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Attention Editor/Property Editor/Chief of Staff

APARTMENT AND UNIT MANAGERS IN GOLD COAST AREA URGED TO “BITE THE BULLET” AND IMMEDIATELY UPGRADE SMOKE ALARMS

PROPERTY OWNERS CALLED ON TO PLAY A ROLE IN FIRE SAFETY

Apartment and unit managers at the Gold Coast, are being urged to “bite the bullet”, when it comes to smoke alarm upgrades.

The peak body for the strata sector in Queensland says owners and managers of strata title property need to regularly review fire safety plans and equipment to ensure the safety of their communities.

House fires continue to make headlines after a spate of recent incidents in South East Queensland, and experts warn that this will continue to happen in all types of homes if proactive measures aren't taken soon.

Queenslanders, like the rest of Australia are beginning to favour the high density living options found in strata communities like apartment and unit blocks; and the state's peak body for the strata sector says these recent fire threats should put the growing community on notice to be vigilant.

“As the development boom continues to deliver more apartment and unit blocks to regions like the Gold Coast, it's never been more important that Body corporate managers, owners and residents protect their communities,” Strata Community Australia (Qld) President Simon Barnard said today.

“A fire in a strata building has the potential to simultaneously put hundreds of lives and homes in danger, so proactive measures should be high on the to-do list.”

One of the biggest obstacles for a safe community, according to fire departments, is the presence of older smoke alarm systems, instead of the newer, safer photo-electric models which detect smoke particles from smoldering fires. Research by the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council indicates that photoelectric smoke alarms provide the best detection, are less prone to nuisance alarms and contain no radioactive materials.

Mr Barnard is concerned that there are strata communities in the Gold Coast region, possessing older less effective smoke alarms and not the safer, newer models.

“Whether through complacency or a lack of education about the dangers, we have no doubt that there are numerous strata communities in regions like _____, not protected by the best smoke alarms, and that needs to change.

“The “older” smoke alarms are called ionisation alarms, which are designed to pick up a flaming fire at a high level, but without photo-electric alarms, your community might be harbouring a smouldering fire for precious minutes, before you're aware of the danger.”

“The fire service recommends the installation of photo-electric smoke alarms and ideally both types of alarms would be beneficial, so we're not saying throw the ionisation alarms out, just use them in tandem with the newer, safer photo-electric ones.”

Mr Barnard says when it comes to responsibility; this is an issue all strata stakeholders have a part to play in.

“From managers and owners coordinating the maintenance and replacement of alarms, to residents and tenants changing batteries, everyone generally has a role to play in this element of fire safety.”

“This is not an issue to drop the ball on; the stakes are just far too high.”

“Just like you would get your car checked every year or every 10,000 kilometres, we want strata property stakeholders in the Gold Coast region to start making a commitment to checking the safety of their communities. There are annual obligations for almost all strata buildings to check evacuation plan, evacuation, diagrams, training for fire wardens, conducting an evacuation practice and of course maintenance of fire equipment. All of these annual requirements must have appropriate records to demonstrate compliance.”

Mr Barnard says that unlike some other elements of strata community maintenance, the cost of smoke alarms sit well below their true value.

“In terms of ensuring your property has the best possible fire detection, managers will be looking at just over \$20 a pop for a photo-electric alarm.”

Mr Barnard also clarified that fire detectors in a strata building's common areas and those in units hardwired into a common fire panel are the Body corporate's responsibility while standalone detectors within the unit are the individual unit owners responsibility.

"It really comes down to creating good habits, and we're wary that managers all around the country need to lead from the front if these recent tragedies are to achieve anything."

"When the best possible fire safety measure for your property costs a fraction of your tank of petrol, there's no excuse to not do the right thing."

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