

Publication Date: 19 February 2026
YSP Podcast Transcript: 475 - What AS 1851 Actually Means for Your Strata Building

Listen to this podcast episode [here](#).

Intro: Welcome to Your Strata Property, the podcast for property owners looking for reliable, accurate, and bite-sized information from an experienced and authoritative source.

Amanda Farmer: Hello, and welcome to this week's episode of the podcast. I'm your host, strata lawyer, Amanda Farmer, and I have a guest for you this week. His name is Dominic Dodwell, and he's from Valen Project Services. Dominic has 15 years experience across the Australian Construction and Facilities Management Industries, representing the Owners Corporation Network, where he was a director until late 2025.

Dominic served on the fire safety industry reference group for the implementation of AS 1851. Advocating for owners and non-technical stakeholders in the development of the AS 1851 implementation guidelines. What is AS 1851? I get straight into that with Dominic at the top of this chat. Yes, it does relate to the routine inspection.

Testing and maintenance of fire protection systems. The key point to be aware of right now is that in New South Wales, compliance with this standard AS 1851 is now a mandated requirement for residential apartment buildings. This is raising a lot of questions. I'm getting them from you. They're in my inbox.

They're in our member forum from owners, from strata managers, committee members. I had some of these questions ready to ask Dominic in this chat. His answers on the meaning and effect of AS 1851, coming right up for you now. I'll take you on over.

Amanda Farmer: Dominic Dodwell, welcome to the show.

Dominic Dodwell: Hey, Amanda. How are you?

Amanda Farmer: I'm doing very well today. You have been very busy. I think probably the last. A few months. I don't know, you might tell me this has been a year or so in the making. Thank you for making the time to come and talk to us about AS 1851. The numbers on all the strata managers' lips. This week in particular. Perhaps.

We've heard a lot, some tuning in, maybe haven't heard it at all. I want to acknowledge that. But many still don't understand. What exactly are we talking about when we say, as Australian Standard 1851? Why has it suddenly become such a big deal? In New South Wales.

Dominic Dodwell: Oh, thanks, Amanda. And yes, it has been a big couple of years actually, as you may know, this was delayed by 12 months. The implementation was supposed to be February, last year and it got pushed back to February this year. So the reference group was working hard and it was delayed for the right reasons. It was to make sure there was the right communication and knowledge.

Or at least in attempts to have the right communication and knowledge out there in the sector before actually implementing fully. So the last 12 months have been a broad kind of working group between regulators, contractors, technical specialists and standards committees and owners, representatives like myself.

I was part of the reference group on behalf of Owners Corporation Network as a former director to the organisation. I work in fire safety on a day-to-day basis. So it was quite a relevant crossover in terms of day job versus the director role that I was taking with OCN, and what I was bringing to that organisation where I could, was more the technical side of things than the general organisational side of things.

Basically, 1851 is the standard for routine service testing and maintenance. And so interspection testing and maintenance. It covers off everything that's kind of already done in New South Wales for all intents and purposes, where there's a competent kind of fire practitioner doing the maintenance work in an existing building.

Publication Date: 19 February 2026
YSP Podcast Transcript: 475 - What AS 1851 Actually Means for Your Strata Building

So the annual, like the year-to-year, the month-to-month sort of testing, and then what 1851 in its full intent does, is include. What they call high-level routines, which is your less frequent testing which try to ensure ongoing performance of systems into the future to make sure that your hydrant system, for example, if it was ever called for an emergency for the fire brigade to utilize.

It's going to function. There will be water in the system sufficiently to actually fight or fire, and that there's not going to be a failure of the system somewhere, whether it be the pumps, the pipe work, the street mains, there's so many different aspects that play into the compliance of these assets.

And 1851 is there to try and. Build confidence that the systems obviously perform long term, and also capture some of the information around and that baseline information, ongoing testing records, and it's, it is a governance piece as well as the actual practical testing side of things.

Amanda Farmer: Okay, so this is a standard that requires the routine testing of fire safety equipment, devices that perhaps until now haven't needed to be tested as frequently. Is that what I heard you say? So. While buildings have known for quite some time about the process of their annual fire safety statement, AFSS AS 1851 requires a different type of inspection, investigation of different equipment or just more frequently. What's the difference?

Dominic Dodwell: It's enforcing the frequency of things. In the past, for example, a fire panel is supposed to be inspected monthly, and tested monthly. Different fire contractors apply. Interpretation and kind of, it was a bit unregulated in that sense. So now this is about enforcing those sorts of controls around the frequency and also introduce those less frequent, the less frequent tests and more invasive.

So, a really good example of that is hydrostatic testing by hydrant, where they pressurize the system similar to what would happen in the event of firetruck boosting up pressure in the system, and ensure that the actual pipe work infrastructure and all the valve infrastructure in the building can actually handle that pressure and wouldn't fail in the event that it was called upon in our emergency scenario.

