20 September, 2010

SMOKE ALARMS MANDATORY IN CARAVANS

The NSW Government is moving to protect the safety of holidaymakers and mobile home residents by making smoke alarms mandatory in all caravans and other vehicles where people sleep.

Minister for Planning, Tony Kelly, said the risk of fire in caravans and recreation vehicles is high because of the confined spaces and combustible nature of construction materials in them.

“The installation of smoke alarms would almost certainly have prevented many of the incidents that have occurred in these types of dwellings,” Mr Kelly said.

Minister for Emergency Services, Steve Whan, said NSW fire fighters have attended more than 320 fires involving these types of accommodation vehicles in the last five years.

“Seven people died and 44 were injured,” Mr Whan said.

Proposed amendments to the Environmental Planning and Assessment Regulation 2000, containing the new smoke alarm provisions, have been placed on public exhibition until 5 November, 2010.

The new requirements follow the introduction of similar smoke alarm laws for fixed dwellings in 2006 and will apply to:

- Caravans;
- Motor homes;
- Campervans;
- Holiday vans;
- Buses and other vehicles converted to provide sleeping accommodation, regardless of whether they are registered for road use or not; and
- Annexes and associated structures made of non-flexible material (not tents).

Mr Kelly said while newly manufactured caravans in Australia are fitted with smoke alarms as standard, the requirements will now also apply to all existing caravans and recreational vehicles (RVs) regardless of when they were manufactured.

“There are currently around 330,000 caravans and recreational vehicles (RVs) registered in Australia, with up to 80,000 being used by holidaymakers and travellers on any given day, who deserve the same level of fire safety that already exists in homes,” the Minister said.

“That protection is now what the Government is proposing.

“Recent progress in smoke alarm technology allowed the new policy to be introduced without unduly imposing on the rights and enjoyment of caravan and RV users,” the Minister said.
“The introduction of pre-emptive ‘hush button’ technology as a standard feature of many smoke alarms makes this important policy much more practical to implement,” the Minister said.

“The Government recognises caravans and RVs are places where people will often, for example, cook in what is usually quite a confined space.

“It wouldn’t be appropriate to enforce a law whereby holidaymakers had to deal with a smoke alarm going off every time they cook.

“However, hush button technology allows users to silence the smoke alarm for a short period of time when they know they are about to create some smoke, which means this new regulation is able to save lives without impinging on people’s ability to enjoy their holiday or place of residence.”

On the spot fines of $200 will apply for breaches of the regulation, with a maximum fine of $550 should the matter go to court – these are consistent with the existing penalties for smoke alarm offences in homes.

However, owners will be given six-months grace to comply with the new laws and fines are enforced.

This will also be complemented by consultation with industry groups and a public awareness campaign to ensure owners are informed of the changes.

The draft regulation can be found on the Department of Planning’s website at www.planning.nsw.gov.au