

# Renting, hiring or selling your property?

## You need mains powered smoke alarms



The Building Regulations 2012 require owners to have mains powered smoke alarms fitted to all residential properties in Western Australia that are subject to sale, rent or hire.

It is the responsibility of the owner to ensure that the smoke alarms fitted are:

- No more than 10 years old
- In working order, and
- Permanently connected to mains power.

### What types of dwellings need to comply?

The laws apply to existing residential properties that are subject to sale, rental or hire and which fall within the following residential building classes as broadly defined in the *Building Code of Australia (BCA)*:

- **Class 1a:** Single residential dwellings, row houses, duplexes, town houses, terrace houses, villa units or chalets including those used for holiday accommodation
- **Class 1b:** Boarding houses, guest houses, hostels, bed and breakfast accommodation, farm stays or the like (in which not more than 12 people would ordinarily be resident and with a total area of all floors not exceeding 300 square metres)
- **Class 2:** Individual units such as apartments and flats within Class 2 buildings
- **Class 4:** A residential unit inside a building of another class e.g. a caretaker's residence

### Are there penalties involved?

Yes. Where the dwelling does not comply with the laws, a local government may issue an infringement notice under the *Criminal Procedure Act 2004*, which attracts a penalty of \$750 for a prescribed offence. The local government may also prosecute an owner for non-compliance resulting in a penalty of up to \$5,000 for a prescribed offence.

### When should owners install smoke alarms?

- **Selling:** Prior to the transfer of ownership
- **Renting:** Prior to tenancy for new rentals, however landlords should be aware that all existing dwellings subject to a residential tenancy agreement must comply
- **Hiring:** Prior to making the dwelling available for hire

### Are battery powered smoke alarms permitted?

The laws do permit the installation of battery powered smoke alarms in limited circumstances. In those circumstances local government approval is required unless:

- a) There is no hidden space in which to run the necessary electrical wiring and there are no appropriate alternative locations for the smoke alarm, and
- b) Where a building is not connected to the mains power electricity supply network.

**Where a battery powered smoke alarm has been approved by local government or is permitted in circumstances outlined in a) and b) above, it must have a 10 year life, non-removable battery**

### How many smoke alarms are required?

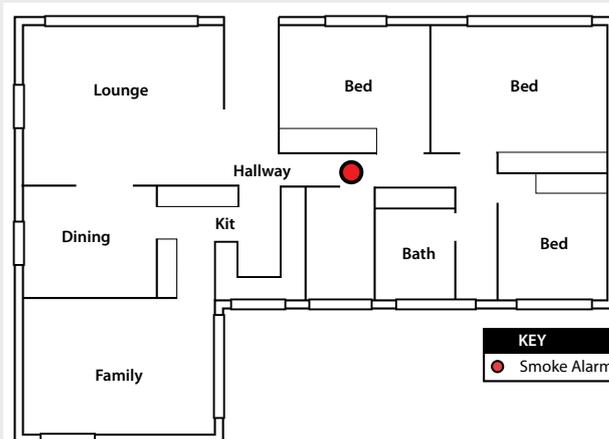
The number of smoke alarms required will depend on the class, size and layout of your property.

- Class 1a buildings** (house, duplex, villa or town house)
- Class 2** (flat or apartment)
- Class 4** (residential unit inside a building of another class)

Smoke alarms must be installed in a Class 1a building on or near the ceiling in—

- (a) any storey containing bedrooms—
  - (i) between each part of the dwelling containing bedrooms and the remainder of the dwelling; and
  - (ii) where bedrooms are served by a hallway, in that hallway, and
- (b) any other storey not containing bedrooms.  
(see Fig. 3 for multilevel)

Figure 1 – Class 1a, Class 2 and Class 4 buildings



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### Class 1b buildings

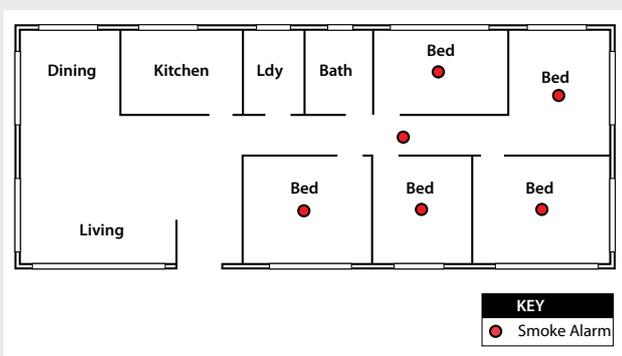
(boarding/guest house or hostel where up to 12 persons can reside)

In a Class 1b building, smoke alarms must be installed on or near the ceiling—

- in every bedroom; and
- in every corridor or hallway associated with a bedroom, or if there is no corridor or hallway, in an area between the bedrooms and the remainder of the building; and
- on each other storey. (see Fig. 3 for multilevel)

(Source: Building Code of Australia, 2012)