So that's just one example. Similar with sprinkler head testing, for example. There's lots of sprinkler heads out there, been 30, 40 plus years and never been looked at. They just, if fire contractor walks through the building and they can see that the sprinkler rangers go the whole way through the building and trust that they would perform in the event of the fire.

So if sprinkler head testing is on a 25-year routine. It's about taking a sample of his heads out, sending them off to a laboratory testing to make sure they operate in the correct function fit in a fit for purpose kind of scenario. And then you can obviously retain the remainder of what you've got on site.

Obviously, if they've failed, then it would be a case of having to do further work, but it's obviously all there for the right reasons and trying to make sure that these systems, which are implemented based on the scale, the use or otherwise within a building do obviously perform when they're most required.

Amanda Farmer: Okay, so you've said that this is about enforcing the controls, and maybe these controls have been around for a while, and this requirement to do inspections and testing has been around for a while, but perhaps hasn't been enforced. Who is enforcing this? Is this local council staff? Is this state government staff?

Dominic Dodwell: It's a council-regulated thing and obviously that varies as well. That's been part, part of the interesting outcomes from my perspective, at least with the reference group, is understanding how council varies from area to area. City councils, for example, have got a lot more resources, a lot more skillset within the council, whereas some more remote councils, for example, may not even take on the burden of managing an AFSS process in New South Wales.

So those areas are all subject to different kinds of application of rules. What was good to see is there's definitely a community amongst the councils and a lot of support from the larger, more kind of informed councils in the city, especially in Sydney and you know, the various kind of areas of Sydney in supporting those kind of remote locations.

And then it's interesting as well, there's some very good specialists in other areas who are on the fire safety reference group. A lot of knowledge and input to how to best implement this sort of thing. The intention from the regulator is definitely not to use the stick as such, it's very much trying to get things in place, and operating.

It's in everyone's best interest to maintain proactively. I'm sure you've done many a podcasts about the path of least resistance and the, you know, the most efficient use of funds are the proactive use of funds, not a reactive use of funds. And, this is no different. This is resilience in strata and trying to give owners more information on their own buildings and understanding what sits within them.

And in turn, being able to make good decisions and understand and actually have a realistic capital worktime plan and all these different things where you can forecast and actually know what to expect rather than every year being a roll of the dice as to what comes at you in that following period.

Amanda Farmer: Some of the. Panic, I'm going to say Dominic, that I've been hearing from owners and a couple of the owners have told me that they feel it's coming from their strata managers, is that there is this understanding, and maybe you'll tell me, it's a misunderstanding, that this is a standard now that requires upgrades and new equipment and older buildings too get with the times and become compliant with current codes and that might mean expensive new equipment and infrastructure for some older buildings.

Is that the case, or is it about, you know, you only need to comply with the code that was applicable at the time your building was constructed, which has sort of been our, always our general understanding.

Dominic Dodwell: That's right. There's definitely no. The 1851, it doesn't call for an upgrade. There's not no part of the standard which calls for an upgrade. There's obviously different scenarios that you go down, which could end up triggering something within a building. However, the intent of this is not related to that. Obviously, the outlying example might be, for example, you do a hydrostatic test in the building and pipe work fails on the ground or in the rises through the building, and you then having to address a relatively major kind of repair or further testing and potentially triggering replacement of an asset in its entirety.

At that point, you may consider whether you want to do something to a more current standard, because it might be better use of funding to do it to that later standard. Fire panels are an interesting example because if you have a fire panel at the end of its life. You can't necessarily buy a panel off the shelf that actually complies with historic standards. You can only buy some, which complies to the more current standards, and then you're left with a bit of a hybrid system because the wiring probably doesn't comply to the new standard.

You might have to replace all the detector heads and speakers and that kind of thing to suit to various kind of iterations of scope, depending on what has failed in the system. And at that point you may then be required to sort of negotiate partial upgrade with council or something similar to that. But the essence of 1851 is a straight up, no, there is no mandate to upgrade anything under the maintenance. It's a maintenance standard, not an upgrade.

Amanda Farmer: Okay, so the buildings are going to be assessed where they're at. I hear what you're saying though, that, you know, in the process of testing equipment that perhaps hasn't been tested for 20 plus years and maybe a recommendation that there needs to be a repair and the most cost-effective way to repair that could be replacement, do you think where that's sometimes where, maybe mistrust or cynicism comes from from owners where they get these huge quotes back from a service provider who might have been recommended by their strata manager, and all of a sudden they're saying, we've never had to pay for this or service this or deal with this for the last 20 years.

