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20 May 2026

Stronger smoke alarm rules critical, says coroner

A coronial investigation into three fatal fires between 2022 and 2024 has prompted Victorian Coroner Dimitra Dubrow to today recommend stronger rules for smoke alarms in all homes.

The fires resulted in the passing of four people and subsequent investigations by Coroner Dubrow and Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) found significant issues with the installation and maintenance of smoke alarms in all the properties:

- On 19 December 2022, UYB, 11, and his family friend, NGN, 74, passed away when a fire started in the early hours of the morning at NGN's property in Lara, Victoria. FRV found one smoke detector in the house but concluded it was not working as the detector was over 10 years old, the battery was no longer operational, and it had passed its 2016 use-by date.
- On 17 January 2023, RTD, 44, died in a fire in her rental home in Sunshine West, Victoria. While there was evidence that smoke alarms had been installed in 2016, FRV concluded they had likely failed as no maintenance – including changing of the batteries – had occurred since installation.
- On 22 March 2024, QRB, 32, died following a fire at the home she rented in St Albans, Victoria. FRV found no evidence of smoke alarms having been installed at the rental property.

In the findings – released for the first time today – Her Honour noted that the cases highlighted the need for improved awareness about smoke alarm requirements and the importance of legislative changes to ensure smoke alarm safety issues are addressed in all residential contexts.

Currently, it is recommended that smoke alarms are replaced every 10 years as the sensors may degrade over time. Under the Australian Standard, the replacement date should be clearly marked on the alarm, however this date is commonly marked on the back of the alarm or inside of the casing, making it difficult to find. FRV noted that this, coupled with a lack of community awareness means that there may be large numbers of smoke alarms in Victorian homes that are over 10 years old.

This risk is further compounded in the context of rental properties, such as RTD's and QRB's homes. While the Residential Tenancy Act was updated in 2025 to make clear that rental property owners are now responsible for the maintenance of smoke alarms and must conduct mandatory annual checks, the onus remains on renters to follow up non-compliance with landlords and owners. This not only requires renters to be aware of their rights for mandatory smoke alarm checking and maintenance, but many may not do so for fear of jeopardising their housing arrangements.

FRV has previously recommended that there be a review and strengthening of existing smoke detector legislation in Victoria with specific comparison to Queensland legislation.

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Following the deaths of eleven people in the 2011 Slacks Creek house fire in Queensland, the Queensland Government strengthened its smoke alarm legislation by mandating that by 2027, all smoke alarms in all homes, regardless of when built, must either be hardwired or powered by a non-removable 10-year battery; located in each bedroom and hallway on every level of a dwelling; be interconnected; and be less than 10 years old.

By comparison, in Victoria, homes constructed or subject to major renovations after 1 August 1997, must have smoke alarms connected to mains power with battery backup – while earlier homes, such as NGN's, may have just battery-operated smoke alarms with no requirement for replacement after 10 years.

In the findings, Her Honour reiterated FRVs message that *“only working smoke alarms save lives”* and echoed their previous recommendation for stronger rules around smoke detectors in line with the reforms introduced in Queensland.

Her Honour also commented on the importance of ongoing commitment to residential fire safety more broadly, citing two previous recommendations from Victorian Coroners for the inclusion of sprinkler systems in all new residential buildings, regardless of height. *“The presence of a sprinkler system in conjunction with a working smoke alarm would afford occupants, including vulnerable members of our community, greater opportunity to escape and survive fires,”* said Her Honour.

To strengthen health and safety and prevent similar deaths, Coroner Dubrow today recommends:

That the Minister for Housing and Building consider and assess Fire Rescue Victoria's recommendation to strengthen smoke detector and alarm system requirements in Victoria along the lines of the reforms introduced in Queensland including mandating that smoke alarms in all homes, regardless of when built, be either hardwired or powered by a non-removable 10-year battery, be interconnected and less than 10 years old and to consult with Fire Rescue Victoria, the Country Fire Authority, the Victorian Building Authority and the responsible Queensland Minister in relation to the implementation of the legislative changes in that state. It is acknowledged that any mandatory changes to smoke alarm requirements may cause financial and other hardship to Victorian homeowners such that it is recommended that the Minister consider an appropriate lead time and support by way of rebates or discounts akin to that provided as part of the Victorian Energy Upgrades.

A copy of the finding into the passing of UYB can be found [here](#).

A copy of the finding into the passing of NGN can be found [here](#).

A copy of the finding into the death of RTD can be found [here](#).

A copy of the finding into the death of QRB can be found [here](#).

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