



ACT
Government



AFA FALSE ALARM CHARGES AND FEE WAIVERS

FIRE SAFETY GUIDELINE

FSG-23

JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY SAFETY DIRECTORATE
ACT EMERGENCY SERVICES AGENCY
ACT FIRE & RESCUE

VERSION 2.0 NOVEMBER 2025



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Terms and Definitions

Acronym / Term	Definition
ACTF&R	Australian Capital Territory Fire & Rescue
AFA	Automatic Fire Alarm
AFANP	Automatic Fire Alarm Network Provider. The fire alarm monitoring company.
AFASP	Automatic Fire Alarm Service Provider. These are the technicians that maintain the AFA systems within the building.
ASE	Alarm Signalling Equipment
AS1851	Australian Standard 1851 - Routine service of fire protection systems and equipment
Competent Person	Fire service industry trained and accredited professional working for an accredited fire service company

PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to provide information on ACTF&R Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA) fees and charges. This guideline has been developed by ACTF&R to provide consistent advice around AFA fees and charges and the criteria and process for fee waivers.

APPLICATION

This fire safety guideline applies to all sites with a monitored fire detection system (wet or dry) that is connected to the ACTF&R dispatch system and is monitored by an AFANP.

1 AUTOMATIC FIRE ALARMS

1.1 AUTOMATIC FIRE ALARMS

AFA systems are a crucial component in fire detection for buildings and are designed to alert occupants and initiate quick response by ACTF&R in the case of fire. AFA systems are required under building legislation, as prescribed by the National Construction Code (NCC). AFA systems that require monitoring must be connected to an approved Automatic Fire Alarm Network Provider (AFANP). ACTF&R has a statutory obligation under the Emergencies Act, 2004 (ACT) to attend all fire alarms.

1.2 UNWANTED FALSE ALARMS

An unwanted or false alarm is an alarm activation where there is no fire or other emergency. Unwanted alarms create complacency towards genuine alarms, which can result in serious injury or loss of life. Unwanted alarms divert ACTF&R resources that would otherwise be available for genuine emergencies.

ACT Fire & Rescue (ACTF&R) is committed to reducing the number of unwanted false alarms from Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA) systems in the ACT.

It is important that building owners and managers properly manage and maintain their AFA systems to ensure their correct operation and to reduce the likelihood of unwanted alarms.

1.3 CHARGES FOR FALSE ALARMS

The Emergencies Act 2004 Section 201 (Determination of fees) allows ACTF&R to charge for attending false alarm callouts to monitored AFA systems. False alarm charges are determined in accordance with the Emergencies (Fees) Determination disallowable instrument as in force from time to time.

False alarm charges incentivise building owners and managers to be continually proactive in managing their AFA systems and to ensure that they are properly maintained. It has been demonstrated that properly maintained systems assist in reducing the number of false alarms attended by ACTF&R allowing them to respond more readily to genuine emergencies.

Building owners or managers are responsible and accountable for the payment of false alarm charges resulting from unwanted false alarms. ACTF&R invoices AFANPs and they, in turn, invoice building owners or managers.

1.4 A TWO-TIERED CHARGING STRUCTURE

AFA False Alarm Charges are charged on a two-tier charging structure based on who is deemed responsible and best positioned to prevent future false alarms of the same cause is classified as:

- the building (and alarm) owner which attracts a fee of \$2000, or
- a residential occupant which attracts a fee of \$400.

The responsible entity is determined by the assignment of the alarm code when the activation is investigated. Alarm codes are detailed in appendix 3.

A reduced fee is charged when the alarm is attributable to a residential occupant to provide a more equitable incentive where the required action to reduce those alarms is for residential occupants to change their behaviour.

This approach:

- acknowledges that sometimes occupants are responsible for a false alarm
- recognises that a residential occupant who is not the building / alarm owner has no responsibility or control over the maintenance or suitability of the alarm system
- reflects that some building owners pass on false alarm charges to occupants
- sets a charge more in line with an individual's capacity to pay
- may address the risk of people covering a detector to avoid the excessive higher charge, leading to better safety outcomes.

1.5 ALARMS FORWARDED TO A THIRD PARTY BY THE BUILDING OWNER.

In some cases, building owners pass on alarms to individuals when the building owner deems that the activation of the alarm is the responsibility of an individual within their building.