Now we have to, what's changed? We don't understand it. This all looks like a money-making exercise for everyone involved. Can you speak to that at all? Do you see that happening, and is there a better way for contractors and strata managers to deal with that and to communicate how this is happening to owners knowing that that's the attitude that some owners do have out there?

Dominic Dodwell: Yes, it is definitely a difficult one because. Fire safety as a collective group of trades, effectively, tradespeople under that kind of banner of fire. Fire is not just one trade discipline. It's basically all of them. You've got electrical side of things, you've got wet fire. So you've got, you know, effectively plumbers come, sprinkler fitters and pump technicians, and there's a lot of specialist knowledge.

Fire panels are a combination of ultra low voltage electrical systems, same with your warning systems and yada, yada, yada. There's lots of complexity to systems. I've seen lots of, again, lots of different examples of things failing and some of them are spectacular. Some of them are pretty boring. It's pretty easy to fix the maintenance-related sort of fixes.

Then when you've got large buildings with complex asset groups, you've got interconnected mechanical systems and stair pressurization systems connected to detection and sprinklers and everything else, it gets a lot more complicated. And when things go badly, they can obviously cost significant amounts of money to repair.

And, obviously, there's also, again, another topic. I'm sure you. Of course on a million occasions is the defect side of things coming out of what was new construction 20 years ago. You know, something like passive, for example, isn't well understood in the industry. At the best of times, there's a handful of companies who really know what they're doing properly and it is an area where a lot of historic buildings, through no fault of their own, no fault of the building owners, it's nothing to do with the maintenance.

Things just weren't done right in the first place. And there's always that argument when we take on a project is, Oh, the building was signed off. It was a certifier or council accepted this, and it's, it's every project, and I get it. Like if I was in that person's position, I'd feel exact the same, and it's unjust and it's always. It's very unlucky for the the owners at the point in time who are holding the stick when they realise how bad something might be.

And I appreciate the owners who get on with things, and I also appreciate the position of the owners who wants to push back and fight tooth and nail with things. But it's not easy as you'd know, trying to fight historic kind of basically evidence of something doesn't work in a building. After the fact. But yes, the various works that you may need to do, is very much down to the knowledge of your building, and basically under understanding what you've got, what you need to maintain, and then how to best maintain that.

And the most important thing to owners, especially in strata because there's such an attrition of strata managers and contractors and building managers and strata committee members and everybody else, and there's not a great record keeping system in some cases, like Strata Hub and stuff like that. Hopefully does obviously take on a part of this moving forward.

It's really essential for the life of somebody's ownership in a building. Make sure you keep everything that you can potentially keep your hands on, because the minute you rely on somebody else, they're relying on somebody else, and you'll lose records. And it's very difficult to get them back after the fact. It can be a really extensive process to also reverse engineer and try and work out what the original intent was for certain things.

So yes, it's a very difficult kind of topic and a question to answer because there's definitely bad players out there in certain sectors, but there's also a lot of people trying to do the right thing, potentially. It's not communicating very well, and I think one of the sentiments, which was not gratefully received is the last minute six figure quotation that comes in a month before the AFSS is due with almost a bail bondsman forcing the issue to get the AFSS over the lines. It just doesn't feel great, you know, the way that it's received.

Amanda Farmer: Yes, and I suppose the fear is that this is only now going to get worse because there's going to be a lot more to do. The standard is now being enforced, more expensive, more serious work to be done, contractors busier than ever before, contractors quoting more than ever before, and it all just lands back in the strata owner's lap. That's not fair.

And thank you for sharing those examples where, you know, it has been the original, this has been a problem since the building was constructed and it's left. To the owners at that point in time to deal with. It's not fair, but I can see where the work of the reference group and the focus of the reference group has been on safety and the politics and the policy is on safety, and it has to be. I mean, we've seen too much tragedy around the world that we hope is not going to come to our..

Dominic Dodwell: And I think it should be something similar to Design Building Practitioners Act as well, where implementation of better routine maintenance and testing should reduce that kind of gap in the knowledge where there are these big kind of issues lurking, unaccounted for. So, it's really about kind of rounding out that side of things qualitatively as well. It's not just about. It's obviously safety, and performance of the systems, but there's people might not perceive it as a positive to start with, because obviously there can be costs involved. But there's no linkage between an AFSS and 1851 as well. I think 1851 is not on the fire safety schedule.

Amanda Farmer: Sorry, just say that again. 1851 is not on the fire safety schedule?

Dominic Dodwell: Fire safety schedule.

Amanda Farmer: So your AFSS process is not what's changing here?

