



EXIT

What you need to know about

Maintaining essential services in your building



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Why maintain essential services?

When the construction of a building is complete, the building owner is responsible for its upkeep and maintenance, particularly its safety features or essential services.

The maintenance of essential services will ensure that the safety systems mainly dealing with fire situations within the building, remain at the required operational level throughout the life of the building. The type of maintenance depends on the complexity of the service, equipment or feature and the experience of the person carrying out the inspection or test.

What is an essential service?

An essential service defined under the *Building Regulations 1994* (the Regulations) include the following safety measures:

- Air conditioning systems*
- Exit doors
- Early warning systems
- Emergency lifts and lighting
- Emergency lighting
- Emergency power supply
- Emergency warning systems
- Exit signs
- Fire control centres
- Fire curtains and doors
- Fire extinguishers
- Fire detectors and alarm system
- Fire hydrants
- Fire isolated stairs
- Fire rated materials
- Fire windows
- Mechanical ventilation
- Passage ramps
- Path of travel to exits
- Smoke alarms
- Smoke control systems
- Sprinkler systems

Please refer to the Regulations for a full listing of essential services.

* There is a separate process for registration of cooling tower systems. For more information, please refer to the Building Commission's brochure titled *Registration of cooling tower systems*.

What type of buildings are affected?

All buildings other than a house or outbuilding are affected. These include the following Classes as defined in the *Building Code of Australia 1996*:

Class 1b: Some boarding houses, guest houses or hostels

Class 2: Buildings containing sole-occupancy unit (e.g. apartments, blocks of flats)

Class 3: Backpacker accommodation, residential parts of hotels or motels, residential parts of schools, accommodation for the aged, disabled or children

Class 5: Offices for professional or commercial purposes

Class 6: Shops or other buildings for sale of goods by retail cafés, restaurants, milk bars, dining rooms and bars

Class 7: Buildings used for car parks, storage or display of goods

Class 8: Laboratories or buildings for production or assembly of goods

Class 9: Public buildings such as health care buildings or assembly buildings, nightclubs, bars etc.

When the construction of a building is complete, the building owner is responsible for its upkeep and maintenance, particularly its safety features or essential services.

What does the law require?

The Regulations require you as the building owner to maintain all safety fittings, equipment and safety features as well as those items listed as essential services.

There are different obligations under the Regulations dependent on when the building was built or when building work occurred on that building.

Part 11 of the Regulations contain two divisions: Division 1 addresses buildings constructed or altered since 1 July 1994, and Division 2 sets out requirements for buildings constructed prior to that date.

For buildings constructed or altered since 1 July 1994, the relevant building surveyor would have issued you with an occupancy permit or certificate of final inspection which lists the:

- Essential services associated with the building work
- Level of performance for each essential service to fulfill its purpose
- Frequency and type of maintenance required.

There are different obligations under the Regulations dependent on when the building was built or when building work occurred on that building.

What are my responsibilities?

Building owners have an obligation to ensure that an essential service, piece of safety equipment, fitting or other safety measure is maintained so that it operates satisfactorily.

Buildings built before 1 July 1994

(see below for renovations or alterations since 1 July 1994)

If your building was built before 1 July 1994, you are **not** required to prepare and display an annual essential services report. However, you are still responsible for ensuring that any safety equipment, safety fittings or safety measures are maintained and fulfilling their purpose. This includes exits and paths of travel to exits. It is also advised that you keep records of maintenance checks, service and repair work. These should be kept so, if a municipal building surveyor or chief inspector inspects your premises, you have proof of upkeep.

And remember, if building work is carried out, these circumstances may change, so it is worth checking with a municipal building surveyor to see what you need to do to comply with the Regulations, or contact the Building Commission.

Buildings constructed or altered since 1 July 1994

If your building was constructed or altered since 1 July 1994, the list of essential services (including their performance level, frequency and type of maintenance required) would be included with your occupancy permit or certificate of final inspection.

You are required to prepare an annual essential services report on the buildings essential services. You may choose to engage specialist maintenance contractors to assist in the preparation of the report. The following steps should be followed:

- Display all current occupancy permits, annual essential services reports (Form 15) and any determinations made. These documents can be framed, placed in a sealed, transparent or glass covered notice board. For multiple pages, the pages may be laminated so they can be suspended or fixed to the building.
- Place the above documents in a prominent position as approved by the relevant building surveyor.

- Check with your building surveyor to determine when compliance is required.
- The annual essential services report is to be in accordance with the prescribed Form 15 (copies of this form are available in the Essential Services Manual which can be purchased from the Building Commission).
- All essential service reports and records of maintenance checks, service and repair work are to be kept on the premises for inspection.
- The agent of the owner may complete the annual services report if written delegation is provided.

By meeting these requirements, you as the owner will have greater knowledge of the safety of your building. In addition, the permanent display of these documents provides occupants with important safety information.

What happens if an owner doesn't comply?

Councils have a responsibility under the building legislation for the enforcement of building safety within their municipality

Non-compliance may result in a fine of up to \$10,000 for individuals or \$50,000 for companies. More importantly, non-compliance could place not only building occupants lives at risk, but also those of passers-by and the occupants of adjoining buildings.

Adequate maintenance is the best means of ensuring that safety systems will operate reliably if an emergency arises.

Non-compliance may result in a fine of up to \$10,000 for individuals or \$50,000 for companies

Need more information?

To find out more about essential services please contact the Building Commission. Essential Services Maintenance Manuals can be purchased from the Building Commission.

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