New smoke alarm laws – the facts

From 1 July 2007, owners of all houses and units in Queensland must install at least one 9 volt battery powered smoke alarm.

As a legal **minimum** requirement, a smoke alarm must be installed on or near the ceiling on any storey:

- Between any area containing bedrooms and the rest of the house or unit e.g. hallways; or
- On a storey not containing bedrooms on the most likely evacuation route from the storey.

Current Building Code of Australia (BCA) Law for New Homes, Units and Renovations

Since 1 July 1997 in Queensland, it has been mandatory under the BCA to have hard-wired (240 volt) smoke alarms installed in residential homes built or significantly renovated (more than 50%) after this date. These alarms must meet all requirements of Australian Standard (AS) 3786, and the BCA specifies location requirements for smoke alarms.

Minimum Requirements

The minimum required is a 9 volt, battery powered smoke alarm, in which the battery requires replacement annually. It is estimated that the laws will require the typical home to install one or two alarms.

There are a number of ways in which smoke alarms can be powered, these include:

1. 9 volt batteries that have at least a one year life and require changing each year
2. Long-life 9 volt lithium batteries that can be renewable or non-removable that last the life of the alarm, up to 10 years. These avoid the need for the householder to replace the battery annually. In some models the battery cannot be removed due the unit being sealed; and
3. Mains power supply, with some models featuring a rechargeable battery back-up. Often called hard-wired (240 volt) smoke alarms, these offer the highest level of reliability, but must be installed by a licensed electrician.

Some smoke alarm models can be connected in groups so that if one alarm goes off it will also set off others. This will require the work of an electrician.

Types of Smoke Alarms

There are two types of smoke alarms - ionisation and photoelectric. Ionisation smoke alarms mainly detect the presence of extremely small particles of smoke, whilst photoelectric mainly detect visible smoke. The type most commonly installed in homes has been the ionisation smoke alarm. The two types are explained in greater detail at **www.fire.qld.gov.au/communitysafety/smokealarms**

Recommendations Above Minimum Requirements

Your protection against fire increases with the quality and type of smoke alarm that is installed. Research indicates that photoelectric smoke alarms are generally more effective than ionisation types across a wider range of fires experienced in homes. For this reason, QFRS recommends that photoelectric smoke alarms be installed, especially if you are installing only one alarm. If you already have smoke alarms installed, QFRS recommends that you supplement the existing alarms with photoelectric types, especially between sleeping areas and exits from your home (e.g. hallways); and at the end of the service life of existing smoke alarms, replace them with photoelectric types.

It is expected that stocks of photoelectric alarms will become more readily available at retailers as demand increases.

For more information phone the information hotline number: 1300 369 003 (the cost of a local call) or go to the Queensland Fire & Rescue Service website at www.fire.qld.gov.au

Fact sheet

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