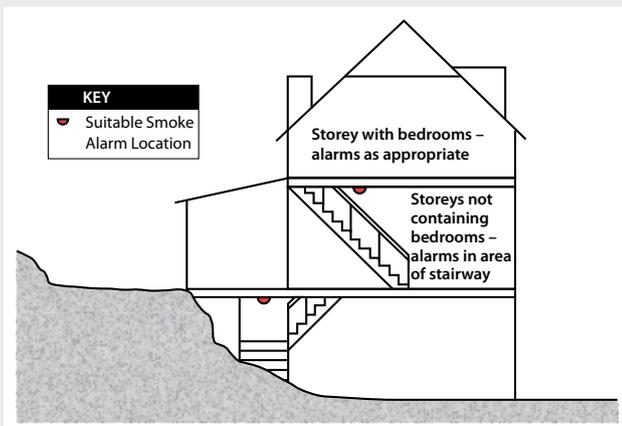
Figure 2 – Class 1b buildings



### Multilevel homes and properties

Smoke alarms should be installed in each bedroom, in corridors and hallways that lead to exits and the living area. If you are installing smoke alarms in a multilevel home or property you should have an additional alarm in the stairway between each level. Often people sleep with their bedroom doors closed at night and only a smoke alarm installed in that room will detect a fire fast enough to get out safely.

Figure 3 – Multilevel homes and properties



### Multilevel homes and properties

In multi-level properties a smoke alarm is required in every storey, even if it consists only of carparking, bedrooms, laundries and the like.

In storeys not containing bedrooms, smoke alarms should be installed in the area of the stairway between each level, e.g. if the bedrooms are on the first floor then an alarm should be positioned near the area of the interconnecting stair at ground level. This location is favoured as it is the path that people will most likely take to evacuate the building. It ensures that an alarm will be raised before smoke makes the common exit path impassable. If the other storey is not connected to the remainder of the dwelling (for instance a ground floor garage) the alarm should be centrally located in the lower area.

### Installation of smoke alarms

Smoke alarms are very sensitive and may detect smoke and moisture created by common household activities, such as burning toast or steam from a bathroom. Smoke alarms should not be located near:

- Cooking appliances
- Heaters or fireplaces
- Doorways to bathrooms, laundries or other humid areas
- Heating and cooling duct outlets
- Ceiling fans, doors and windows (excessive air movement may prevent smoke from reaching the smoke alarm)
- Fluorescent light fittings (to avoid the effect of electrical 'noise' or 'flicker') or doorways and windows where barbecues and incinerators are located.

### Which smoke alarm is best?

A mains powered photoelectric smoke alarm is best with a fixed rechargeable battery that does not need to be changed for the life of the smoke alarm. This type of alarm can detect smoke faster and more types of smoke than other models. This means you will be alerted to a fire earlier giving you more time to escape safely. All smoke alarms should comply with Australian Standard 3786.

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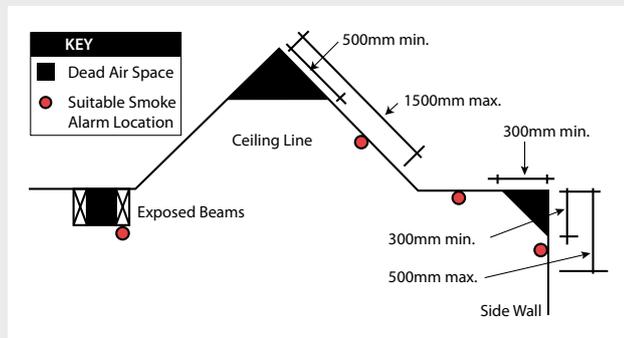
### Installation of smoke alarms

Smoke alarms should be installed on or near the ceiling, with special care taken to avoid installation in the following areas:

- the apex of cathedral ceilings
- the corner junction of walls and ceilings
- between exposed beams, where there may be a dead air space

If it is not practical to install the smoke alarm on the ceiling, then it may be installed on the wall. The recommended position in this situation is between 300mm to 500mm below the ceiling. For cathedral ceilings, the recommended position should be between 500mm and 1500 mm from the apex to the top of the alarm.

**Figure 4 – Installation of smoke alarms**



### How do I maintain my smoke alarm/s?

For smoke alarms to remain in working order they should be tested and maintained regularly. In rental accommodation maintenance is the responsibility of the property owner.

The Department of Fire and Emergency Services recommends the following smoke alarm maintenance routine:

- Testing once per month to ensure the battery and the alarm sounder are operating
- Replacing batteries annually, where appropriate (mains powered smoke alarms have back-up batteries)
- Check your smoke alarm for a build-up of dust and cobwebs and clean with a vacuum cleaner at least every six months
- Vacuum with a soft brush attachment around the smoke alarm vents
- Use a surface insect spray around the smoke alarm to prevent insects nesting inside
- Smoke alarms should never be painted

*\* Always refer to the manufacturer's guide when selecting batteries and following testing procedures*

### Want more information?

Contact the Department of Fire and Emergency Services on 9395 9300, visit [www.dfes.wa.gov.au](http://www.dfes.wa.gov.au), contact your local government or access the laws (*Building Regulations 2012*) at [www.slp.wa.gov.au](http://www.slp.wa.gov.au)