ACTF&R is not involved where owners forward false alarm costs on to a third party.

A \$2000 alarm fee attributed to the building owner should not be forwarded to a residential occupant living in the building. The cause of these alarms is outside of the control of a residential occupant.

A \$400 alarm fee that has been determined as attributable to a residential occupant may be forwarded to a residential occupant by the building owner.

1.6 MAIN CAUSES OF FALSE ALARMS

Smoke detectors are extremely sensitive. There are many scenarios that can cause them to activate.

The most common causes are:

- Poor building maintenance
- AFA system malfunction
- Contractors (construction/ maintenance/ cleaners etc)
- Burnt food (toast etc)
- Cooking fumes
- Steam (showers/ cleaning etc)
- Aerosols sprays (deodorant/ hairspray etc)
- Cigarettes / candles / vaping
- Dirty smoke detectors (dust/ cobwebs etc)
- 'Break Glass' alarm damage or misuse

1.7 RECOMMENDATIONS TO REDUCE ALARMS

Ensure your fire alarm system is tested and maintained to the relevant Standards by a professional fire alarm technician.

Protect and isolate detectors when undertaking works which generate dust, smoke, steam or when using spray paint and other like materials.

Educate your occupants

- Inform residents and staff about what can trigger alarms (e.g. burnt toast, aerosol sprays, steam, candles and incense).
- Encourage behaviours that reduce the risk of false alarms, such as using exhaust fans while cooking or showering, avoiding the use of sprays near detectors, and keeping hotel room and apartment front doors closed when cooking fumes are present inside the apartment—especially if those fumes could enter communal corridors where monitored fire detectors are installed.
- Ensure contractors working on site are aware of the AFA system ensure they take all appropriate measures to reduce false alarms

1.8 COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

ACTF&R is a member of the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC) Unwanted False Alarm Network that is actively reviewing ways to reduce the proportion of false alarms. ACTF&R collaborates with a diverse range of stakeholders including building owners and managers, fire protection industry professionals, AFANP's and regulatory authorities to address the causes of false alarms and promote best practices in alarm system management.

2 AFANP RIGHT TO APPLY SURCHARGE

2.1 AFANP RIGHT TO APPLY SURCHARGE

An AFANP has the right to apply an administration or other surcharge to the AFA false alarm amount charged by ACTF&R.

Note: The application of AFANP surcharges to AFA false alarm charges is an arrangement between the AFANP and its customers and is therefore a matter over which ACTF&R has no control.

2.2 AFANP MUST DISCLOSE SURCHARGE

An AFANP is required to fully disclose administration or other surcharges on customer invoices.

2.3 AFANP SURCHARGES ARE NOT REFUNDABLE BY ACTF&R

In the event of waiving of AFA false alarm charges, any AFANP applied false alarm administration or other surcharges are not refundable by ACTF&R.

3 ACTF&R AFA FALSE ALARM CHARGE LENIENCIES

ACTF&R applies two (2) leniencies to AFA false alarm charges. These leniencies provide the AFANP and/or the customer with the opportunity to have the alarm problem rectified while reducing the risk of incurring further false alarm charges.

3.1 90 DAY LENIENCY

ACTF&R applies a 90-day leniency period in which the first in a series of AFA false alarms from the same AFA number is not charged. Therefore, the second and subsequent AFA false alarms that occur within any 90-day period after the first in the series are charged.

Exception: Activations attributed to poor building maintenance (alarm code 766) are not eligible for this leniency, as such causes are considered preventable and charged on the first and all subsequent false alarm activations deemed to have this cause.

3.2 24 HOUR LENIENCY

ACTF&R applies a 24-hour leniency period from the first chargeable alarm with repeat false alarms from the same AFA number. Therefore, only one alarm activation from the same AFA number will be charged in each 24-hour period.

4 ACTF&R AFA FALSE ALARM CHARGE WAIVER PRE-CONDITION

ACTF&R will consider applications for waiver of AFA false alarm charges subject to the following pre-conditions:

Note: See Section 7: Process for Applying for Waiver of AFA False Alarm Charges for details.

4.1 180 DAY APPLICATION SUBMISSION LIMIT

The application is received by ACTF&R not more than 180 calendar days from the ACTF&R invoice date.

