



The Aged Care Act 1997 is the main law that covers government-funded aged care. These facilities could include certain Class 9a healthcare buildings, Class 9c aged care buildings or Class 3 residential aged care buildings. Amendments made to the Act put obligations onto approved providers of aged care facilities to submit an annual Fire Safety Declaration.

Fire Safety for Aged Care Facilities is not only important for the health of the patients but required by Australian regulatory reform laws. Aged care facilities must be accredited under the Accreditation Standards for Residential Aged Care.

Fire protection in the aged care sector requires both careful planning and technical knowledge, given the need to safeguard infirm and often immobile residents as well as the intricate medical equipment housed in such facilities. Inadequate or improper fire protection can expose residents and staff to dangers, leading to potential injury or even loss of life.

When developing a fire protection solution for an aged care facility, fire protection specialists will consult with a variety of personnel including facility management and staff to gain an understanding of the needs and fire hazards specific to the facility, which would help them develop the most appropriate solution to suit the fire risks.

Fire sprinkler systems can protect general areas within the facility while more specialised fire suppression systems can be installed where cooking facilities and equipment are situated. They will be required to improve the housekeeping and maintenance procedures so that a clear path is always available for emergency exits in case of emergency.

Fire safety training is also extremely important as it can help ensure that staff and occupants are aware of the building's emergency management and evacuation plan. In the event of a fire, elderly and immobile residents will require special assistance to evacuate from the building. When a smoke alarm sounds, every staff member should know exactly what to do. A decision will need to be made quickly on whether to evacuate the patients.

With frail and often immobile residents the installation and maintenance of fire systems for aged care requires planning and a respectful understanding of the environment.

Technical expertise is essential to ensure inadequate fire systems do not expose patients and staff to unnecessary risk.

The Western Australia Department of Health's licencing standards for Nursing Homes have mandatory criteria for fire systems and emergency response systems and processes which promote patient, staff and visitor safety.

- Staff are trained to recognise and respond to emergencies.
- Fire orders and up to date evacuation plans are displayed throughout the facility.
- Fire drills, equipment training, and evacuation procedures are carried out annually for all staff.
- Exits are available for egress, either at all times, or the door hardware releases on fire alarm or power failure.
- Fire hydrants and fire exit doors are clearly marked, easily accessible and free from clutter or equipment.
- Fire equipment, including extinguishers and hose reels, is ready for immediate use and tested six monthly as evidenced by a current service tag.
- Flammable rubbish is managed in a way that it does not pose a fire risk.
- Automatic fire detection and alarm systems are functioning and tested in accordance with AS 1851, and service and maintenance log books are kept in the fire indicator panel.