



20 March 2020

The Hon. Mick Gentleman MLA  
Minister for Police and Emergency Services  
GPO Box 1020  
Canberra ACT 2601

Dear Minister,

***RE: Impact of Coronavirus on fire safety***

Fire Protection Association Australia (FPA Australia) is the national peak body for fire safety, providing information, services and education to the fire protection industry and the community.

Over the last few days, FPA Australia has received several enquiries about the onset of coronavirus and its implications for the fire protection industry.

These enquiries fall into three groups:

1. Owners or agents of owners preventing practitioners from entering buildings to perform routine service on maintenance of fire appliances;
2. Employees expressing concerns about their safety when providing services; and
3. Employers are trying to meet their own OHS responsibilities to their staff while at the same time delivering on their commitment to protect the community and meet their contractual obligations.

Although we recognise that owners and managers of buildings are able to determine activities in their own premises, and can determine their own compliance needs, the industry is looking for direction on the Government's expectations at this time.

Most activities can be rearranged to ensure compliance – for example, servicing commercial premises after hours or when the building has lower occupancy levels.

However, the maintenance of residential, health care, aged care, education facilities or buildings with designated restrictions is causing concern.

Sole occupancy units (SOUs) pose particular problems for practitioners.

Federal, State and Territory Government advice for people to work from home or to undertake self-quarantine means that there is an increased risk to practitioners carrying out assessments, as those who may be affected will be on-site when assessments must be carried out.

This poses a significant health risk to practitioners that are required to access relevant parts of a building (including an occupier's residence) to undertake their normal duties.

Technicians/service contractors are already being denied access to buildings or are being instructed not to access these areas due to implementation of internal company policies to safeguard their employees.

To resolve these concerns, we believe the Government should issue a declaration as follows:

*While maintenance of fire protection systems and equipment (fire appliances) required to be provided or installed by section 92 of the Emergencies Act and required to be maintained under section 95(2)(b) of the Act should continue to occur, the Government acknowledges that:*

1. *Occupiers, owners or agents of the occupiers or owners may restrict access to their building or part of their building as part of their response to the COVID19 crisis.  
Such action prevents fire protection service providers from entering buildings to undertake maintenance of fire appliances.*
2. *In trying to meet their own OHS responsibilities to their staff or as a result of Government-required COVID19 actions, fire protection service providers may be unable to provide staff to undertake maintenance in some buildings.*
3. *Employees of fire protection service providers may, in concern for their safety, refuse to enter certain buildings or parts of buildings (e.g. healthcare buildings, apartments within residential buildings, etc.).*

*Therefore, the Government advises that, where such circumstances occur:*

- *Maintenance of fire appliances should continue to be carried out on relevant buildings where possible, but without the need to enter SOUs or areas of designated restriction.*
- *Where maintenance is unable to occur, it can be delayed by the allowable tolerance in the proper maintenance standard or up to four (4) months, whichever is greater, without incurring an offence under section 95(2) of the Emergencies Act.*

Such a declaration would ease concerns for practitioners and not expose owners to fines for non-compliance when compliance cannot be achieved due to responses to the COVID19 crisis.

Although our preference would be for maintenance to continue, we need to be alert to the safety concerns of those performing the work.

Delaying the maintenance of certain elements within the tolerances identified in relevant standards does not pose a significant safety risk.

Delaying this beyond the tolerance may pose a risk but we believe a delay at this time would be in line with existing Government advice.

As noted earlier, this would be mostly applied for residential, health care, aged care, education or buildings with designated restrictions. At this stage we expect maintenance would generally continue on commercial and industrial type facilities.

We would appreciate your advice.

Yours sincerely,



**Nathan Semos**  
Chief Technical Officer  
Fire Protection Association Australia