4.2 REQUEST FOR APPEAL

If an application for waiver has been rejected a further application addressing the ACTF&R reason(s) for the rejection may be submitted as an appeal within 30 days of the date of rejection.

5 CRITERIA FOR WAIVER OF AFA CHARGES

Pursuant to the Emergencies Act 2004, waiver or reduction of AFA false alarm charges is at the discretion of the Chief Officer of ACT Fire & Rescue.

A fee may be considered for waiver in the case of a false alarm, where - in the opinion of the Chief Officer ACTF&R, the alarm:

- Could not have been prevented by reasonable maintenance of the alarm system, as defined in the Emergencies Act 2004,

- Was activated by circumstances beyond reasonable control of the ‘owner’, as defined in the Emergencies Act 2004.

Note: ACTF&R officers attending incidents do not have authority to waive AFA false alarm charges.

ACTF&R considers the following criteria when determining customers’ applications for waiver of AFA false alarm charges:

5.1 FALSE ALARM BEYOND CONTROL OF CUSTOMER

The AFA false alarm was caused by an event beyond the control of the customer.

The customer is to provide adequate evidence that the AFA false alarm was beyond their control and correlates with ACTF&R records (stop codes, ESAAIRS report and incident logs) of the cause of the AFA false alarm.

5.2 ALARM EQUIPMENT REPAIRED OR REPLACED TO REDUCE FALSE ALARMS

The Customer provides adequate evidence that since the AFA false alarm, the alarm installation equipment (not a detector) has been rectified (repaired or replaced) by a properly qualified *competent person* employed by a registered alarm installation and servicing company.

- Essential fire safety measures are to be maintained in accordance with AS1851 as referenced under the Emergencies Act 2004. Evidence indicating reasonable system maintenance is not considered grounds for a waiver application to be approved.
- Consideration may be given only where new installation equipment has replaced the existing malfunctioning equipment, specific to the alarm installation equipment that transmitted the AFA false alarm (pre-used, reconditioned and/or serviced detectors will not be considered).
- The rectification work is required to directly relate to the cause of the AFA false alarm.
- The evidence must include a written receipt recording the date, cost and description of rectification work performed specific to the alarm equipment that generated the AFA false alarm.
- ACTF&R may require evidence to be submitted demonstrating compliance with the NCC and Australian Standards applying to the premises and/or copies of approvals, where required.

- The rectification work is not to contravene the requirements of the NCC or Australian Standard applying to the premises.

5.3 DETECTOR REPLACED WITH DIFFERENT TYPE TO REDUCE FALSE ALARMS

The customer provides adequate evidence that since the AFA false alarm, the alarm detector (not installation equipment) has been rectified (replaced) with a different type by a properly qualified *competent person* employed by a registered alarm installation and servicing company.

Note:

- Essential fire safety measures are to be maintained in accordance with AS1851 as referenced under the Emergencies Act 2004. Evidence indicating reasonable system maintenance is not considered grounds for a waiver application to be approved.
- Consideration may be given only where a new detector has replaced an existing or malfunctioning detector, specific to the alarm installation equipment that transmitted the AFA false alarm (pre-used, reconditioned and/or serviced detectors will not be considered).
- The rectification work is required to directly relate to the cause of the AFA false alarm.
- The evidence must include a written receipt recording the date, cost and description of rectification work performed specific to the alarm detector that generated the AFA false alarm.
- ACTF&R may require evidence to be submitted demonstrating compliance with the BCA and Australian Standards applying to the premises and/or copies of approvals, where required.
- The rectification work is not to contravene the requirements of the BCA or Australian Standard applying to the premises.

5.4 ALARM DETECTOR REPLACED OR RELOCATED TO REDUCE FALSE ALARMS

The customer provides adequate evidence that since the AFA false alarm, the detector (not equipment) has been rectified (replaced with the same detector type and/or relocated) by a properly qualified *competent person* employed by a registered alarm installation and servicing company.

Note:

- Essential Fire Safety measures are to be maintained in accordance with AS1851 as referenced under the Emergencies Act 2004. Evidence indicating reasonable system maintenance is not considered grounds for a waiver application to be approved.
- Consideration may be given only where a new detector has replaced an existing or malfunctioning detector, specific to the alarm installation equipment that transmitted the AFA false alarm. (Pre-used, reconditioned and/or serviced detectors will not be considered).
- The rectification work is required to directly relate to the cause of the AFA false alarm.
- The evidence must include a written receipt recording the date, cost and description of rectification work performed specific to the Alarm detector that generated the AFA false alarm.
- The rectification work is not to contravene the requirements of the BCA or Australian Standard applying to the premises.

