Fire Protection Industry (ODS & SGG) Board

Fire Protection Industry Permit Scheme

What is the fire protection industry permit scheme?

In July 2005, the Australian Government implemented the fire protection industry permit scheme to support regulations under the Ozone Protection and Synthetic Greenhouse Gas Management Act 1989 (Ozone Act). The permit scheme ensures all fire protection technicians and companies handling, trading in and/or disposing of scheduled extinguishing agents in Australia are suitably knowledgeable and can competently handle bulk gas or related equipment.

What is the role of the Fire Protection Industry (ODS & SGG) Board?

The Fire Protection Industry (ODS & SGG) Board (the Board) administers the permit scheme on behalf of the Australian Government.

The Board is responsible for granting extinguishing agent handling licences (EAHL), extinguishing agent trading authorisations (EATA) and halon special permits (HSP) to technicians and companies that demonstrate they can competently work with ODS and SGG.

The Board also:

• identifies, promotes, and supports 'best practice' activities throughout the fire protection industry

• communicates and consults with the fire protection industry to educate and support regulatory compliance

• develops and distributes information on scheduled extinguishing agents to support those working in the fire protection industry.

What are scheduled extinguishing agents?

Scheduled extinguishing agents are ozone depleting substances (ODS) and synthetic greenhouse gases (SGG) listed in Schedule 1 of the Ozone Act commonly used within the fire protection industry. While effective, these types of agents pose significant risks to the environment:

Ozone-depleting substances damage the ozone layer, allowing more ultra-violet radiation from the sun to pass through, causing harm to human health.

Synthetic greenhouse gases often replaced ODS in the fire protection and refrigeration and air conditioning industries. SGG do not damage the ozone layer, but as greenhouse gases they contribute to climate change and must be controlled and managed.

ODS and SGG scheduled under the Ozone Act include, but are not limited to:

Commonly used	Limited use
Heptafluoropropane (HFC–227ea) (FM200®)	Tichlorofluoromethane (CFC-11)
Bromochlorodifluoromethane (BCF) (Halon 1211)	Trifluromethane (HFC-23)
Bromotrifluoromethane (BTM) (Halon 1301)	Pentafluoroethane (HFC-125)
Hydrochlorofluorocarbon (HCFC Blend A and HCFC Blend C) (NAF S-III, NAF P-III)	

What is the purpose of the legislation?

The Ozone Act and supporting Regulations protect the environment by controlling the manufacture, import, export, buying, storing, selling, and handling of scheduled substances, including some extinguishing agents used by the fire protection industry in Australia.
These controls:

- Promote the responsible management of scheduled substances to minimise their impact on the atmosphere.
- Implement Australia's obligations under various international conventions and protocols.
- Encourage industry to replace substances that damage the environment.

To see a full list of scheduled extinguishing agents and to read more about the common use of ODS and SGG in fire protection, click here.

Permits and licensing

The permit scheme offers the following types of licence, authorisation and permits:

EAHL- Extinguishing Agent Handling Licence
Individuals who handle a scheduled extinguishing agent that is, has been, or is used for fire protection must hold an EAHL or a Special Circumstances Exemption. There are six types of EAHLs and the work you do determines which one(s) you need.
Handling means to do anything that carries the risk of emission, including:

- Decanting the agent,
- Installing or maintaining fire protection
- Decommissioning or disposing of fire protection equipment.

There are three licence classes available:

EAHL - Qualified Persons Licence – for technicians who have completed the necessary training.

EAHL - Experienced Persons Licence – for technicians who can demonstrate they are suitably qualified due to previous relevant experience or supervision.

Extinguishing Agent Trainee Licence – for technicians under the active supervision of a holder of a licence relevant to the work being undertaken.

To view the full suite of licence types, entitlements, and units of competency, please click here.

EATA- Extinguishing Agent Trading Authorisation
An EATA is required by an individual or company buying, storing, selling, or disposing of bulk containers of scheduled extinguishing agent (other than halon) that is for use, or has been used, in fire protection equipment.
An EATA is not required for containers that are physically attached and forms part of an installed fire protection system or extinguisher or where the ODS or SGG is contained within the equipment (e.g., a portable extinguisher).

HSP- Halon Special Permit
An HSP is required by an individual or company possessing halon for use in fire protection equipment or systems.
An HSP is not required for containers of halon physically attached and forming part of an installed fire protection system or extinguisher or where the ODS or SGG is contained within the equipment (e.g., a portable extinguisher containing halon).

Application forms for an EAHL, EATA and HSP are available here.

Permit Conditions

Technicians and companies in the fire protection industry who hold a licence, permit or authorisation are required to meet the conditions of their licence, permit or authorisation. These conditions are in place to prevent avoidable emissions of an extinguishing agent and, where required, ensure appropriate records are kept.
Details of the conditions are included with the licence, permit or authorisation. In addition, the Board encourages technicians to work in accordance with the ODS and SGG Good Practice Guide which offers guidance on industry best practice for working with scheduled substances.
The Good Practice guide is available here.

State licensing

State licensing requirements are different to the fire protection industry permit scheme and do not cover technicians under the Ozone Regulations.
It is important that technicians and companies obtain the permits relevant to their work under both Australian and state legislation as required. Technicians and companies found working with scheduled extinguishing agents without the appropriate licence, permit or authorisation may be subject to penalties under ozone legislation. More information on these penalties is available here.

ODS and SGG discharges

While uncommon, accidental discharges of ODS and SGG extinguishing agents do occur. Accidents are usually caused by:

- Human error/ system not isolated
- Equipment malfunction
- Lack of technical knowledge
- Inadequate maintenance

Using only licensed technicians to maintain a fire protection system will reduce the risk, and expense, of an unintentional discharge.
Licensed technicians responsible for the maintenance of a system are requested to notify the Board if a discharge occurs. This will help develop education material and industry specific advice.

Information for facility managers

While facility managers do not need to be licensed under the permit scheme, they should ensure any gaseous fire protection systems they manage are regularly maintained by a licensed technician.
Why is it important to only use licensed technicians?

- They ensure the system is fully functional in the event of a fire.
- Extinguishing agents are stored in cylinders under very high pressure. If these cylinders are not properly handled and maintained, they can pose a significant safety risk due to the amount of stored energy contained within.
- There have been cases of people being severely injured and even killed when cylinders have been accidentally discharged or mishandled.
- Discharging scheduled gases will damage the ozone layer and/or contribute to climate change.
- Your insurance may not cover replacement or repairs in the event of a discharge.

Alternative systems

There are several systems that have no or very little environmental impact which can replace traditional ODS and SGG fire protection systems. Technicians who do not handle ODS and SGG are not required to hold an EAHL. More information about alternative systems, including advice on when and how to switch, can be found here.

Reporting noncompliance

If you have any information about the buying, storing, selling, or handling of scheduled extinguishing agents in Australia that may not comply with the requirements of the Ozone Act or Regulations please contact the Board via email at ozone@fpib.com.au or call 03 8892 3132.

To alert the Board of instances of non-compliance, please fill out the form available here. You can choose to remain anonymous.