

# Essential Safety Measures

By GLENN TALBOT

**T**he new Australian Standard for Fire Protection Maintenance AS1851-2005 is now published and is a step forward in ensuring fire safety measures are maintained correctly. But what does it actually mean for facility managers and contractors charged with ensuring regulatory compliance? Glenn Talbot from Verified discusses some of the issues surrounding its publication and implementation.

*Q1. Can you tell me about your service, and the sort of issues you have found with compliance testing and maintenance requirements in the field?*

GT: Verified tracks, records and interrogates safety measures maintenance for building owners and managers. We identified some years ago that keeping track of safety measures maintenance was a bit of a black art. It was so prescriptive, with so many standards, requirements and frequencies that it becomes very difficult to ensure correct compliance. The average building manager just hasn't got the time, knowledge, or tools to effectively bring all the items together to get to compliance. With the possibility of 180 transactions required annually per building, the task can be quite huge. Over the past 5 years, with 30,000 sites nationally on our database, we now have a resource we can mine to get meaningful statistical reporting on compliance. Annually we send over 30,000 reports to facility managers and building owners on their compliance status.

It is alarming to see how many tests are not being completed, which often have been paid for. Unless the facility manager has a sophisticated tool to track actual field results, it would be impossible to confirm what tests have been completed, or more importantly, not completed. The confirmation most managers use to confirm delivery of the required services tends to come from the service provider in the form of an invoice!



For example, we generated a compliance report for one of our clients, based on 700 sprinkler systems they had contracted out for a 3 year period. The report showed that only 60% of the valve overhauls had been completed, yet 100% had been paid for. There are a number of different testing frequencies for Fire Systems, from weekly to 30 yearly. We tend to find that the high frequencies such as weekly or monthly have a relatively good completion rate. They are done by the same person week-in / week-out (or each month). When it comes to the lower frequencies, it generally takes a higher skill set. The contractor may need to arrange parts or special tools, and the job needs to be scheduled. Generally these frequencies are overlooked or neglected or just not done. Funnily enough lower frequencies also carry most of the cost within a maintenance contract.

Insurance companies are particularly anxious to ensure that all tests, especially the lower frequencies, are completed correctly. The major tests are the most rigorous and will show defects and system failures that the lower frequencies will not. You can test a sprinkler system every week and it is not until the annual test >



< is done that it is identified the system would never have worked correctly in a fire situation.

Once the test is performed and relevant paperwork has been completed, you have documented evidence of compliance. If you do not have evidence of compliance as per the relevant standard or regulation, **YOU ARE IN TROUBLE**. Whether it is criminal or civil litigation, you need to be able to produce the documented evidence that you have performed the test.

On a number of occasions our client's records have been used as evidence, to shift some of the responsibility when a loss has occurred. One of our clients had a major loss when a sprinkler system failed to work properly. From the records it was found that the contractor failed to test the system correctly. As such some of the liability and cost was borne by the contractor's insurance company. You need to ask the question – "If something goes wrong have I got the records on hand to prove the correct maintenance was carried out". Others have used Verified records to enforce KPI's and/or apply penalties when the service standards have not been met as per the contract.

It is important for both the contractor and client to know that there is a tool available to accurately measure a contractor's performance. We are able to notify our clients of any test that has been missed or defects found. The client then has the ability to measure what is being delivered at a transaction level.

Coles Group for instance has now included in their Fire Safety Measures contracts that the service delivery will be measured. Should something be missed, it is the

contractor's responsibility to ensure delivery or they will not get paid. In addition, Coles Group stipulates that the contractor must provide the documentation to Verified – as this is their only surety that the job has been done.

Understanding that facilities managers are time poor, we have automated the process of generating reports and statistics, providing them in either Excel or PDF format. At the push of a button periodic reports can be generated automatically. The report(s) query is set up once and forgotten about, yet received monthly, or a frequency defined by the client. The report(s) can be configured with numerous query items such as tracking contractor jobs, type of works completed and/or geographical areas the work was performed in. The report is represented graphically and is color coded so key items are easily recognized. This makes for easier analysis and follow up of key issues or defects.

Recently we have provided report access to contractors, inviting them to understand how they are being measured, and to assist them in delivering their contracted service. They are now able to see what their clients are being notified of (such as missed tests or defects). It has proven to be a powerful tool for the contractor, with the results being an increase in the service level for their clients.

Initially our system was not seen favourably by contractors, as they were being held accountable for their actions. Over time, and with education, we have found an uptake from major contractors because they now see that the system can work for them too. They are able to monitor and manage their employees and

sub-contractors, be pro-active in rectifying defects, ensure tests don't get missed, and generally provide a better service to their clients.

*Q2 What has been the reaction to the new Standard AS1851 in the field?*

The changes that came about due to the implementation of Australian Standard AS1851-2005 make it far more onerous for the building owner and facility manager to ensure fire safety maintenance gets delivered correctly. There are significant changes to the structure, regime, control, reporting, and documentation requirements of the new standard. These changes impact on the role of the facility manager and they must have good systems in place to measure and control the work of the specialist providers in this area. Some changes include; new test frequencies with specific tolerances for each period, anniversary dates for frequencies are now based on the original test date for that frequency (dates that were in the past), physical records are required on site, surveys of back of house safety systems need to be carried out, and condition reports (noting missed tests and outstanding defects) need to be generated annually, to name a few.

AS1851-2005 definitely demands a more rigorous testing regime for your critical safety systems and should be embraced because of it. We must be aware of the impact it has on the workload, the costs to deliver these services, and the resultant reporting and performance expectation. To compare the workload I need only to compare the Verified sprinkler test sheet from the old to the new standard. The old single test sheet covered frequencies from weekly to six yearly and contained 30 test questions. The new Standard requires us to have three separate test sheets covering the same frequencies, with a total of 197 test questions. That is a significant increase in the test regime and does not include all the additional recordings for pressure, temperatures, flows, and so forth.

Although the new Standards are onerous, Verified has adapted their systems to ensure the reporting and recording process is automated. The facility manager will know if something has been missed, that the frequencies have been completed within tolerance, that the service provider has completed the test as required, and have the ability to produce a condition report at the click of a button and have all the original records to back it up with. All this will happen without any direct day to day involvement from the facility manager.

*Q3: Should we implement the new standard across our property portfolio?*

It seems every time this question is asked a different answer is given. There is no black and white answer, sorry to disappoint you. There are many regulatory, legislative, OH &S, insurance, and maintenance costs that lie beyond the purely technical reasons for implementing the new standard.

The requirements to maintain buildings is controlled at a State or Territory level. They can include references and adoption of Australian Standards and The Building Code of Australia (BCA) but not all do so. Even the names of the "Safety Measures" differ from State to State.

Some States have very specific references, recording and reporting requirements, and others have nothing at all. With the new standard some States adoption of AS1851-2005 is mandatory, others will require changes to the BCA and State regulations. Sounding consistent? You could not afford to have a different regime for each State across your national property portfolio. We don't need to make it any harder than it already is.

From a common law point of view, much has been written about the consideration of negligence should this latest community and industry standard not be adopted. It would be up to a court to decide whether a good argument could be given as to why the standard was not being applied. I would suggest cost would not be a good argument.

State OH&S requirements certainly get a lot of heads turning when we talk about director's liability relating to providing a safe workplace. Recent changes see a marked increase in penalties. I'm sure it becomes a good argument if you get the ear of the CFO, safety measures maintenance cannot be pushed aside.

So have I answered the question? No, and that was on purpose. Every property owner has their own triggers for change and they need to carefully consider their own situations. I do know what I would do if I was a property manager. Stay safe! ■

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