5.5 PRACTICES CHANGED AT PROTECTED PREMISES TO REDUCE FALSE ALARMS

The customer provides adequate evidence that since the AFA false alarm, practices at the Protected Premises that could cause AFA false alarms have been changed to reduce the likelihood of repeat false alarms of the same type (such as installation of new fit for purpose kitchen extraction system).

5.6 AN AGREEMENT EXISTS

A current written agreement exists between ACTF&R and the customer for waiver of AFA false alarm charges subject to an AFA false alarm reduction program to be successfully completed within a defined time.

6 ACTF&R FALSE ALARM REPORTING AND INVOICING

6.1 NOTIFICATION TO AFANP OF AFA FALSE ALARMS

ACTF&R notifies AFANPs daily by email of AFA false alarms that have occurred at the customers' Protected Premises within the previous 24-hour period. This email notification indicates the date, time, AFA Number, ACTF&R AFA false alarm '700' code, ESACAD Incident Number and Transaction ID. The notification lists all AFA false alarms.

Note:

- AFANPs are responsible for notifying their customers of relevant AFA false alarms.
- AFANPs may also obtain their customers' Protected Premises historical AFA false alarm data directly at any time by accessing FLAMES web.

6.2 INVOICING TO AFANP FOR AFA FALSE ALARM CHARGES

ACTF&R determines whether an AFA false alarm charge applies, and if so, includes that charge in the next billing advice and invoice to the AFANP. Billing advice and invoices are issued on or after the first week of the calendar month and contain fees and charges incurred from the first day of the previous month to the last day of the previous month. However, due to the 90-day leniency period that applies to all monitored sites in the ACT (refer to Section 3.1 of this document), these charges are often not captured until after the 90-day window has expired from the first activation in that series. This may result in a delay in receiving the associated charge

> See Disallowable Instrument DI2025-110 Emergencies (Fees) Determination 2025

7 APPLYING FOR WAIVER OF AFA FALSE ALARM CHARGES

7.1 THE CUSTOMER

Requests the AFANP to apply to ACTF&R for a waiver of AFA false alarm charge/s, indicating one or more ACTF&R criteria for waiver and including the criteria it falls under for a waiver and the substantiating documentation. A detailed report as to what caused the activation and why this activation should warrant a waiver will help support the application.

Note: See Section 5 -Criteria for Waiver of AFA False Alarm Charges.

7.2 THE AFANP

Receives a request from a customer to apply for waiver of AFA false alarm charges and submits an AFA Waiver Request to the AFA Manager of ACTF&R on behalf of a customer, in accordance with the ACTF&R AFA Waiver Process (Appendix 1), including the criteria it falls under for a waiver and the supporting documentation

For each waiver application, the AFANP must also include:

- A detailed description outlining the reason for the waiver, clearly arguing the case for this false alarm to be waived and referencing which criteria for waiver it falls under (see section 5 for all the criteria)
- Maintenance records for the AFA system covering the 12 months prior to the incident.
- A copy of the AFANP's invoice that references the incident.
- A completed ACTF&R AFA waiver form, **filled out in full by the AFANP** on behalf of the customer.

Note: The Application form is found in Appendix 2 and can be downloaded from the ESA website at;
<https://esa.act.gov.au/be-emergency-ready/fire-safety>

7.3 ACTF&R:

1. Receives the AFA Waiver Request from an AFANP – to the AFA Manager ACTF&R.
2. Chief Officer ACTF&R considers the application and makes a determination if the criteria from Section 5 apply.
3. Notifies AFANP and the Customer by letter, of its determination, within 60 calendar days of application receipt.
4. If ACTF&R grants the application, ACTF&R credits the AFA false alarm charge to the AFANP by the issue of a credit adjustment.
5. The AFANP forwards on this credit to the customer.
6. If ACTF&R requests further information, it must be provided within 14 days, or the application will be rejected.

