



**Logan House Fire
Support Network** INC
"Operating Throughout Qld"

Senator Glen Lazarus
Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee
C/- Ms Sophie Dunstone
Committee Secretary

Dear Senator Lazarus

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee inquiry into the use of Smoke Alarms to prevent smoke and fire related deaths.

Our submission is based on first-hand experience that we have witnessed.

I would like to take you back to the morning of the 24th August, 2011, I woke up to the devastating news that 11 lives 3 Adults and 8 Children were lost in a house fire in Slacks Creek, a suburb in Logan City, Qld. That fire is now known as Australia's worst ever residential house fire. We like every other Australian were totally devastated of the events that were unfolding on our TV screens, myself being a local for over 15 years I decided along with my family to go and pay our respects to the family members and offer any assistance that we could. We didn't know what we would do once we saw them but felt the need to at least go and let them know the community and country are feeling their pain. We met with the surviving Taufa family members and cried with them, we helped in the days after and continued to help, after all of the help we offered we were asked by the immediate family if we could attend the funerals of their loved ones, we obliged and agreed to go, it was devastating to say the least. We have remained very good friends with the family now 4 years on, some could even say they are family to us. We attended the Coronial Inquiry last year into that very devastating house fire, as support for the family and learnt very quickly how easily this tragedy could have been avoided in many ways.

After that tragic event, there was another fatal house fire again in Logan City, in a suburb named Kingston, after all of the help we had provided to the Taufa family we were asked if we could help with this other tragedy that claimed the life of an 18 year old man. We could not say no and when we met the mother, again we helped and cried with her.

After these two tragic events, I looked at my wife Christine and said there is a need in our community for an organisation that is there to help people through the devastation of a house fire, it is then that we formed Logan House Fire Support Network, we now attend every house fire in Logan City, no matter the time or day we will be there to help and offer assistance 24/7. Since we founded our charity we have averaged attending a structure fire every week that is 52 house fires just in the Logan City region every year. It has got to the point that we now attend even more fires and not just in Logan, we are being asked for assistance right across Brisbane.

In June of last year we received a phone call from a gentleman by the name of Adrian Butler, he is the founder of The World Fire Safety Foundation, he asked to meet up and we agreed, after the meeting I was horrified at what he told me in regards to Smoke Alarms, we did not know there were

two types of Smoke Alarms available for purchase of the home. We like so many thought by having a smoke alarm on our ceiling, we would be alerted to a potential threat from a fire giving us ample time to evacuate the premises with our children, how wrong we were. After Mr Butler left we decided to do some research of our own and we couldn't believe what information we had gathered and couldn't understand why for so long the now as we know them Ionisation Alarms were and are still sold around the country let alone the world and are the most common alarm in most Australians homes.

We decided to take action after a discussion from a gentleman called Mr David Isaac, Mr Isaac's is a member of the Australian Standards Committee in regards to Smoke Alarms, and if Mr Butlers words didn't frighten us, the words we were hearing from Mr Isaac certainly did, the action we took was to phone the 9 network in particular 60 minutes, to try and get the story aired to alert all Australians of the dangers within their homes, we met with the producer Rebecca Le Tourneau, we informed her of the information we had gathered and put her in touch with Mr Butler and Mr Isaac, after a very thorough investigation by the Nine Network and 60 minutes the end result was a powerful story called "The Alarming Truth".

The tragic events of 2011 could have been avoided if the public were aware of the Ionisation Alarms not being able to detect a slow smouldering smoke, and the fact that Ionisation Alarms constantly false alarm when you are cooking food gave a high rate of disconnecting the battery just to eliminate that sound. That is exactly what happened many years prior to the Taufa family in their residence and they never had the chance to re install the alarms with one's that would not have gone off repeatedly as they were never made aware. They have become along with so many, the victims of a fraud by the manufacturers of Ionisation Alarms, for not alerting them that there product **WILL NOT** alert the occupants, the people, their so called Smoke Alarm should be protecting in the event of a slow smouldering fire, the most common household cause of fires.

The fact that when the community rallied behind the rebuilding of the Taufa house in Slacks Creek, the General Manager of Brooks Australia, kindly donated 10 Brooks Photoelectric Smoke Alarms to be installed in the new home, when we were advised of the difference of the two smoke alarms we decided to visit the newly finished premises where 11 lives were lost and to our amazement there were 5 Clipsal Fire Tek 240V Ionisation Smoke Alarms installed, we couldn't believe it, 11 lives were lost 8 of them children, the house was rebuilt, 10 brand new of the latest technology 240V photoelectric smoke alarms donated and the cheapest deadliest Ionisation smoke alarms were fitted in that home, DID we not learn from the original disaster? Why did no one speak out? Naturally our charity decided to remove all the Ionisation Smoke Alarms from the home and install new Photoelectric Smoke Alarms and we even went one step further and had them installed in every bedroom and also had them interconnected, there are now 9 photoelectric Smoke Alarms all interconnected in that new home and we feel comfortable knowing the remaining family members are going to sleep at night peacefully with the knowledge should a fire repeat itself in that home they will have enough warning this time to escape.

All Australian fire authorities recommend the use of Photoelectric Smoke Alarms, why would the people that come to rescue us from a house fire recommend Photoelectric Smoke Alarms over the Ionisation? They also know it is a far more superior Smoke Alarm to alert the occupants of the home giving them valuable minutes and enough time to escape with their lives. Why won't the Australian Building Code Board listen to our Fire Authorities?

