



Educational buildings are structures where the implementation of fire safety is of the utmost importance. The majority of school occupants are children and youths who easily panic and are difficult to manage in the event of an emergency or crisis.

Damage may be devastating when a school has a fire, as they play an important role as temporary meeting places for children, teachers and communities.

Educational buildings need to meet the building standards operational at the time of the approval to build. In 1997, Western Australia gave the Building Code of Australia (BCA) the status of building regulations.

The BCA contains technical provisions for the design and construction of buildings and other structures and covers important issues as fire resistance, access and egress, services and equipment and aspects of health and amenity.

While the BCA applies to new buildings, proprietors and principals (or equivalent) of schools have a common law responsibility to ensure that older buildings are safe for educational purposes. In a dispute regarding the safety or appropriateness of a building, guidance is often sought by referring to the BCA.

For older buildings, it is advisable for the proprietor and principal (or equivalent) of a school to refer to local government requirements with respect to compliance with the relevant sections of the BCA.

School dining facilities are a concern as the risk in any kitchen is high simply because it is where the food being cooked, or oils and fats used, can burn, and cause a fire to spread. If there are boarding facilities then there will be a 'sleeping risk', which will need careful consideration. Special needs pupils may also need additional facilities, this means providing refuge areas/places of temporary safety in case of fire.

False fire alarms can be a serious issue for some schools. The causes of false alarms can be varied, including students activating Manual Call Points. Avoiding false alarms may require a change in behaviour, a management response, a technical solution or a combination of solutions.

Educational facilities can have the same hazards as other workplaces, but they also have a range of risks associated with their function. Schools and universities are often the target of accidental fires or arson.

Also, many educational facilities incorporate laboratories or workshops where staff and students may be exposed to fire hazards, dangerous substances and machinery.

The most common sources of fires in schools are arson, overloaded electrical systems, fuel store areas with high oxygen and materials that produce toxic fumes when heated.

Some areas in educational buildings have a higher than ordinary fire risk and particular consideration and precautions ought to be taken in such areas. Facility managers or a responsible person should implement procedures to;

- Keep all storage and waste storage areas clean.
- Maintain proper fire exits and exit signage (e.g. exit signs that can function in a power failure)
- Place and maintain fire extinguishers in easily accessible places.
- Properly store and use of hazardous materials that may be needed for students or operational requirements.
- Prohibit flammable materials in certain areas of the facility.
- Maintain fire alarm systems for detection and warning of fire.
- Obtain and maintain a complete inventory of fire safety equipment in school.
- Maintain a high level of training and awareness of students, staff and other users of the school building.
- Conduct fire drills at regular intervals throughout the year.