

monitored automatic alarms

a guide for building owners & managers
3rd edition

This guide has been produced to assist building owners and managers to know their rights and responsibilities in relation to monitored automatic alarms in buildings. It includes:

- understanding legal obligations including the legislation recently introduced by the fire services
- advice on how to manage your fire alarm system including isolations
- useful information on fire service and monitoring provider processes
- references and contact information

WHAT ARE THEY?

A monitored automatic alarm system is a fire alarm system which automatically sends a signal to the fire services (MFB or CFA) via a monitoring provider (ADT, Chubb or Romteck Grid). A monitored automatic alarm system may be either fully monitored (all fire detection systems on the site are connected to the fire services through the alarm signalling equipment (ASE)), or partly monitored (only some of the systems on site are connected to the fire services - eg. the sprinkler system is connected but the smoke detection system is not).

A monitored system is different to a local fire alarm system. A local fire alarm system may sound an audible alarm at the site and the alarm is indicated on the local fire indicator panel (FIP), but the alarm is not connected to the fire services.

WHY ARE THEY INSTALLED?

The primary function of an automatic alarm is to immediately notify the fire services enabling them to undertake fire fighting operations including:

- protecting life: and
- protecting property and the environment, minimising damage caused by fire and other hazardous materials, thus saving costs – time and money.

Most automatic alarms form part of the essential safety measures of a building, and are required to be operating at all times in accordance with the building's occupancy permit, or so they can fulfil their purpose if there is no occupancy permit.

a joint initiative from:



monitored automatic alarms

Ensure your
monitored automatic
alarm system is
operational at
all times

LEGAL OBLIGATIONS

RESETTING A FIP (FIRE INDICATOR PANEL)

New offence provision

It is now an offence in Victoria to reset a FIP, if the FIP detects a fire (or simulated condition) and sounds an alarm, unless you have the consent of the fire services or a reasonable excuse (Section 75B(4) MFB Act - Section 106A(4) CFA Act). You may be liable for a fine of up to 60 penalty units (In 2013/14 financial year - \$8,661.60).

There have been an increasing number of incidents where owners/occupiers reset the FIP after a false alarm and before the fire services attend the scene. Resetting the FIP on a monitored automatic system removes information about the source of the fire or fault in the fire detection system. Some owners/occupiers mistakenly believe they can avoid a charge for a false alarm by resetting the FIP, however this is not the case. In fact, because the fire services need to spend more time searching the building, you are likely to be charged more for the call out.

Understand your alarm system - know what you can and cannot do

Fully monitored automatic alarm systems

DO NOT reset your FIP. Wait for the fire services.

Local fire alarm systems

(where the alarm and the FIP are not connected to the fire services) - you may reset your FIP after thoroughly investigating the cause of the alarm.

Partly monitored automatic alarm systems

if the monitored part of your system has triggered the alarm - DO NOT reset your FIP or system. Wait for the fire services. If the local only part of your system has triggered the alarm you may reset your FIP or system after thoroughly investigating the cause of the alarm.

Evacuation Procedures and Emergency Warning and Intercommunication System (EWIS)

The fire services recommend all premises have a documented Emergency Plan which includes Emergency Response Procedures, Evacuation Diagrams and a Training Schedule (Chief Warden, Wardens and Extinguisher), to meet AS 3745-2010.

With an Emergency Plan in place, it may be practical for a trained Warden to silence the audible alert siren at the EWIS panel when a monitored automatic alarm activates, providing an immediate investigation of the cause of the alarm is made by a trained occupant. Do Not reset your FIP - wait for the fire services. Ensure public safety is not compromised.