Many lives every year are being lost due to a house fire, more recently we attended 15 minutes after the first triple zero call to the premises at Kokoda Street, Beenleigh Logan City, Qld, again we

couldn't believe what we were witnessing, a little boy on his 2nd birthday trapped inside his burning home, while his parents are on the street yelling at authorities that their precious son was still inside the burning home, sadly the little boy never made it out, again the nation was grieving for a family. The mother had told authorities the smoke alarm did not activate to alert her that the house was on fire. Was it an ionisation Smoke Alarm? Was the battery disconnected? We would never know after the house was totally destroyed leaving no evidence and a family grieving the loss of their 2 year old son and brother. What we do know is the home was a rental property and the couple had only moved into the home a few months before that tragic day, and as we know the Legislation here in Queensland in regards to rental premises is that the smoke alarm is to be checked that it is in date and in working order within 30 days prior to any tenancy change and lease renewal. The mother should have been alerted to a potential danger in her home with enough warning to get **ALL** of her children out of the home.

The public will continue to be unaware of the dangers lurking within their home and we will continue to lose lives unless something is done and very quickly, there are too many options available for the consumer making it very confusing when they go to the hardware store to purchase. There are 9V battery operated Smoke Alarms, Ionisation and Photoelectric, then the consumer needs to know that the smoke alarm that they just purchased needs to be checked every month by pushing the test button, then to have the 9V battery replaced every year, then they also need to be aware that when that smoke alarm they purchased reaches 10 years of life from the date of manufacturer that it will need to be replaced with a new one, then we move onto 240V hard wired Ionisation and Photoelectric alarms, hard wired to the consumer means that it has constant power going to the Alarm therefore there is no need for a battery, but as some of us know when a fire starts within the home the first thing to be disconnected is your mains power, hence leaving you with no warning whatsoever to alert you, it is obvious to some that the battery backup is there for a reason and also needs to be changed annually, then we move onto the 10 year Photoelectric Lithium battery operated smoke alarms, never change the battery for the life term of the unit, the battery is tamper proof, just hit the test button every month, replace the whole unit in 10 years' time and you are protected, **that is it**. The current laws have not kept up with technology, children are playing with their phones, computers and other electrical items in their rooms with their bedroom doors closed. There needs to be Alarms installed in all sleeping areas of the family home including the exit points to those rooms.

The Alarms need to be Photoelectric to eliminate the constant nuisance false alarms and disconnection rate compared to Ionisation, they need to have a battery that is tamper proof and will operate for the life expectancy of the alarm itself and that is 10 years, if practical the alarms should be interconnected. There needs to be more awareness within our schools and community, children need the education on knowing the dangers of playing with matches and lighters and that will certainly reduce the amount of house fires. A well-rehearsed fire escape plan within the home will also help in reducing the amount of fatalities.

The Australian Building Code Board certainly has enough evidence to change the legislation and mandate new smoke alarm laws, contrary to the comment made by the General Manager Mr Neil Savery " **Well the board is not satisfied at this stage that it needs to make any further changes to the code**" in October last year to the 60 minutes program, the smoke alarm laws in commercial buildings where we visit while we are awake and where we will certainly notice smoke or fire are they must be photoelectric, but in our homes where we sleep and are most vulnerable their apparently is **not enough** evidence to mandate Photoelectric, Ask Mr Savery and his committee of board members to join me to talk to the families that have lost loved ones in house fires unaware

that by having the Photoelectric Smoke Alarms installed in their homes could have potentially saved their loved ones lives giving them earlier warning to escape, ask them to meet with the Taufu family to inform them that the nuisance Ionisation smoke alarm that they had disconnected many years before could have been replaced with a photoelectric smoke alarm giving some of those 11 adults and children that perished time to escape from the fire. Ask them to sit down with the Emergency Services that have to witness the devastating events of pulling dead bodies out of burnt out ruins because he and his board **DO NOT** have enough evidence to alert occupiers of the home of a fire.

The Queensland Coroner in his findings last November 2014 into the deadly Slacks Creek house fire, recommended that laws be changed as soon as possible to mandate the installation and use of Photoelectric Smoke Alarms in residential homes, here we are 10 months after those recommendations with many more lives lost since his findings and we are still talking about this issue rather than acting on it.

We can save over 50 Australians annually just by mandating the use and installation of 10 year Lithium Battery Photoelectric Smoke Alarms , to be installed in all bedrooms, interconnected where possible with more education in our schools, but also the public need to take some responsibility of changes by practicing a well-rehearsed fire escape plan within the home. We also need to go one step further and have these deadly Ionisation Smoke Alarms banned and off the shelves as they **DO NOT** protect families.

Until that happens we will sadly and unfortunately continue to attend house fires, pick up the pieces from devastated families and in some cases arrange funerals for their loved ones.

We urge the committee to see all the evidence presented before them and implement the changes necessary with this very important lifesaving inquiry.

There is so much more I wanted to add to this submission, but as I was typing I got a call to yet another house fire in Beenleigh, where tragically the life of a 3 year old boy was taken, as well as his mother being on life support in a critical condition. So by the time I got home and had 2 hours sleep, I was back at it supporting the community especially the victims. Please accept my apologies for not completing to my best standard.

Yours Sincerely,

Louie Naumovski

Founder

Logan House Fire Support Network

Registered Not For Profit Charity Organisation

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