

MEDIA ALERT



21 April 2020

DON'T SKIP ESSENTIAL BUILDING FIRE SAFETY CHECKS DURING COVID-19

National or State/Territory interviews available

The COVID-19 pandemic is no excuse to skip potentially life-saving **fire safety checks in strata properties**, warns Australia's peak body for strata properties.

Strata Community Association (SCA) has received reports of fire protection officers being denied access to strata properties due to concerns about social distancing and infection.

SCA National President Andrew Chambers joined the Insurance Council of Australia (ICA) and the National Fire Industry Association (NFIA) to urge building owners and managers to **continue fire protection safety checks and maintenance** in residential, commercial and industrial buildings during **COVID-19**.

"As SCA said earlier this month, it's vital that all maintenance continues in strata properties otherwise it can create bigger problems and greater expense in the long term," Mr Chambers said.

"Fire safety inspections rank highly here because they can potentially save lives.

"When fire safety checks are organised by strata managers, residents can be assured that the inspectors are following best-practice social distancing and occupational health and safety guidelines.

"These inspectors should not be turned away."

Mr Chambers said the inspections were an important part of a building's risk assessment, ensuring occupants are protected from the risk of fires.

"They are also a requirement of many strata insurance policies and failure to conduct routine fire inspections and maintenance could affect a building's insurance coverage," Mr Chambers said.

Mr Chambers was responding to press releases from ICA Head of Risk Karl Sullivan and National Fire Industry Association CEO Wayne Smith.

Mr Sullivan said the COVID-19 shutdowns did not remove the regulatory and insurance requirements for buildings to undergo fire protection inspections.

"Many office buildings and commercial premises are unoccupied or have few workers, so maintenance issues that might normally be detected are more likely to be missed, creating the potential for electrical fires," Mr Sullivan said.

"Most high-rise residential properties now have around-the-clock occupancy that places additional pressure on services, amenities and building infrastructure, along with a higher risk of kitchen fires and electrical fires from overloaded appliances and circuits.

"The ICA supports the National Fire Industry Association in its efforts to ensure fire protection inspections can continue during the pandemic. This work is considered an essential service, and fire protection professionals are strictly following the public health guidelines."

Mr Smith said failure to undertake inspections, testing and maintenance in accordance with legal requirements could leave business or property owners open to fines and litigation.

"We want to work with the property owners to ensure fire safety standards are met while helping to reduce risk and limit demand on emergency services at this crucial

About Strata Community Association

Strata Community Association Limited (SCA) is the peak industry body for Body Corporate and Community Title Management in Australia & New Zealand. Membership includes body corporate managers, support staff, committee members and suppliers of products and services to the industry. SCA proudly fulfils the dual roles of a professional institute and consumer advocate.

SCA has in excess of 3,300 members who help oversee, advise or manage a combined property portfolio with an estimated replacement value of over \$1.2 trillion.

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