



Building newsflash

Fire safety in residential care buildings built prior to June 2007 Release of the public benefit test (PBT) report

Purpose

To advise:

- of upcoming industry consultation on a proposed Queensland Development Code for residential care buildings (aged care and nursing homes), built prior to June 2007
- the public benefit test (PBT) report (Newsflash 268) is available upon request.

Background

Following the tragic Childers backpacker fire in June 2000 in which 15 people died, the Queensland Government implemented a staged fire safety improvement program for a range of high occupancy buildings. The first phase of the improvement program targeted fire safety in budget accommodation buildings (BAB) such as boarding houses, backpackers, hostels and supported accommodation built prior to the introduction of the Building Code of Australia in 1992.

The next phase of the program targets fire safety improvements in residential care buildings. Residential care buildings were identified by the Childers Taskforce and the State Coroner for the Childers Inquest as high risk to life buildings in the event of a fire, due to high occupancy numbers and a high proportion of residents with severe impairments.

New buildings

Residential care buildings approved on or after 1 June 2007 are required to comply with the [Queensland Development Code \(QDC\)—Fire safety in residential care buildings](#). The QDC (mandatory part 2.2) requires the installation of life safety sprinklers, building-wide alarms, and maintaining 24-hour minimum support ratio across smoke compartments.

Buildings constructed prior to 1 June 2007

The next stage of the program focuses on residential care buildings approved prior to the introduction of the QDC 2.2 which accommodate six or more residents, where more than one resident requires physical assistance in conducting their daily activities and to evacuate the building during an emergency.

In 2006 a survey of 215 (out of a possible 591) buildings found that in 88 per cent of buildings the evacuation assistance that was available throughout the night was too low for the building to be safely evacuated in a fire. In addition, the vast majority of residents were found to have severe evacuation impairments and 75 per cent of buildings did not have compensating fire control features to either contain or suppress fires.

The final analysis indicated that at least 70 per cent of buildings pose a high safety risk to occupants if an escalating fire were to occur when the available evacuation assistance was low. In response to the survey results, a public benefit test (PBT) was undertaken during 2007 on a range of potential regulatory and non-regulatory options to improve fire safety in existing buildings. The PBT report is available upon request from the department by emailing buildingcodes@dip.qld.gov.au



Consultation period

From January 2009 to March 2009, the Department of Infrastructure and Planning (DIP) will be conducting state wide consultation with industry on a proposed draft QDC ([QDC—Fire safety in existing residential care buildings \(pre-1 June 2007\)](#)). DIP officers will be contacting facility managers to discuss the proposed QDC. The two-month consultation process will provide industry with the opportunity to undertake fire safety audits of their buildings and ascertain the impact, if any, the proposed code may have.

Community liaison officers (CLOs) from DIP will be visiting the regions as set out in the table below.

Zone	Region—by local authority	Estimated consultation date
1	Cairns, Cassowary Coast, Hinchinbrook, Townsville, Burdekin, Whitsunday and Mackay	27 January 2009–13 February 2009
2	Rockhampton, Gladstone, Bundaberg and Fraser Coast	27 January 2009–13 February 2009
3	South Burnett, Somerset, Toowoomba, Lockyer Valley, Southern Downs and Scenic Rim	16 February 2009–6 March 2009
4	Gympie, Sunshine Coast and Moreton Bay	16 February 2009–6 March 2009
5	Ipswich, Logan, Redland and Gold Coast	9 March 2009–9 April 2009
6	Brisbane	9 March 2009–9 April 2009

NB: For facilities outside of these regions, DIP officers will be contacting facilities by telephone.

To make an appointment with a CLO please contact Graham Jones or Tom Leach on (07) 3235 9556 or (07) 3239 0040 or by emailing buildingcodes@dip.qld.gov.au before 23 January 2009.

Contact officer

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