Dominic Dodwell: That's not changing. No, that's right. So the AFSS process will be still signed off by the accredited practitioner fire safety year on year as it is currently. That's unchanged. That person. Or the company that person's working for is likely the company or also being engaged to coordinate the testing to 1851. Got it. But there's no formal sign-off by the contractor to that. They will provide records of the testing. So if they do a hydrostatic test or if they did that sprinkler head testing, there'll be documentation that comes with that, the evidence when it was done and who did it, and then that's on the owners to then maintain those records long term and ensure that nothing's lost along the way.

But there's, yes, there's, there's no further mandate under 1851 with regards to annual fire safety statements. The caveat to that would obviously be that if. You do a test under the 1851 regime, and something doesn't pass, and there is a failure of some sort of non-conformance in the system, that contractor can obviously reference that and say, well, there's work that needs to be done here before I can sign off on that measure. So it's, there's an interconnection, but they're not the same thing. The AS 1851 piece is definitely adjacent to the AFSS process.

Amanda Farmer: So what happens if you don't do your AS 1851 testing? What's going to happen? What is the consequence of non-compliance?

Dominic Dodwell: Obviously council has mechanisms within the regulatory kind of space to enforce fines, and otherwise you obviously need to keep your records. There's different log books you already need to keep for different systems. There's a, there's an 1851 log book that will be retained on site. You need to keep those records for seven years, and obviously if you don't maintain to those standards, at some point somebody could come knocking. I suppose, I think especially.

And much the same as an existing scenario where fire brigade gets called out because of false alarms and that might trigger a fire order because they see the site and they realise this is a disaster waiting to happen. It'll be much the same as, you know, if fire brigade attends site or council attend site on a noise complaint or something else and they have a quick look around while they're there and they realise.

Hold on a second. If they're doing a checklist and none of these regulatory requirements are covered or visibly and available to them, which they should be potentially, then it might trigger them to kind of ask a few more questions and dig below the surface, and that's probably more likely the scenario that it will trigger. It's another mechanism that might trigger future fire orders and those sorts of requirements.

Amanda Farmer: Got it. So while we're talking about the kind of information that needs to be kept, you've mentioned there seven years. That is something that is clear in this standard as I understand it. I mean, let's, let's be honest, we need to be keeping records longer than that. But now this seven-year requirement is very clear for these testing and fire safety measure records.

This concept, you briefly touched on it or mentioned it earlier, this concept of baseline data. I've had this question come up from a couple of strata managers very recently. They're telling me that they're struggling with this requirement that baseline data now be kept on site, and it is the responsibility of the owners corporation to keep this baseline data. I think until now there's been this assumption that, well, we engage contractors.

The contractors test maintain. Inspect the fire systems. They have all the data. They understand what's here at our site. How is it that owners corporations are now being made responsible for this? What even is this data? What do we have to do? Can you help us with that, Dominic?

Dominic Dodwell: Yes, sure. So I think the best analogy for it is probably a car. You obviously have to maintain your testing, you know, inspection records to demonstrate for warranty purposes, obviously for registration purposes as well. So it's somewhat indifferent to that. On a larger scale, obviously, and with farmer moving parts. So, from my experience working across commercial and residential and all multi-use assets talking from the big four banks through to a three lot kind of strata building, the biggest complexity comes from relying on contractors to do all the work for you.

They're there to do one thing. They're not there to be your administrators if you're a building owner. The 1851, which is being endorsed and called upon is amendment one. The original 1851 had a lot more kind of broad-based on data requirements and other kind of record keeping and other bits and pieces. The amendment one limited based on data down to water supply requirements for your wet fire system, so sprinklers, ants, and pumps.

However, and this was again, a large topic of discussion amongst the fire safety reference group. It's also worth acknowledging that baseline data is applicable across lots of different measures, even if it's not court-fought by 1851. In order to properly maintain your building, if you use fire doors, for example, any reputable fire company will use a system and they'll log the assets, and then they'll put barcodes on all those assets, and as they go around the building, they'll test them and tick them off year on year to say.

This asset's passed or it's failed this time. And here's the defect and here's the reason why. And here's this photograph, and here's the quote. When it comes to other assets, which somewhat in my opinion, sit through the cracks a little bit this time around with especially like passive fire and that kind of thing, there's no mandated call for passive register, for example.

Under 1851, under the amendment, one version, at least there was under the original version, and obviously 1851 is subject to future changes. There's lots of discussion around what that may or may not include, including digital record keeping, that kind of thing to try and alleviate this kind of antiquated logbook on-site concept. The logbook site has a good point because. It's accessible to brigades and otherwise, reference.

However, having digital records, you know, the way of the world if we can get ahead of that code, is going to make everyone's life a lot easier as well. It's my recommendation from seeing all the buildings that we work on day to day, is to start collating what you can from original records, because the more knowledge you have about the building that you own in. The less work you have to do if there's ever a trigger to sort of have to justify yourself or demonstrate a level of compliance to council, or otherwise around these other measures.

