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MEDIA RELEASE

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NSW GOVERNMENT MANDATES SPRINKLERS IN NURSING HOMES

Aged care facilities across NSW will be required to install automatic sprinkler systems to reduce the fire risk for elderly and vulnerable residents under a landmark NSW Government initiative.

Minister for Planning and Infrastructure Brad Hazzard announced today the mandatory installation of automatic sprinkler systems in all new and existing Commonwealth accredited residential aged care facilities in NSW.

“In response to the tragic Quakers Hill Nursing Home fire in November 2011, the NSW Government established a working group of key industry stakeholders,” Mr Hazzard said.

“The Government has today committed to decisive action to ensure our most vulnerable are protected.”

Operators will have up to three years to install sprinklers in existing residential aged care buildings, with a possible extension of one year for exceptional circumstances.

“A survey of the state’s aged care facilities, commissioned by the NSW Government earlier this year, found that around 55 per cent did not have fire sprinklers installed.

“This equates to nearly 600 aged care facilities, containing some 24,000 beds.”

Minister for Ageing and Disability Services, Andrew Constance, said similar requirements exist in Victoria and Queensland and the proposed changes in NSW would be consistent with the Building Code of Australia’s national standard for sprinklers in new aged care buildings, which has applied since 2002.

“Residents of aged care buildings are a vulnerable group. Many need assistance for mobility and communication and most may experience some difficulty in evacuating a building in an emergency without assistance,” Mr Constance said.

“We now know sprinklers help reduce a fires intensity and help buy critical time to safely evacuate residents.”

The NSW Government will exhibit proposed changes to planning regulations:

- Creating new offences and penalties for building owners who fail to comply with the sprinkler requirements
- Fast-tracking planning approvals for the retrofitting of sprinklers by allowing the majority of them to be approved in 10 days as complying development, and

- Establishing an implementation committee to oversee the rollout.

The regulation will begin in January 2013.

Commonwealth accredited aged care facilities will be given 18 months to retrofit sprinklers, which some providers have already begun doing.

Providers who can't meet that time frame will be given until January 2016 to complete the work and will be required to submit six-monthly progress reports to the implementation committee.

Operators will need to inform residents, prospective residents and families about whether sprinklers are installed and progress reports will be made publicly available.

"The NSW Government is committed to making residential aged care facilities safe places for our older citizens, and we will continue to work closely with the industry and health care providers on the proposed changes," Mr Hazzard said.

Vision of fire testing used to demonstrate the difference sprinklers can make to a fire can be found at:

<http://fire.nsw.gov.au/>, under the heading "Comparative Sprinkler Test Burns".

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