

Fire safety, evacuation procedures and evacuation schemes

Building owners must ensure their buildings, including temporary buildings, comply with the Fire and Emergency New Zealand Act 2017 (“Act”) and the Fire and Emergency New Zealand (Fire Safety, Evacuation Procedures and Evacuation Schemes) Regulations 2018 (“Regulations”) by having evacuation procedures – and in some cases evacuation schemes – in place for the safe, prompt and efficient evacuation of occupants.

A building’s evacuation procedures must be summarised on clear, distinct and legible notices as detailed in the Regulations.

Buildings that are used, in whole or part, for one or more of the following purposes must have an approved evacuation scheme:

- (a) the gathering together, for any purpose, of 100 or more persons
- (b) providing employment facilities for 10 or more persons*
- (c) providing accommodation for 6 or more persons (other than in 3 or fewer household units)*
- (d) a place where hazardous substances are present in quantities exceeding the prescribed minimum amounts, whatever the purpose of the building
- (e) providing early childhood education and care centre (other than in a household unit)
- (f) providing nursing, medical or geriatric care (other than in a household unit)
- (g) providing specialised care for people with disabilities (other than in a household unit)
- (h) providing accommodation for persons under lawful detention (not being persons subject to home detention).

** In some situations where only (b) or (c) applies, if the building has an automatic sprinkler system an approved evacuation scheme may not be required. The building owner must notify Fire and Emergency NZ of this in writing.*

How do I comply?

Most commercial and public buildings need to have an evacuation procedure in place. Occupants of these building also need to be informed about the procedure, to ensure the safe, prompt and efficient evacuation of everyone in the building in the event of a fire.

For buildings used for one or more of the purposes listed in (a) to (h) above, the building owner must provide and maintain an evacuation scheme, which includes details of the evacuation procedures for the building. An application must be made to Fire and Emergency NZ for review and approval. This must be submitted before, but not more than 30 days before, the building will be used for any of the listed purposes.

Developing your evacuation procedure

Before developing your evacuation procedure, and where applicable making an application for approval of an evacuation scheme, you should familiarise yourself with the Act and the Regulations.

You must consider the building design, use and its occupants. You must be able to ensure that everyone can safely evacuate the building, including those people who may require assistance. Thoughtful planning at the development stage will ensure your building’s evacuation procedure is effective. There are independent evacuation consultants available who can help you with this.

What happens if I do not have evacuation procedures or an approved evacuation scheme?

Failing to have an evacuation procedure in place for your building, or an approved evacuation scheme where required, can result in:

- Your occupants not being able to safely evacuate in the event of a fire.
- If your business relies on a licensing regime, such as a liquor licence, you may not be able to get a licence and your ability to trade may be affected.
- You could be liable for fines or penalties on conviction under the Act and the Regulations.
- You may also be breaching other legislation, such as the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015.

Making an application for an approved evacuation scheme

If you need to provide an evacuation scheme for your building, the quickest and most convenient way to apply is online. Once you have submitted your application, you will be notified when you need to do any follow-up actions to keep your approved scheme current (i.e. to maintain it).

To apply online or read more detailed information about getting an approved evacuation scheme visit <https://onlineservices.fire.org.nz/>

What else do I need to do?

You should review your evacuation procedures, employee training and signage regularly to make sure they are still effective.

If you have an approved evacuation scheme, you must carry out regular trial evacuations and/or deliver a training programme. This needs to be reported to Fire and Emergency NZ in accordance with the Regulations and the terms of your approved scheme.

All building owners also have a responsibility under the Regulations to ensure that various fire safety matters are appropriately addressed so that the risk of a fire occurring is adequately mitigated.

This includes:

- Ensuring stairwells, passageways and exits from your building are free from obstacles and unlocked in case they are required in an emergency
- Maintaining appliances and managing open flames
- Taking care when packing or unpacking goods with flammable material
- Carefully storing certain materials and waste
- Ensuring that fire-fighting equipment is properly maintained.

Find out more

Visit: <https://fireandemergency.nz/business-and-landlords/>