



ESSENTIAL SAFETY MEASURES (ESM) MANAGEMENT

Quick Guide

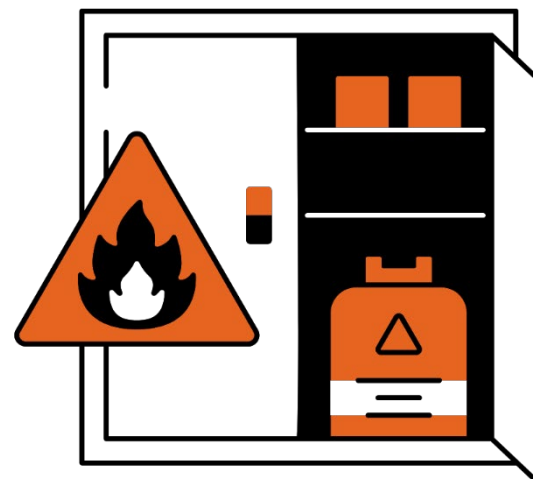
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1. Overview

About this Guide

Essential Safety Measures (ESMs) are the fire and life safety systems built into a building to help protect occupants during an emergency.

Depending on the building, they may include:

- Fire detection and alarm systems.
- Fire doors.
- Fire hydrants and hose reels.
- Sprinkler systems.
- Smoke-control systems.
- Emergency lighting and exit signs.
- Mechanical ventilation systems.

Most apartment buildings constructed since 1 July 1994 will have an Occupancy Permit identifying which Essential Safety Measures apply and how they must be maintained.

Why it matters

Poor ESM management may expose an Owners Corporation to:

- Safety risks.
- Regulatory action.
- Insurance complications.
- Significant rectification costs.
- Difficulty demonstrating compliance.

Maintaining Essential Safety Measures is not simply about obtaining an Annual Essential Safety Measures Report (AESMR). It requires ongoing monitoring throughout the year.

Who should read this guide?

- Owners Corporation Managers.
- Committees.
- Building Managers.
- Owners Corporations.

Scope of this Guide

This Quick Guide provides an overview of Essential Safety Measures management within Victorian Owners Corporations. It highlights the key responsibilities and practical considerations.

Note:

For more detailed guidance, refer to the full **SCA (Vic) ESM Management Industry Guide**.

2. Legislative Framework

Relevant legislation and standards

- Building Act 1993 (Vic).
- Building Regulations 2018 (Vic).
- Owners Corporations Act 2006 (Vic).
- AS 1851-2012 – Routine Service of Fire Protection Systems and Equipment.
- AS/NZS 2293.2:2019 – Emergency Lighting and Exit Signs.

Key compliance obligations

Owners Corporations are responsible for ensuring Essential Safety Measures are properly maintained.

In practice this generally means:

- Maintaining systems in accordance with the Occupancy Permit.
- Engaging appropriately qualified contractors.
- Preparing an AESMR each year.
- Retaining maintenance records.
- Rectifying identified defects promptly.

3. Common Issues

The most common ESM management issues include:

- Missing or inaccessible Occupancy Permits.
- Contractor scopes that do not cover all Essential Safety Measures.
- Overlooked five-year and longer-cycle servicing.
- Missing Systems Interface Testing.
- Passive fire defects.
- Outstanding defects that remain unresolved.
- Assuming annual servicing alone demonstrates compliance.

4. Best Practice Approach

Good ESM management is a continuous process throughout the year.

Owners Corporations should:

- Understand which Essential Safety Measures exist within the building.
- Ensure every system is covered by a maintenance contractor.
- Review contractor reports rather than simply filing them.
- Track all defects through to completion.
- Budget for major servicing and future replacements.
- Provide the AESMR to their insurer where appropriate.

Buildings are generally better protected when compliance is actively monitored rather than managed only during the annual reporting process.

5. Manager / Committee Guidance

Before approving maintenance or rectification works, consider:

- Is the issue safety critical?
- Is the work legally required?
- Has the contractor clearly explained the consequence of the defect?
- Has the Occupancy Permit been checked?
- Is independent specialist advice required?
- Are sufficient funds available?
- Has the issue been properly documented?

6. Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Who is responsible for ESM compliance?

The Owners Corporation is legally responsible, even where maintenance is outsourced to contractors.

Q. What is an AESMR?

The Annual Essential Safety Measures Report is the owner's declaration that reasonable steps have been taken to maintain the building's Essential Safety Measures.

Q. Is annual servicing enough?

No. Compliance also requires:

- Defects to be rectified.
- Servicing completed within required timeframes.
- Complete maintenance records.
- All required systems to be maintained.

Q. What is Systems Interface Testing?

Systems Interface Testing confirms that different fire and life safety systems operate together correctly during an emergency.

Q. Why are five-year services commonly missed?

Long-cycle maintenance activities are often excluded from standard maintenance contracts and require separate planning and budgeting.

7. Emerging Issues and Future Considerations

Owners Corporations and managers should expect increasing focus on:

- Passive fire compliance.
- Insurance scrutiny of ESM records.
- Independent auditing and verification.
- Digital compliance records.
- Stronger governance expectations.
- Proactive maintenance planning.

8. Key Takeaways

- Essential Safety Measures protect lives and require ongoing management.
- The Occupancy Permit is the starting point for understanding a building's obligations.
- Annual servicing alone does not demonstrate compliance.
- Good governance means understanding the building's compliance status throughout the year.
- Early identification and rectification of defects generally reduce risk and long-term costs.

9. Further Resources

- **SCA (Vic) ESM Management Industry Guide.**
- Building and Plumbing Commission (BPC).
- Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV).
- Country Fire Authority (CFA).
- Building Act 1993 (Vic).
- Building Regulations 2018 (Vic).
- AS 1851-2012.
- AS/NZS 2293.2:2019.