One of the things we've also seen is that the sooner you get onto asking for historic information from contractors to do work, you know, you might actually find that contractors are still trading and willing to give you test reports and certificates and you know their information as to what they signed off on the basis of. And that's worth its weight in gold because somebody else coming in after the fact trying to determine what was done and how and to what standard that was supposed to work, and all the rest of it can be a really, really difficult job.

And it might end up with a fair bit of rework as well, which is, you know, the worst case scenario is, you know, you pay for something five years ago under a fire order. You get another fire order and you have to do some of the work again, because the records just aren't there to verify, and that's not a throwaway comment. We've got an example of a very large complex where they did a fire order probably only 10, 12 years ago, and then they had a catastrophic failure, that detection system, which forced an emergency order from brigade.

And then we've gone back and tried to obtain test reports and stuff for different works. And because the qualitative process failed in the closeout of that previous order, there was enough certificates and everything to get counsel off their facts. When it came to actually getting somebody to sign off on that previous work again, now they just said straight up, No, it's not possible. It does not comply. And that puts owners in a really difficult situation because they've already paid to fix it once. You know, they really shouldn't be having to pay for it a second time.

Amanda Farmer: Okay. So that's a really good tip there for strata managers and for committee members. When you have a fire safety practitioner doing work on your building, you are saying Dominic, to ask them for, can you give the language? What are we asking them for when they've completed their work?

Dominic Dodwell: So any work that somebody does, regardless of what it is, obviously ask for, you know, if it's only minor related work, you might just get a job card or something to reflect. Detectives will change and what locations and that just, it's more based on information for the owner's benefit to reference for warranty purposes and that kind of thing. If you've gone through a more substantial kind of upgrade, you would really want people to provide some information as to the work they did, the systems that they've used, the standards to which they're comply and provides sign off to those standards, along with any commissioning data and information and any designs.

You know the fire industry, again, it has to deal with a lot of variables and complexity, and it's only 2016 that the AFSS was, or competent practitioner, fire safety, that became a better practitioner. Fire safety, even existed, you know, before that owners were just signing off on their buildings. It wasn't even a competent person that was signing off on the AFSS. It's come a long way and obviously with various other elements, the design side of things has also come a long way. But there's a lot of design still being done by fire contractors.

And they're not independent engineers. And they're not holding themselves the same sort of governance that an engineering firm would in terms of record keeping. And I suppose the dissemination of information to owners and, and you know, there's that attrition as well. Systems and people within companies, I mean, they lose those records quite quickly if you're not careful.

Amanda Farmer: So, asking for designs. Good tip. If we can just return to the current requirement in amendment number one for the AS 1851. Just to be clear for our strata managers, I think what you've said there, Dominic, is water supply a requirement around the water supply? Is that the only strict one at the moment in terms of baseline data? Did I hear you say, or is there other baseline data that has to be?

Dominic Dodwell: Based on the current information? That's the item that needs to be addressed at this point in time. So that's the pressure and flow kind of analysis, making sure there's enough water in the system so when people are testing their pump sets, they'll have, you'll receive a graph on a yearly basis via flow testing just to demonstrate that the system still complies with its set point so that IE can achieve the pressure and flows to the most disadvantaged point in the building. So that's the one item that's kind of identified.

Amanda Farmer: Okay. But if we're being proactive and acting sensibly, conservatively, knowing that there's going, this is just the beginning, there's going to be more requirements down the track. Collecting as much of that data as possible now is a good step.

Dominic Dodwell: Especially if it's a newer building. Because now's your kind of one chance to really try and extract any information that wasn't part of it. An occupation certificate pack or otherwise it went to council as part of the planning consent. So you know, whether it comes out through a defect process as well. Always a good idea to have an independent set of buyers. If fire contracts who happen to do the work for the developer is still involved with the building, you might want to get somebody else to have a quick look at it.

And also just play devil's advocate to what information you do have, because what we've sting as the commissioning information for mechanical systems like step pressurization. It's very interpretive and it's very hard to reverse engineer, especially when a system's failed and trying to work out what potentially could have achieved at the time and whether it had, you know, compliant to what standard.

So any sort of information you can get, the original certificates for design declarations, obviously now on the DBP, if you can get all that sort of information, which all should definitely form part of that planning package that goes to certifier or council and yes, obviously, older buildings it's a lot harder to get information. We've got buildings in the eastern suburbs in Sydney where we have applied to council and other stakeholders, strata owners. There isn't a single drawing or record that building exist.

Amanda Farmer: Yes, I'm not surprised.

Dominic Dodwell: So that's, that's a challenge itself. And yes, I don't expect to go and find everything for your building when it is an older building like that. The one really notable thing though, with those older buildings is that when you are like this, this isn't 1851, this is just general kind of advice is with passive, especially if you don't have passive listed on your AFSS or if it is listed, but it's got an older reference standard and people provide quotes, just make sure you're only compliant to the standard that was listed.

