Fact Sheet – Decommissioning Fire Detection and Alarm Systems

General

The following general guidance is provided where it is proposed to decommission fire detection and alarm systems in Defence occupied buildings where the system is no longer required by either the Department of Defence Manual of Fire Protection Engineering (MFPE) or the National Construction Code Series Volume One – Building Code of Australia (BCA).

A number of options are available for smoke detection and alarms that are installed but not currently required by the MFPE or BCA:

1. leave in place and maintain;
2. retain system till end of life then follow the steps for decommission and remove; or
3. decommission and remove.

The following advice relates only to the option to decommission and remove a fire detection system.

Decommissioning a fire protection system is not considered as work that is exempt from a Building Approval. As such, decommissioning requires a Building Approval and an updated Certificate of Occupancy at the completion of works. This process is to be undertaken by a building certifier.

As part of the Building Approval process, a review of the structure needs to be undertaken to determine – where possible – whether the system was originally installed to meet MFPE requirements or BCA or other applicable codes at the time of the original construction.

Where it is not possible to determine whether the system was required by the applicable building code or Defence requirements at the time of construction, the process noted below for ‘required by the MFPE at the time of construction’ is to be adopted.

Required by MFPE at time of construction

Where a system was only installed to meet the MFPE requirements at that time, then the Building Approval should note this and confirm that neither the current MFPE – nor BCA – has a current requirement for a fire detection and alarm system.

The review must also include assessment of current MFPE requirements for existing buildings and ensure compliance with these requirements is achieved.
Any decommissioned fire detection system must also be fully removed to avoid future confusion as to whether a system is installed on not.

The Building Approval and updated Certificate of Occupancy at the completion of works must be saved in Objective into the building folder in the Estate Management files.

**Required by BCA or other applicable code at time of construction**

Where a system was required by the BCA at the time of the original construction, then further considerations are necessary. This is because, whilst not required under the current BCA, the effect of the deleting these systems needs to be assessed holistically to ensure that the resultant building fire safety is in line with the intent of current requirements.

For example, BCA 1990 may have had a requirement for fire detection, but different or lesser requirements for fire hydrants or other fire systems. Deleting the detection system may reduce fire brigade response times and when this is considered with reduced or lesser hydrant coverage than permitted under current requirements, the result may be that the overall buildings fire safety is reduced.

As part of the Building Approval to decommission an existing detection system in a building where the BCA required this system at the time of construction, the building certifier must ensure that:

- the new works comply with the MFPE and the fire safety provisions of the BCA; and
- the new works don’t unduly affect the fire safety within the remainder of the existing building.

The review must also include assessment of current MFPE requirements for existing buildings and ensure compliance with these requirements is achieved.

Any decommissioned fire detection system must also be fully removed to avoid future confusion as to whether a system is installed on not.

Where it is impracticable to remove all parts of the system, that part may remain in situ provided signage is installed stating that these parts are decommissioned. The signage must be in a visible area adjacent to the decommissioned parts.

The Building Approval and updated Certificate of Occupancy at the completion of works must be saved in Objective into the building folder in the Estate Management files.

Guidelines for certification, performance solutions and dispensations are available at the Fire Engineering and Fire Safety page of Defence Estate Quality Management System (DEQMS) website DEQMS¹.

---