

Decommissioning of Fire Hydrant and Sprinkler Systems

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1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this guideline is to inform industry of the issues associated with removed, disconnected or decommissioned fire hydrant systems and automatic sprinkler systems.

2. BACKGROUND

Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) has responded to a number of fire incidents at properties where fire hydrant systems and automatic fire sprinkler systems have been disconnected, decommissioned or not maintained.

These incidents constitute a safety hazard to firefighters, as the presence of an apparent operational automatic fire sprinkler system and fire hydrant system generally ensures that firefighters are afforded a greater level of safety.

The presence of a non-operational automatic fire sprinkler system provides firefighters with a false sense of safety, as firefighters are aware that sprinklers have the ability to cool fires and suppress their growth, which in turn reduces some of the hazards associated with fire exposure, fire spread and structural collapse. In these instances, fewer fire fighting resources are needed, as fire fighting operations are less aggressive in comparison to fires within non-sprinkler protected buildings.

3. DEFINITIONS

Building Work: has the same meaning as Section 3 of *the Building Act 1993 (the Act)*. The definition of 'building work' in the Act includes work for, or in connection with, the construction, demolition or removal of a building.

4. CONSIDERATIONS

Where an application for building permit encompasses the removal, disconnection or decommissioning of a fire hydrant system or automatic fire sprinkler system, the Fire Rescue Commissioner requires that the following building work be undertaken to render the systems inactive.

4.1 Fire Hydrant Systems

Option 1: Complete Removal of a Fire Hydrant System

All fire hydrant system infrastructures, located either below or above ground, must be physically removed from the property. This also includes the removal of any cabinets, enclosures, block plans or signs that house any element of the fire hydrant system.

Option 2: Partial Removal of a Fire Hydrant System

Where it is not proposed to remove all the fire hydrant system pipe work located (concealed) below ground level, then all fire hydrant outlets, fire brigade booster connections and all other visible infrastructure must be cut and sealed as close as possible to natural ground level by an appropriately registered plumber. This also includes the removal of any cabinets, enclosures, block plans or signs that housed any element of the fire hydrant system. It may also be required to update site plants or a sign advising the system is decommissioned and non-operational.

4.2 Fire Sprinkler Systems

Fire sprinkler system infrastructure, including sprinkler heads, alarm valves, fire main pipework, signage and other main components forming part of the fire sprinkler system, must be disconnected and physically removed from the property.

5. COMPLETION OF BUILDING WORK

Upon completion of the above building work, the building permit applicant must arrange for a final inspection to be conducted by the relevant building surveyor, prior to the issuance of a certificate of final inspection.

6. CONCLUSION

The carrying out of the building work referred to in Section 4 above generally ensures the firefighters responding to an emergency incident at a property do not expose themselves to any occupational health and safety hazards whilst connecting their pumping appliances and hoses to an inoperative fire hydrant system.

A building where a fire incident has occurred is a firefighters workplace, therefore it is expected that building owners and occupiers will provide firefighters with a reasonably safe workplace in order to carry out their fire fighting operations. This is as per *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (OHS Act)*, Section 2.3, *Duty of Employers to Other Persons*.

7. REFERENCES

Building Regulations 2006

Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (OHS Act)

AS 2118 Part 1, AS 2118 Part 4 and AS 2118 Part 6 – Sprinkler Systems

Standards Australia 2005, Fire hydrant installations system design, installation and commissioning, AS 2419.1, Standards Australia, Sydney

The Building Act 1993 (the Act)

The Building Code of Australia (BCA)

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