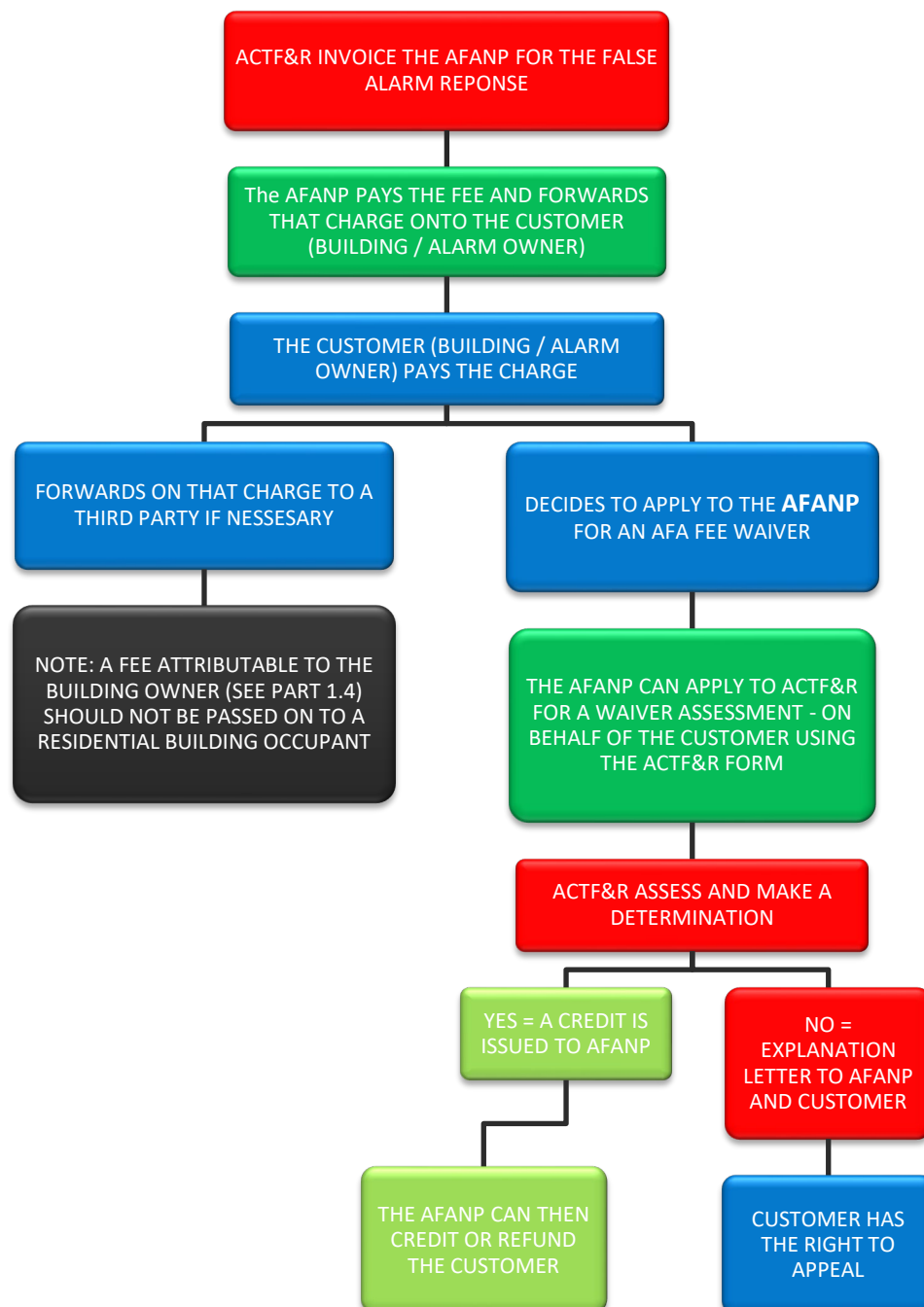
8 FURTHER SUPPORT

For further information or clarification please contact the ACTF&R Community Safety Section AFA Manager ACTFR.AFAManager@act.gov.au

ACT Fire & Rescue wish to acknowledge the support of Fire + Rescue NSW in the development of this document and the close working relationship our services share.

