Home (EACH/Packaged Care Level 4 ), <b>C.</b> Extended Aged Care at Home Dementia (EACH D/Packaged Care Level 4)	Contact your Case Manager to receive assistance through these programs.
6. Transport Accident Commission clients may be eligible to receive assistance.	Contact your Case Coordinator at TAC.
7. People with disability who receive an Individual Support Package may be eligible for assistance.	Contact the person who coordinates your care.

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## **REFERENCES**

National Construction Code (NCC) Legislation AS 3786 – 3.7.2.4

Australian Standard AS 3786 – 1993

Building Regulations 2006

Brochure – Only Working Smoke Alarms Save Lives – MFB P632

Coronial Recommendations for COR2008 002158(2012)