Because we have an example of a building in Ola where we coordinated the passive reports. The owners selected a company. They did an inspection. They provided the report, we reviewed it. We pushed back on the reference standards that they had into the report because the fire order was actually only calling for an older set. It was only calling for the original standard of performance, and their report was calling for 2015 standards, which is a world apart for a 1980s building.

We went through the tender process because we got pushback, and they were like, No, this is what you have to do. Went through the tender process, selected who we thought was the best contractor on the premise of the work that we believe needed to be done, and what was an \$85,000 quote, got knocked down to 20 in one site visit just by going through and asking the question of their technical specialist, "Does this comply to X standard from the 1980s?" And they're like, "Yes, it does. I said, so why is it in your report then?"

Amanda Farmer: See, this is exactly what owners are talking about and why they feel they're getting screwed over. They don't have the knowledge to say it only has to comply with the standard that was listed on the AFSS, or whatever it is. They don't have this knowledge.

Dominic Dodwell: No, that's right. I mean, even commercial kind of asset managers would struggle with some of the technicalities. So when you've got an average draft committee, they don't sign a chance. And in fairness to some of the fire companies, there's a lot of really young people who are the inverse commerce experts in these spaces, and they don't necessarily bring the same, like fire companies are mandated to achieve compliance. So that's all they, and that's the right tunnel of vision that they should have.

They are looking to defects, they're looking to fix problems, but then when it comes to interpretation and going, okay, but achieve compliance. To a mirror universe 30, 40 years ago, and they just, they really struggle sometimes to actually achieve that. So that's, that's the biggest gap and that's where, you know, for us, when we are running firewalls and fire upgrades and coordinating complex AFSS issues and that kind of thing, we can really add a lot of value because we can just cut straight through that and really keep people on track and make sure the owners get what they need and not.

Not always. I mean, everyone always says don't goal play things. And I agree, but Australian standards are the minimum standards. On the maximum standards. Yes. So there's a kind of compromise in there somewhere, but

Amanda Farmer: Yes. But you know, from 85 grand to 20 grand worth spending a few dollars on getting some guidance there. You've mentioned it a few times now, Dominic, and it would be remiss of me not to call it out and ask you to explain it. For those who don't know what passive fire safety measures are, can you explain that for us?

Dominic Dodwell: So passive is the separation of compartments within a building. So in an apartment building level to level through the slab needs to be two different fire compartments, especially from car parks into residential floors and commercial, even residential to residential. And then each of the units is supposed to be separated from each other, and it's just about compartmenting. So if a fire breaks out in one location, it doesn't grow beyond that point.

So, the main considerations are just the fire collars around your plumbing traps and obviously fire seals around electrical penetrations and the dampers that go into your mechanical duct work. There's lightweight systems and the whole bunch, there's a whole host of different things, but essentially it's anything which has to poke through a wall between two areas of the building, and there should be a compliant treatment applied to those things.

Amanda Farmer: And of course, we know where owners are carrying out renovations may be penetrating firewalls and not then making sure that those penetrations are properly sealed. That's what you're talking about. Where then contractors are coming in seeing a couple of these and thinking, God, how many of these are there in the building? Things start to get expensive if we're not keeping track of that.

Dominic Dodwell: A good example is top-floor units in any eastern suburbs building, you know, the red brick style buildings. Everyone's put downlights in as a retrofit. Every single downlight becomes a penetration because that ceiling's supposed to be fire-rated.

Amanda Farmer: Right? You heard it here, guys. You can't hardly hear that now. Alright, so let's try and bring some of this together. If I put my committee member hat on, I'm a committee member for my building, and my strata manager sent me what looks very obviously like a template letter that they're sending to all buildings, saying from February, AS 1851 is now going to be enforced. This is really serious. We are getting quotes for a fire safety practitioner to come out, inspect the joint, do their testing, and let us know if there's needs to be anything done around your building.

Is that kind of what our committee members should be expecting, and is that the right thing for strata managers to do? And if you're getting that letter as a community member. Do you have any advice for us on how and what instructions we issue? What we then do with our strata manager?

Dominic Dodwell: Yes, the most important thing is understanding your building. Determine the application of 1851. The most important consideration is there's a date cut-off, prior to which buildings are not eligible to 1851, unless they've been subject to future upgrades.

Amanda Farmer: Okay.

Publication Date: 19 February 2026
YSP Podcast Transcript: 475 - What AS 1851 Actually Means for Your Strata Building

Dominic Dodwell: So anything pre July 1st, 1988.

Amanda Farmer: July 1st, 1988. If your building is older than that?

