

HOUSE FIRES

**96. Mr R.C. KUCERA to the Minister for Housing and Works:**

Having personally over many years experienced the absolute tragedy of house fires, I ask: will the minister advise the house of the initiatives this government is undertaking to make houses safer and help prevent the loss of lives from house fires?

**Mrs M.H. ROBERTS replied:**

I thank the member for Yokine for the question. I also acknowledge the role that our emergency services workers are required to play when a house fire takes place. That includes, obviously, our fire and emergency services personnel, and the police officers and arson squad officers who conduct some of the investigations. Sadly, each year, over \$20 million-worth of damage is caused by domestic house fires. That is despite the fact that we run strong education campaigns advising people to install a smoke alarm in their house. We also remind people on 1 April each year, by way of an advertising and education campaign, to make sure that the batteries are not flat and their smoke alarm is functioning properly. Even more sadly, each year on average five lives are lost due to house fires. Those are five lives that, in the view of this government, could have been saved had people installed a functioning smoke alarm. One of the things this government did some 10 years ago, in 1997, was to require that a hard-wired smoke alarm be installed not only in all new houses, but also in existing houses if major renovations that cost in excess of \$10 000 are carried out. Sadly, though, a large percentage of houses do not have functioning smoke alarms. People are relied on to ensure that the batteries in the battery-operated smoke alarms are not flat. Sadly, there are plenty of stories of people who get tired of the incessant beeping noise that occurs when those batteries go flat and therefore remove those batteries and do not replace them. Last weekend the government announced an important step; that is, in the future whenever houses are let out or sold, they will be required to have a mains-powered smoke alarm. This sends a very strong message to the community. I urge all members to encourage the people in their electorates to install hard-wired smoke alarms. I visited a family on the weekend whose house caught fire a week ago. A young couple with two young children managed to escape a house fire because they had a mains-powered smoke alarm.

**Mr M.W. Trenorden:** What happens when the power goes out?

**Mrs M.H. ROBERTS:** That is a good question. Most hard-wired smoke alarms have a couple of backup lithium batteries if the power goes off. Indeed, I have found that if the lithium batteries go flat, the smoke alarms also emit that beeping sound, so people need to replace the batteries. Clearly, about 99 per cent of the time, power is connected to the house and it is a much more fail-safe system. I believe that this move will definitely save up to five lives a year.