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1st February 2016

The Research Director
Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee
Parliament House
Brisbane QLD 4000

Sent via email to: facsc@parliament.qld.gov.au

Re: Fire and Emergency Services (Smoke Alarms) Amendment Bill 2015

Dear Sir/Madam,

Brooks Australia appreciates the opportunity to comment on the proposed *Fire and Emergency Services (Smoke Alarms) Amendment Bill 2015*.

Brooks Australia fully supports legislation being introduced that would require all residential accommodation to be fitted with hard-wired smoke alarms of the photoelectric type. While in principle we agree with the philosophy that battery operated smoke alarms are certainly better than nothing, particularly where it is not feasible to install hard-wired smoke alarms; we would however strongly advocate that any battery operated type smoke alarm have, as a minimum, a non-removable 10 year battery housed within the smoke alarm in a sealed chamber, so that the battery cannot be removed without destroying the total alarm. Brooks Australia would support any legislative and/or regulatory measures that would require these in every home.

We would also strongly recommend that where two or more alarms are installed within a single dwelling that all alarms, be of a type that can be interconnected together either by hard wiring or by RF (wireless).

With respect to the specific clauses in the Amendment Bill, we make the following comments:

Clause 5 (1) (2A) (a) – Alarm type

There is general consensus that if you are putting a smoke alarm in to meet the minimum regulatory requirement then it must be photoelectric. This is the position of FPAA, NFIA and AFAC. The Commissioner of Fire and Rescue NSW is on record in the senate enquiry and in the media as seeking to ban ionisation devices all together. AS1670.1 mandates the use of photoelectric in all sleeping areas and paths of travel to an exit. AS1670.1 2015, published in December 2015, in the new smoke management section 7 mandates photoelectric at smoke and fire doors. Ionisation detectors can be used supplementary to the required photoelectric but cannot be used instead or in place of.

A4 ALARM SELECTION

A4.1 General

The object of any smoke alarm is to provide early warning of a fire in order to maximize escape time. Whilst attempting to reach the same objective, different detection principles, such as ionization or photoelectric, behave differently. In deciding which type to install, consideration needs to be given to the likely type of fire (smouldering or fast flaming) and therefore the type of particulate matter and gases to be detected. The ambient conditions and the likelihood of the installation creating an unacceptable level of nuisance alarms should also be considered. A mixture of alarm types may be required to optimize detection results.

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We recommend photoelectric smoke alarms to ensure thorough fire detection in a home. Photoelectric alarms can detect visible particles of combustion, for example, smouldering cigarette smoke, and respond to a wide range of fires. They are particularly responsive to smouldering fires and the dense smoke given off by foam filled furnishings or overheated PVC wiring.

Clause 5 (1) (2A) (b)

The new current Australian Standard for Smoke Alarms AS3786:2014 which replaces AS3786:1993 Amendments 1 – 4 and should be the referenced standard in the proposed Amendment.

Clause 5 (1) (2B) (b) – Also, each smoke alarm must –

(b) powered by a battery that is –

(i) a 9V lithium battery; and

(ii) manufactured to have a battery life of at least ten years.

Brooks Australia would recommend the removal of the wording 9V and the description to be replaced with; *a ten year non removable lithium battery as supplied and fitted within the smoke alarm by the manufacturer. With current battery technology it is now common to see 3V lithium batteries in use in a variety of alarms.*

The simple replacing of a 9V battery with a long life or long life lithium battery is not sufficient enough to stop the removal of the battery which is a common occurrence and factor in supposed “non-working” smoke alarms. The long life lithium battery has also not be tested and approved to ensure the ten year life of the battery and may not be of a type supplied or recommended by the manufacturer. It must be in a sealed compartment where removing the battery would cause the smoke alarm to be destroyed.

Clause 6 (1) (1)

The owner of a domestic dwelling must test each smoke alarm in the dwelling in compliance with this section and in accordance with the manufacturers written recommendations -

Clause 7 Insertion of new ss 104RDA and 104RDB

(4) Despite subsection (2), the owner of the domestic dwelling must, if the installed battery is capable of being replaced, replace the installed battery with a battery that complies with section 104RB (2B) (b) within 10 years after the day the installed battery was manufactured.

As detailed previously Brooks Australia would recommend this paragraph be removed or reworded as such that a 9V smoke alarm cannot be turned into a 10Y lithium smoke alarm by simply replacing the battery with a “long life” type. If the installed smoke alarm has a battery that can be replaced it needs to be replaced with a battery as per the manufacturers specification. The installation of a long life or lithium battery will not make the smoke alarm a 10y smoke alarm as the battery may not last the ten years as indicated by the manufacturer of the battery.

We further recommend that the wording for a standalone battery smoke alarm must state that it is to be a 10Y lithium smoke alarm with a non-removable battery and sealed battery compartment as designed and built by the manufacturer.

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Finally, Brooks Australia strongly recommends that any regulatory measures addressing smoke alarms be accompanied by an awareness campaign educating the public about the importance of testing and maintaining their smoke alarms regularly and in accordance with the manufacturer's recommendations and written instructions.

Brooks Australia would welcome any opportunity to be involved in future consultations on this critical safety issue.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Malcolm Kerr".

Malcolm Kerr
Regional Manager - Queensland

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