APPENDICES:

APPENDIX 1: WAIVER APPLICATION PROCESS



APPENDIX 2 – WAVER APPLICATION FORM

Note: this document can be found on the ACTF&R website at - <https://esa.act.gov.au/be-emergency-ready/fire-safety>



ACT FIRE & RESCUE AFA WAIVER REQUEST FORM



Applicant Name:		Email:	
Company:		Network Provider:	
Position Title:		Network Provider Contact:	
Phone:			

ACTF&R Use Only

Date	ACTF&R Inc#	Site Location	ASE/AFA#	ACTFR STOP CODE / Cause of alarm	AFANP Invoice #	Fee Amount (\$)	Fire tech company invoice attached	Zone and detector ID	Other evidence attached	Which Waiver Criteria does this fall under and why	Waiver recommended	Reason for recommendation
Pick a date.	Type here	Type here	Type here	Type here	Type here	Type here	Yes/No	Type here	Yes/No	Select criteria	Yes/No	Type here
Pick a date.	Type here	Type here	Type here	Type here	Type here	Type here	Yes/No	Type here	Yes/No	Select criteria	Yes/No	Type here
Pick a date.	Type here	Type here	Type here	Type here	Type here	Type here	Yes/No	Type here	Yes/No	Select criteria	Yes/No	Type here
Pick a date.	Type here	Type here	Type here	Type here	Type here	Type here	Yes/No	Type here	Yes/No	Select criteria	Yes/No	Type here
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Pick a date.	Type here	Type here	Type here	Type here	Type here	Type here	Yes/No	Type here	Yes/No	Select criteria	Yes/No	Type here
Pick a date.	Type here	Type here	Type here	Type here	Type here	Type here	Yes/No	Type here	Yes/No	Select criteria	Yes/No	Type here
Pick a date.	Type here	Type here	Type here	Type here	Type here	Type here	Yes/No	Type here	Yes/No	Select criteria	Yes/No	Type here

Application submission and further support:

Email: ACTFR.AFAManager@act.gov.au | Phone: 02 6207 8351 | Post: ACT Fire & Rescue, ATTENTION: AFA Manager, GPO Box 158 ACT 2601

APPENDIX 3 – ESA-AIRS ALARM CODES

Table 1: Chargeable ESA-AIRs alarm codes separated into alarm type as attributable to residential occupants or a building owner.

Alarm causes attributable to the building owner - where the full charge should be levied		Alarm causes attributed to an occupant (an individual) - where the reduced rate should be levied	
701	Manual Control Point or Break Glass Alarm activated (was alarm operated as a result of external factors – remote to the premises)	756	Cooking fumes – toast or foodstuffs etc
711	Malicious false alarm	758	Simulated condition – caused by incense, candles, sparklers, smoke machine, etc
731	Sprinkler malfunction - monitored by fire service	767	Alarm activation due to aerosol – hair or insect spray or insecticides
732	Smoke detector malfunction - monitored by fire service	768	Alarm activation due to steam – bathroom, sauna, steam room
733	Heat detector malfunction - monitored by fire service		
734	Sprinkler malfunction - proprietary monitored		
735	Smoke detector malfunction - proprietary monitored		
736	Heat detector malfunction - proprietary monitored		
737	Fire Indicator Panel in normal condition on arrival		
738	Alarm system suspected malfunction – fault in wiring, alarm panel, inadequate maintenance		
739	Attending officer unable to locate detector indicated by fire alarm panel		
752	Heat detector operated - no fire – heat from other location		
753	Gas detector operated - no gas detected		
762	Accidental operation of alarm		
763	Failure to notify of test		
764	Incorrect test by service company personnel		
765	Alarm activation caused by workmen/occupier activities		
766	Alarm activation due to poor building maintenance – dust, cobwebs, insects and storm water		
770	Fire indicator panel, insufficient information to classify further		
771	Fire indicator panel not activated. ASE not activated.		
772	Fire indicator panel activated. ASE or PPU not activated.		
773	Fire indicator panel not activated. ASE or PPU activated		
779	Fire Indicator Panel. Not classified above.		

AMENDMENT HISTORY

Version	Description of changes
1.0	Created – October 2023
2.0	Updated to reflect changes to Disallowable instrument Emergencies (Fees) Determination 2025

RELATED LEGISLATION AND DOCUMENTS

Related legislation and documents

Emergencies Act 2004 (ACT)

Building Act 2004 (ACT)

ACT Emergency (Fees) Determination -Disallowable Instrument that is current at the time

AS 3745-2010 Planning for emergencies in facilities

National Construction Code (NCC)



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