Dominic Dodwell: Yes. And hasn't been through a subsequent upgrade, so that might have been a fire order. It might have been council issuing a fire safety schedule through that far process, or there might have been a change of use to the building. So it might have gone from a company title to a strata, for example, that would be a sufficient change, which would've triggered the update effectively, and generates the fire safety schedule. So the fire safety schedule, by definition, includes a essential fire safety measures.

Buildings prior to that 1988 date don't include the essential fire safety measures, by definition in the way that the regulations changed over time. So there's a big caveat there that is obviously a huge subset of buildings.

Amanda Farmer: Yes. However, can I just stop you there? Am I right that if your building does submit an annual fire safety statement, it has been brought into this regime as come in the past?

Dominic Dodwell: That's right. If you've got a fire safety schedule and an AFSS is being issued, then yes, you need to obviously comply. There may be other kind of nuanced interpretations while the odd thing falls in out the category, but typically the rule is if the building doesn't have the fire safety schedule, and it's pre 1988, 1st of July, 1988. Then you're exempt from 1851. By that definition, there are other parts of the regulation which still call for assets to be maintained. And obviously, 1851 is a guideline as much as it is a now regulated standard that it does demonstrate what best practice for maintenance looks like.

So realistically, if you also want to keep council off your back and maintain your building accordingly, you're probably still best to align with the sort of expectations set out by the standard. But yes, there's definitely no obligation as such. So firstly, yes, understand if your building even applies. If it does understand what assets you've got in the building, and work with your fire company to work out which assets have those high-level routines. Which aren't currently being undertaken. Some buildings are already doing the five-yearly testing.

Some fire companies are already pushing that agenda. They're doing tank drain dams and cleans. They're doing the hydrostatic tests, and they're doing other kind of items and within that bucket anyway. It's mostly on an elective basis. They're just sending through quotes as part of a, I mean obviously some would consider it. They're just trying to create work for themselves. Others are saying, well, they're doing that, but they're actually already implementing what's best practice like AS 1851 ones already implemented across the vast majority of Australia.

So with to the table in many ways in New South Wales. So yes, if you're building requires 1851 based on date or fire safety schedule or otherwise, and then work out what assets you've got that would be aligned with 1851. With your fire company to work out what that looks like when things are due. Another really important interpretation of the implementation of the standard is that it comes into effect last week. Ideally are not due for five years. Doesn't matter how old the building is.

Amanda Farmer: Okay, so let's just be clear on that. 13th of Feb, 2026 was the start date. If you need to do testing every five years, that testing is going to be due in five years time. Great point.

Dominic Dodwell: Which is a really big kind of grace period because that was another discussion we were having as part of the reference group was how do we implement this in order to not over create this huge over demand in a really short period of time. And when they came back with that, it wasn't quite what I was expecting. I was assuming there was some sort of method of madness, but left it to the people. So we'll see what happens next. My only suggestion would be is obviously, don't defer more than you have to. Like I understand, like there's going to be a lot of proactive people putting their hand up and getting on with it.

And there's a lot of obviously, commercial and other asset groups which are going to be enforcing every chance insurance gets hold of this and says, right, where's your testing for 1851? Because much like remedial and water ingress, it just becomes another kind of tick in the box for them to reference policies. And yes, don't leave it for five years because I can guarantee you 2031 is going to be a really good year for the five years.

Amanda Farmer: Yes, absolutely. And knowing that there's the opportunity to get more than one opinion, there's the opportunity to bring in people like yourselves. And your company's not the only one out there. I know providing these services in a sort of a project management perspective is that kind of the right way to drive you. And especially if you do get a quote that you know is looking like, I'm not sure we have to do that. Get that expert guidance. Get that second opinion.

Dominic Dodwell: Yes. So especially in the fire space, I mean, we work across remedial defect claims and fire, fire and remedial make are two kind of biggest pieces of the pie for us. But the fire side of things, we manage anything from, you know, complex AFSS issues where people are failing to achieve compliance on one or two measures. And it's often those kind of passive and, major detection works where systems have completely failed, and you are effectively having to undertake some level of upgrade.

And one other thing I didn't notice before, as well, actually is with the hydrant systems. Fire brigades do not really endorse Ordinance 70 Systems anymore. So there's a lot of triggers for upgrade around that space as well. But again, 1851 shouldn't be the trigger of it unless the system fails the hydrostatic test.

If it does, that's probably another one where you are not doing your best interest to just maintain the existing standard because it's basically an additional boost. It's like a different boost to set up. The valve should be done on a five-year basis moving forward anyway to make them comply, and doing your pressure and flow analysis to see if there's enough water into streets to service without a pump.