ISOLATIONS, MODIFICATIONS OR DISCONNECTIONS WITHOUT A BUILDING PERMIT MAY:

- >> Breach Section 75B of the MFB Act or Section 106A of the CFA Act (penalties may be incurred) - it is now an offence to damage or interfere with a fire indicator panel (FIP) or other apparatus without a reasonable excuse;
- >> Invalidate your insurance;
- >> Breach building permit requirements (penalties may be incurred). Ref: S.16 - Building Act 1993; and or
- >> Breach your occupancy permit (penalties may be incurred). Ref: S.40 - Building Act 1993

DAMAGING OR INTERFERING WITH A FIRE INDICATOR PANEL OR OTHER APPARATUS

New offence provision

It is now an offence in Victoria to damage or interfere with a fire indicator panel or other apparatus that transmits the signal to the fire services (monitored automatic alarm system) without reasonable excuse. (s75B(1) MFB Act, s106A(1) CFA Act)

Interference of this kind includes any action that causes the transmission of the signal to the fire services to be isolated, disconnected or disabled. This means that interfering with the ASE without a reasonable excuse is also an offence.

To avoid committing an offence you must ensure that you have a reasonable excuse for each isolation or disconnection of your automatic alarm system. In order to have a reasonable excuse you will need to:

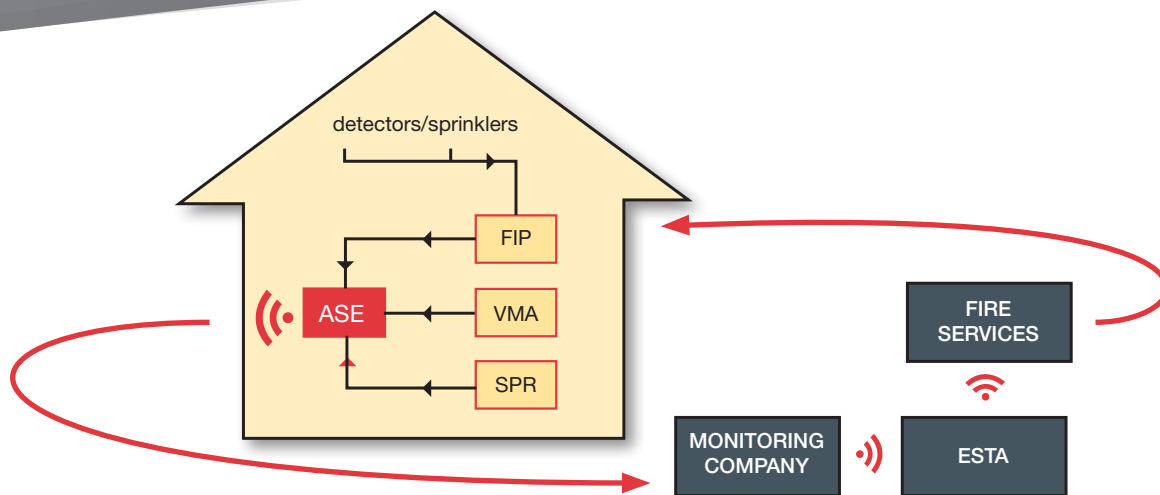
- have a valid reason for the action;
- have complied with all legal requirements (in many cases you will need to obtain a building permit from a registered building surveyor); and
- have followed appropriate procedures (including minimising the isolation/disconnection period and putting appropriate alternative fire safety procedures in place during this period).

You may be liable for a fine of up to 60 penalty units (in 2013/14 financial year - \$8,661.60) in relation to each isolation or disconnection for which you do not have a reasonable excuse.

TIPS WE RECOMMEND

- advise your insurance provider of any changes to your monitored fire alarm system, including isolations, modifications and disconnections.
- request your building surveyor to include instructions for alternative fire safety procedures whilst isolated or disabled.
- read the MFB/CFA Guideline for additional information: www.mfb.vic.gov.au/firesafetyguidelines

*NOTE This document does not address the provisions set out in agreements made with the fire services in relation to delayed responses. For all activations where the signal is sent to the fire services, ensure the FIP is not reset.



ADVICE: HOW TO MANAGE YOUR FIRE ALARM SYSTEM

Isolations

Should the ASE (or its separate inputs) be isolated?

