

March 23, 2020

LEADING HVAC&R FOR 100 YEARS



The Hon Alan Tudge MP
Minister for Population, Cities and Urban Infrastructure

In these unprecedented times, we applaud the measures the government is taking to guarantee the immediate safety and ongoing wellbeing of our communities.

We have now reached a critical moment, when decisions must be made about which facilities and services should be closed to prevent the spread of COVID-19, and which are essential, and should therefore continue operating. We understand that you are relying on accurate information from subject matter experts to choose the best path forward.

In this context, the Australian Institute of Refrigeration, Air Conditioning and Heating (AIRAH) recommends that HVAC&R, building maintenance and support services be clearly identified as essential service providers.

Key facilities, such as emergency services, healthcare and public health, information technology, communications, energy, food and agriculture, government facilities and transportation systems, are all underpinned by heating, ventilation, air conditioning and refrigeration systems. In most cases, if the underlying HVAC&R systems fail, the facilities themselves will fail.

Furthermore, commercial premises will still require building maintenance, even if staff have temporarily vacated. If premises are not maintained, when they are reoccupied the essential safety and maintenance measures will not be up to date, the statutory maintenance regime will not be up to date and therefore not in compliance – and the buildings cannot be occupied.

Obviously, when any measures to control COVID-19 are relaxed, it will be vital to quickly return to normal operations. This will only be possible if our facilities are ready.

In practical terms, there are also serious issues that can arise if buildings are not maintained, particularly in water systems. These include corrosion cells and stagnant water in piping (dead legs) that can subsequently lead to further health issues such as Legionella. Today's buildings are simply not designed to be shut down for extended periods.

AIRAH calls on the government to ensure that the ongoing safety of our communities is not compromised by the failure of our essential HVAC&R systems. We recommend that any official government direction on “essential services” takes this into account.

Finally, we would point to the [recently released guidance](#) on the essential critical infrastructure workforce, released by the US Department of Homeland Security. This includes “Workers to ensure continuity of building functions” as one part of the essential workforce.



We believe Australia should do the same, and clearly identify HVAC&R, building maintenance and support services as essential service providers.

Please feel free to contact me directly if you require any additional information or clarification.

Regards

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Anthony Gleeson'.

Tony Gleeson, M.AIRAH

AIRAH Chief Executive

AIRAH's primary aim is to develop the competence and skills of industry engineering professionals and technicians so that they can better meet the public's safety, energy usage, comfort, and emission concerns. AIRAH encourages world's best practice within the industry through continuing professional development, education programs, and a wide range of technical tools and resources.

AIRAH is the only body solely focussed on representing specialist HVAC&R personnel. Practitioners who plan, design, install, commission, operate, tune, and maintain mechanical machines and systems in the built environment that include air conditioning plants, ventilation systems, chillers, cooling towers, refrigeration systems for food production and preservation applications, transport cooling systems, fire and smoke systems, medical facilities, and control systems.