And if you do need a pump, then obviously you again, best doing things in accordance with later standards so you don't trigger further works down the track. But yes, that's in a nutshell. Those kind of works that we are doing, like the largest side of upgrades, like if it's only a few thousand dollars, we obviously have a really good baseline of information ourselves.

We are reviewing these quotes day in, day out. So we quickly check quotes and just say, okay, do we think it's worth getting comparable quotes? Obviously, if it goes over 30,000 bucks threshold. Again, it's over to that scenario anyway. But in terms of the annual kind of quotes and that kind of thing, we can review very quickly and determine whether or not we think there's any gaps in the story being told and what cost space looks like, et cetera.

And we can also provide any level of touchpoint in terms of whether it's just how to go and get your reporting done by third parties, because what you get back in the initial inspection reports is absolutely essential on the next step to then go and get tenders back from multiple parties. If you only get a very light amount of information in a report and you haven't mandated, they must provide, then I'll use passive against must example.

But you've got the wall system, five resistance level you're supposed to achieve, the type of penetration that's there, and then what they're proposing to use as a tested system. That then gives anybody the opportunity to provide a comparative price. Otherwise, they'll take an angular photograph. They'll really poorly describe what the penetration looks like.

The wall system might not even be nominated, and then any other company providing a comparative quote probably has to go and do that work for free to inspect. Determine for themselves what the scenario is. And at that comparable quote, there's so much work out there. So these guys, you know, they're not necessarily throwing away their time to chase being the second quote. So, really asking for the right information up front is absolutely essential.

Publication Date: 19 February 2026
YSP Podcast Transcript: 475 - What AS 1851 Actually Means for Your Strata Building

Amanda Farmer: And perhaps spending the time and the energy, and inevitably the money on getting that first report. Right, you are saying, can save you money down the track. You're going to get more quotes, you're going to get better quotes, more accurate quotes, and then you can cherry-pick from there. I suppose to the extent you are legally able to, at least you've got the quotes in front of you, and you can say, yes, do this bit, but not that bit.

Dominic Dodwell: That's right. And with good information. Again, tenderers will look at things and give you innovation. They'll suggest different alternatives and foreign engineer strategies and different things where you can, you know, we had a building up in the northern suburb of Sydney where it was a couple of hundred collars, which are all noncompliant. They were not fit for purpose. They would've been if they'd been installed five years earlier. But they were installed incorrectly by a really shocking developer who everyone would know their name.

And we managed to get a fire engineer solution to retain all of those colors on the premise that they're not perfect, but it's not reasonable to expect that people go in and retrofit every single bathroom waste throughout a 60 lot building and create all the damage, and then the reinstatement works in the off chance, you know it is still going to provide a level of safety. Yes, it's not perfect. It's that kind of acceptable compromise again, which is. It's a lot of where the fire space, especially in retrofit and existing buildings needs to live because it's far too difficult. It's almost impossible in a lot of cases to achieve full compliance.

Amanda Farmer: Well, good to know that those other solutions can be acceptable if you're aware of them, if you know that they're out there. Alright, so that's all we have time for, Dominic. And I'm certain that we haven't answered everybody's questions and there are still questions out there about implementing AS 1851 and making sure we're all compliant. So where can our listeners go to getting in touch with you to find out more about working with you? Where do you want to send them?

Dominic Dodwell: Visit the website, so, valenprojects.com.au. I'll send you some links. There's a couple of blog posts relating to 1851 I can share to you as well. And I'll also share, I'm sure you went into the notes for today. There's links to the New South Wales government website with the different practice guides and also the owners' obligations for 1851, which help to round out any of the points which I haven't either touched on or explained sufficiently and yet, otherwise reach out to me on, on LinkedIn or like I said, just through the website and happy to assist across, any scale of job we work in strata. It's the vast majority of what we do.

And yes, that fire, the water ingress, any of those sorts of existing building problems is day-to-day lives, working with committees and engineers and contractors. So yes, just reach out.

Amanda Farmer: Awesome. So that's VA projects, V-A-L-E-N projects. We will make sure we have a link to the website in our show notes for today. Thank you so much, Dominic, for generously sharing your wealth of knowledge. There's a lot there. I think there's going to be a few people reading, listening to this a couple times and perhaps reading the transcript as well. The more you read about this, you know, as you said, I think there's blog posts out there.

There's webinars, there's the New South Wales government website as well. Please do if you're a committee member, if you're a strata manager trying to explain this to your committees. Keep yourself up to date and educated, and reach out to Dominic if you have more questions.

Dominic Dodwell: Thanks so much, Amanda.

Amanda Farmer: Thank you very much. Bye for now.

Dominic Dodwell: See you.

Intro: Thank you for listening to Your Strata Property, the podcast which consistently delivers to property owners reliable and accurate information about their strata property. You can access all the information below this episode via the show notes at yourstrataproperty.com.au.