The only circumstances in which the fire services understand it may be reasonable to isolate the ASE are:

- when a building permit for the ASE isolation has been issued by a registered building surveyor; or
- when exceptional maintenance requirements of the fire alarm system can only be performed with the ASE isolated. Most maintenance can be performed with the individual circuits, zones or detectors of the fire alarm system isolated (at the FIP).

ASE isolations are not to be made to prevent false alarms from normal day to day activities.

Should individual circuits, zones or detectors of the fire alarm system be isolated or disabled at the FIP?

- Temporary and short term isolation or disabling of circuits, zones or detectors may be made at the FIP whilst standard maintenance of the fire alarm system is undertaken by your fire maintenance provider.
- All other isolations or disabling of this kind must be kept to a minimum and carefully assessed for suitability - do not jeopardise the safety of occupants. Long term or regular isolation or disabling of this kind should be discussed with a registered building surveyor as each isolation type may require a building permit.

Can the monitoring provider isolate the ASE?

For emergency maintenance work, your monitoring provider may agree to a written request to isolate your ASE for a maximum of 24 hours.

Modifications

All modifications to your fire alarm system require a building permit from a registered building surveyor specifying the changes. We also recommend you advise your insurance provider.

Modifications include:

- moving or changing the type/calibration of detectors, sprinkler heads or Manual Call Points
- changing the monitoring status of inputs eg. from automatic alarm to local alarm
- amalgamating or rationalising inputs
- placing a time delay on the signal

Disconnections

Can an ASE be temporarily disconnected?

For emergency maintenance work (eg in the case of equipment breakdown), your monitoring provider may agree to a written request to disconnect your ASE for a maximum of 24 hours without a building permit. The disconnection is carried out by the monitoring provider.

For all other temporary disconnections, a building permit must be obtained and a copy provided to the monitoring provider together with a reconnection date or best estimate for the length of the disconnection.

Examples of temporary disconnections are:

- Structural renovation affecting the entire site protected by the ASE.
- Non-occupancy of building – ensure the site and/or building is made secure.

Can an ASE be permanently disconnected?

Once an ASE is installed, a building permit from a registered building surveyor must be obtained to disconnect an ASE. A copy of this permit must be supplied to your monitoring provider with your written request to disconnect.

MANAGING AN ISOLATED ALARM SYSTEM, PARTIAL ISOLATION OR TEMPORARY DISCONNECTION: ALTERNATIVE FIRE SAFETY PROCEDURES

Follow the instructions provided by your building surveyor with the building permit or occupancy permit. If these are not provided, please consider the following actions:

- Roster on extra staff for patrol duties.
- Provide 24 hour security or a responsible person from the building to monitor the fire alarm system and area of isolation.
- Advise all building occupants, especially chief fire warden and floor wardens of isolation
- Advise all building occupants they should ring 000 for emergencies
- Install advisory signs at MCPs (manual call points) to ring 000 for emergencies
- Install a notice at entrances
- In the event of an emergency, nominate a representative to meet the fire services on arrival
- Inform all building occupants when the fire alarm system is back on line

We recommend you adopt a minimum isolation policy

While your monitored automatic alarm system is not fully operational it is vital to put alternative fire safety procedures in place to ensure an appropriate level of fire safety during this period.

USEFUL INFORMATION

Notification of alarm activation

All monitoring providers offer a notification service when an alarm activates. You will be required to nominate the contact details for this notification. Please update your monitoring provider if contact information changes.

ADT	1300 360 575
Chubb	1300 369 309
Romteck Grid	1300 658 158

Tips

- For phone contact, be aware that message banks have limits – a common problem reported by the monitoring providers.
- If you nominate your fire maintenance contractor to attend the site, please ensure that adequate authorisation has been provided.

MFB and CFA entry advice

When the fire services attend a false alarm call, the officer in charge will leave an entry advice detailing their attendance and investigation.

