

# Frequency of testing for selected passive fire safety installations

An active maintenance regime is not required for some passive fire safety installations. The new QDC acknowledges the practical problems in complying with the frequency of inspections and access to passive fire safety installations listed in AS 1851–2005. The frequency of required testing and inspections for passive fire safety installations are listed in schedule 1 of the QDC. The frequency of inspection is six-monthly and yearly, depending on the building classification. A building occupier may decide to increase the frequency by using the testing frequency mentioned in AS 1851–2005 if practices or uses are considered to warrant this, however, the regulations only require the testing frequencies in schedule 2 to be followed.

Even though there is no active maintenance regime required in the QDC for some passive fire installations such as floors and walls, the occupier should still be aware that it is a breach of the Act to carry out building work without complying with the requirements of the Act. For example, a body corporate might engage a data cabling or pay television company to install cabling and the contracted worker may wish to create a penetration through fire walls or floors. This is not permitted without building approval. If the openings around the penetration are too large or have not been fire stopped in accordance with the BCA the building's fire safety will be compromised.

## Fire doors

Fire doors are an integral component of fire protection in buildings and are known as 'passive fire protection systems'. They are installed in walls constructed as fire barriers and each fire door has a fire rating known as a fire resistance level (FRL) as does the fire wall itself. The term 'fire door' is the common short form used for a 'fire-resistant-doorset'. A fire resistant doorset consists of a door leaf, doorframe, and associated hardware such as closers, handles, locks, vision panels and air grills. Fire doors are also required to be self-closing and latching. Fire doors contain the spread of fire and assist in providing occupants the time to safely evacuate a burning building. Most fire doors are kept closed at all times, however some doors are held open with magnetic devices and will shut automatically upon alarm in the event of fire. The movement (opening and closing) of a fire door should never be impaired by a door wedge/chock or other obstacle.

If your building is a class 2 (e.g. apartment building), it is most likely apartment doors are fire doors which require yearly testing. Generally, the obligation to test fire safety installations is placed on occupiers and, in the first instance, the requirements to maintain these doors is placed upon the unit occupier because the unit occupier controls full access to the door. However, in practice, the body corporate is responsible for maintaining the common property and unit doors typically intersect with the common property pathways. Therefore, unit occupiers may accept the common practice of allowing the body corporate to undertake the testing on their behalf. It is recommended that owners, occupiers and the relevant body corporate put in place standing arrangements to facilitate how each apartment door can be accessed for testing as required. Where occupiers do not allow the body corporate to test and maintain the unit fire doors, the occupier must ensure their door is tested and maintained in compliance with the QDC.

## Common defects of fire doors

Fire doors are often installed in areas where they may be subject to regular traffic (movement of people and/or equipment) resulting in damage, defects, or wear and tear that may affect the door's efficiency during a fire. Further, aggressive environmental conditions such as constant heat or humidity, chemicals and salt air can also affect the operation of and/or the individual components that make up a fire door.

Work is sometimes undertaken in buildings such as refurbishing, where the fire doors are not touched, but the installation of new floor covering might affect the required performance of a door. For example, the gaps around a fire door must not exceed certain distances. Replacing existing floor tiles with new thinner tiles could increase the gap between the door and the floor, allowing for fire to spread from one side of the door to the other. Some of the more common defects observed during routine maintenance procedures are outlined below.

- Door hardware is inoperative. Fire doors have a number of moving parts that are integral to its operation. All the hardware components associated with a fire door are key elements that combine to achieve the overall FRL that a door complies with and is certified to. These components are tested and approved by a registered testing authority and installed or repaired by an appropriately qualified person. For example, oil leaking from a door closer may affect the performance of the closer during closing and stop the door from shutting to a fully closed position.
- Door leaves are warped, twisted, delaminated or buckled, creating a situation where they no longer close against the frame within acceptable gap limits. The edging of the door should also be in good condition where it is free from splitting or other damage on all sides. These defects can occur from aggressive environments such as heat, humidity, chemicals and exposure to weather.
- Door frames not being adequately anchored to the wall, free from distortion or with obstructions that could prevent the door from closing properly. With metal door frames exposed to aggressive elements including salt air in coastal regions they may become corroded and require regular additional maintenance to maintain compliance.
- Vision panels (windows) are damaged or cracked or framing is not secure.

Typically, vision panels need to be made from materials of a type approved for use and securely held in place.

## Asbestos in fire doors

Some buildings constructed before January 1990 may have fire doors using thermal insulation that is asbestos containing material (ACM). ACM is a health hazard and the *Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995* and *Workplace Health and Safety Regulation 2008* detail the obligations of building owners for managing and removing ACM.

If a fire door is damaged to expose friable asbestos material, the material and door will need to be removed by an asbestos removalist who has a certificate to perform the work issued by Workplace Health and Safety Queensland.

For fire doors, where the asbestos is bonded or enclosed, the door must be entered onto an asbestos register for the building, have a suitable label to ensure maintenance workers are aware asbestos is present, and be managed through an asbestos management plan controlling maintenance work and other activities that could lead to the ACM being disturbed.

For further information about asbestos management please contact Workplace Health and Safety Queensland on 1300 369 915 or [www.deir.qld.gov.au](http://www.deir.qld.gov.au)

# Who can carry out maintenance?

The occupier of a building must ensure that the maintenance of each prescribed fire safety installation for the building is carried out by an appropriately qualified person. An appropriately qualified person means a person who holds a license for a certain type of work under the Queensland Building Services Authority.

When you arrange for maintenance to be undertaken you should advise the appropriately qualified person (i.e. licensed contractor) of the age of the building and provide copies of the approved plans and Certificate of Classification so that he/she has an understanding of the building's construction and the legislation that applies.

For information on the different licenses required for maintenance of fire safety installations please contact the Queensland Building Services Authority on 1300 272 272 or [www.bsa.qld.gov.au](http://www.bsa.qld.gov.au)

# Body corporate obligations

The maintenance code applies to a range of buildings which commonly have a body corporate such as class 2 (residential apartments), class 3 buildings (such as holiday/business accommodation) and commercial/industrial buildings.

Members of a body corporate will need to determine who is authorised to sign the yearly occupier's statement on behalf of the body corporate.

Suggested actions that a body corporate could take to ensure the building is maintained include:

- determining who is authorised to sign the occupier's statement on behalf of the body corporate
  - confirming the date of when the building was approved for construction
  - entering into a maintenance contract with an appropriately licensed person to ensure ongoing periodic maintenance is carried out
  - confirming dates of maintenance inspections where entry into individual units may be required, such as for the inspection of unit entry doors that are fire doors
- keeping records of all maintenance for two years with the building's fire and evacuation plan
- include fire safety maintenance in your funding forecasts.