

Dear SFS members

The following message is from the president of the Victorian Municipal Building Surveyors Group and myself.

Please feel free to share.

Jonathan

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RE: ESSENTIAL SAFETY MEASURES AND EARTHQUAKE 22 SEPTEMBER 2021

The earthquake which occurred on Wednesday 22 September 2021 was unusual and in Victoria, the most severe seismic event in the modern era. As with most such events, different buildings and their essential safety measures (ESM) were subject to a unique stress. In most cases, our ESM systems should have survived the event without damage; but this is dependent on a building's location, soil conditions and building design elements.

It is expected that many large buildings have a building manager or other qualified person who could perform an initial assessment of any damage. However, the ESM system needs a "competent person" to evaluate damage and in particular identify any "critical defects".

All such buildings should be inspected in accordance with AS1851 "Routine service of fire protection systems and equipment". Under normal circumstances the standard assumes "...that a system will continue to perform to the approved design when routine service is conducted on a pre-determined and regular basis." However, this assumption may not be appropriate after an unusual event such as an earthquake.

We have a report of one high rise building where the ESM systems appeared fine; until the smoke management system was checked. At that point, despite the lack of a fault indication at the Fire Indicator Panel, one of the fans was not operating correctly. As the system had recently been checked, it is more likely than not that this defect was a result of the earthquake.

Buildings where the annual or quarterly check are about to be performed in accordance with AS1851 should have that work done in the near term. If there is going to be a delay of more than a couple of weeks or so, a quick check by a "competent person" (as defined in AS1851) is probably warranted. This check does not replace the need for routine ESM maintenance but is a prudent measure.

We all agree that ESM are critically important to the safety of the general public who occupy and use buildings in Victoria. Having regard to the report that we have received, please notify your clients and others that might have a need to know.