This advice is left on site. If you are having trouble finding this information, especially when the call is out of business hours, please provide a notice at the fire alarm panel advising where it is to be placed on site, or provide a clip board at the fire alarm panel. (The fire services do not sanction the practice of faxing or posting entry advice as operational personnel may be diverted to another emergency call out of indefinite duration or vehicles may be moved up to another fire station).

Zone Block Plan (as-installed diagrams)

Ref: AS 1670.1-2004: Section 3.10 & 7.2 and AS 1851-2005 Sections 2 & 6.

Current plans or as-installed diagrams should be available adjacent to the FIP (fire indicator panel). Incorrect plans create time delays in the fire services response. Should the call be a chargeable false alarm, this time delay can result in higher charges.

We recommend you maintain your system records in accordance with Australian Standards. A new 1670 system should have a commissioning report which includes the zone block plan. These should be kept current and inspected annually.

Keys

Your local fire station will hold keys on your behalf to access the common areas of properties out of hours. If new or replacement keys are issued, please notify your fire station by phoning during business hours and request to be transferred to your local fire station.

Major changes to fire alarm system

Please report major changes in equipment to your local fire station as the fire fighters may need to make changes to their turnout information. Phone during business hours and request to be transferred to your local fire station.

MFB 9662 2311 or CFA 9262 8444

REFERENCES - LEGAL RESPONSIBILITIES

REFERENCES CURRENT AT TIME OF PUBLICATION.

Victorian Legislation & Parliamentary Documents

www.legislation.vic.gov.au - Victorian Law Today - Acts

Section 75B	Metropolitan Fire Brigades Act 1958
Section 106A	Country Fire Authority Act 1958

Building Commission Practice Notes

www.buildingcommission.com.au - Publications & Fact Sheets

2006 – 40	Fire alarm monitoring systems
2007 – 23	Maintenance of essential safety measures
2006 – 24	Occupancy Permits

Building Regulations 2006

www.legislation.vic.gov.au - Victorian Law Today - Statutory Rules

Part 3	Building Permits
Part 12	Maintenance of buildings and places of public entertainment
Schedule 8	Exemptions - Items 3(e) and 4(e)

Australian Standards

www.saiglobal.com/shop to purchase online

AS 1851	Maintenance of fire protection systems & equipment.
AS 1670.3	Fire detection, warning, control & intercom systems – System design, installation and commissioning
AS 3745	Planning for emergencies in facilities

Building Code of Australia (BCA)

www.saiglobal.com/shop to purchase online

Volume 1 & 2	National Construction Code (NCC)
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Whilst every effort has been made to ensure that the information contained in this brochure is accurate, the authors of this brochure make no warranties nor do they assume any legal liability for the accuracy, completeness or usefulness of any of the information.

INTERNET WEB LINKS

MFB/CFA Guideline DGL - 46

www.mfb.vic.gov.au/FireSafetyGuidelines

False Alarm Prevention

www.mfb.vic.gov.au/FalseAlarms

www.cfa.vic.gov.au/plan-prepare/reducing-false-alarms

Monitored Automatic Alarms

www.mfb.vic.gov.au/AutomaticAlarms

www.cfa.vic.gov.au/automatic-alarms



Help & assistance

- The Building Commission has published an Essential Safety Measures Maintenance Manual. It is available through their website electronically, hard copy or on CD. www.buildingcommission.com.au
- Your fire maintenance provider has detailed knowledge of your fire alarm system.
- The MFB & CFA can assist - refer to contacts below.
- Your monitoring providers can assist - refer to contacts below.



Building Commission

P 1300 815 127

www.buildingcommission.com.au



ADT Fire Monitoring

P 1300 360 575

www.adtfire.com.au



Chubb Fire & Security

P 131 598

F 03 9264 9751

www.coderedmonitoring.com.au



Romteck Grid

P 1300 658 158

www.romteckgrid.com.au



Country Fire Authority

Fire and Emergency Management

P 03 9262 8444

www.cfa.vic.gov.au



Metropolitan Fire & Emergency Services Board

P (Helpdesk) 9665 4688

www.mfb.vic.gov.au