

11 December 2024

Building Code Fire Safety review
Building System Performance
Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment

Emailed to: building@mbie.govt.nz

ICNZ'S SUBMISSION ON THE BUILDING CODE FIRE SAFETY REVIEW

ISSUES IN THE BUILDING CODE REGULATIONS

1. Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission on MBIE's Discussion Document '*Building Code fire safety review: Issues in the Building Code regulations*'.
2. Te Kāhui Inihua o Aotearoa / The Insurance Council of New Zealand (**ICNZ**) represents general insurers. ICNZ's members provide insurance products ranging from those usually purchased by individuals, including home insurance, to those purchased by small businesses and larger organisations, including commercial property insurance.
3. ICNZ has the following comments on fire safety provisions in the Building Code and other matters related to fire safety.

Insulation

4. ICNZ recommends the fire safety provisions under the Building Code should be strengthened to limit the spread of fire in buildings and neighbouring buildings by restricting the use of insulation products that have a high fire load. High flammability insulation and other building products are increasingly being used to meet insulation requirements. When these products burn, they promote fire spread. ICNZ would prefer that alternative products that are non-flammable, such as mineral or glass wool products, are used. This would reduce the severity of damage and help to keep people safe.

Solar panels and battery energy storage

5. Solar panels and battery energy storage systems are not adequately controlled by the current building fire safety regulations or the current electrical regulations. Solar panel arrays that are currently installed on many buildings cannot be isolated from other panels to limit dangerous voltages that could hinder adequate firefighting. We also consider that lithium-ion battery storage systems need special fire protection measures including specialist ventilation and cooling should a battery fire occur.

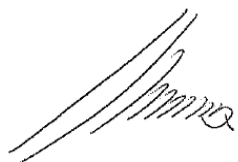
Building risk hazard plans for fire fighters

6. We consider that building risk hazard plans should contain details of new technology hazards, such as solar panels and battery storage systems, to allow firefighters to target and isolate those devices without losing valuable firefighting time.

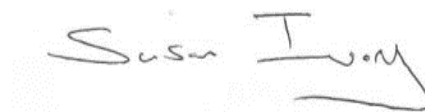
Fire protection upgrades

7. ICNZ is also concerned that section 112 of the Building Act 2004 has been interpreted to require the building owner to undertake extensive upgrades to the means of escape or fire compliance measures when the building owner's aim is to protect the building by upgrading or installing an automatic sprinkler system. ICNZ has been informed of a recent case where the building owner was told that they would need to install a second means of escape at significant cost as a condition of the consent to install / improve an automatic fire sprinkler system. When fire protection systems are being installed or upgraded, the need to obtain building consent can be a disincentive to such fire protection works. The costs of engaging a fire engineer to prepare a gap analysis for the Building Consent Authority (**BCA**) can be considerable.
8. We recommend that:
 - The Building Act 2004 should be amended to specifically remove the requirement to require a fire report when the building owner is simply seeking to upgrade the building's current fire sprinkler protection system, unless there is an identified life safety risk.
 - BCA's should be encouraged to allow improvements to fire protection systems to be carried out under an exemption to a consent or to have a simplified consent application process for such improvements.
9. Thank you again for the opportunity to make this submission.

Yours sincerely



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