



Building newsflash number 469

Water system pressure management

Purpose

To advise of work underway to support industry stakeholders with the design, installation and maintenance of fire safety systems in Queensland.

Background

Newsflash 429, issued on 24 May 2010 advised water service providers of the need to consider the scope of any pressure reduction and leakage management programs to help maintain effective operation of fire safety systems.

The issues identified in Newsflash 429 are the subject of an ongoing review of water system pressure requirements and any potential impacts on water based fire safety systems. The work that is underway is outlined in this newsflash.

Buildings with water based fire safety systems must have adequate pressure and flow rates for the systems to work effectively, such as fire fighting systems (hydrants) and life safety systems (sprinklers). These systems are vitally important where life safety depends on the early suppression of fires, such as in nursing homes and hospitals.

Issues

South East Queensland buildings are the initial focus where the effectiveness of fire safety systems may have been affected by changes to water system pressure. Owners are reminded to actively monitor the performance of their building's systems and a process is outlined below where compliance problems are identified.

Consultative work is now underway with the aim of providing a reliable and safe model for minimising operational and maintenance costs for the provision of water services, in particular, the costs resulting from high water pressure and minimising any consequential financial impacts on building owners.

Progress

Water System Pressure Inter Departmental Committee

The State Government established a Water System Pressure Inter Departmental Committee in November 2010 to oversee the projects relating to water system pressure and fire safety from a whole of government perspective and consult with stakeholders regarding water system pressure and fire safety systems.

Water System Pressure Technical Working Group

Building Codes Queensland established a Water Systems Pressure Technical Working Group in January 2011 to consider the technical aspects of building approvals and the appropriate criteria for monitoring the effective ongoing operation of fire safety systems. The Group is currently developing



a standardised water based fire safety system testing procedure. Once the draft procedure has been finalised it will be released for industry consultation. Group members include water service providers, hydraulic consultants, relevant state agencies including the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and fire safety system testers.

What to do if a problem arises relating to water pressure in fire safety systems in South East Queensland

Building owners/occupiers are responsible for ensuring their buildings continuously meet fire safety standards. Where a building owner/occupier becomes aware their building does not meet the minimum requirements for water pressure as required by any standard called up as being applicable by the Queensland Development Code Mandatory Part 6.1 (Maintenance of fire safety installations) the building owner/occupier should contact the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service to notify them of the defect.

The Queensland Fire and Rescue Service will advise the building owner/occupier, if they have not already done so, to take steps to determine the cause of the water system pressure issues. The first step will be to fund the engagement of a competent person, such as a hydraulic or fire consultant, to determine whether there is an on-site problem causing the water system pressure issues.

If it is determined that there are no on-site problems and the non-compliance with fire safety requirements may be due to water system pressure in the mains, the building owner/occupier should notify Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and contact the relevant water service providers (contact details for south-east Queensland below) for further advice.

Water service providers in South East Queensland already investigate all cases where building owners/occupiers consider there is a problem with water system pressure. Water service providers have agreed to investigate cases where non-compliance with fire safety requirements may be due to water system pressure to determine whether short-term resolutions are available to resolve individual cases of non-compliance.

Consultation

Consultation on water system pressure issues including policy, guidelines and risk mitigation will continue across government agencies and relevant stakeholders. As work progresses Building Codes Queensland will advise industry regarding any changes through the newsflash service.

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