

500m litres wasted in fire sprinkler tests

HALF a billion litres of pure drinking water is being wasted each year in Victoria to test fire sprinkler systems in high-rise buildings and shopping centres.

The wasted water could fill 200 Olympic-sized pools when Melbourne's water storages are at their lowest level for this time of year since the Thomson Dam's completion in 1984.

Figures seen by the *Herald Sun* show about 9.5 million litres of class A water are used each week to flush and test commercial fire sprinkler systems in Victoria.

Gareth Trickey

The waste of drinking water has prompted the State Government to call a meeting of 60 government and private organisations to try to save 450 million litres of water each year.

Some high-rises use up to 400,000 litres of water every year to test fire sprinkler systems, said Roger Thomas, fire protection technical director of Wormald Asia Pacific.

He said that with Australia in its worst drought on record, the fire safety industry could no longer turn a blind eye to outdated water practices.

"The lady next door can't even water her garden and here's this guy throwing a year's worth of water down the drain in 10 minutes because he's testing the system," Mr Thomas said.

"I'm of the opinion that we don't need class A drinking water to squirt on a fire.

"What we need to do is introduce techniques and conserve water and install systems designed to recycle water."

The Plumbing Industry Commission believes up to 450 million litres of drinking water could be saved each year by installing recycled water tanks in big buildings.

The government and pri-

vate sector meeting, scheduled for October 29, will provide findings and recommendations on detailed case studies of 15 fire sprinkler sites across Melbourne.

Organisations invited to the forum include representatives from the three Melbourne water authorities, the Department of Sustainability and Environment, Municipal Association of Victoria, Macquarie Real Estate Capital and the Fire Protection Association Australia.

Planning Minister Justin Madden praised the private sector's commitment to the water-saving project and encouraged property owners to

use readily available methods to save water during the testing of fire sprinklers.

"It's imperative that systems be configured to waste less water," Mr Madden said.

Also yesterday, the State Government called on Melbourne residents to take even shorter showers in a bid to save water over summer.

Melbourne Water, owned by the State Government, has asked residents to cut shower time from an average of seven minutes to four minutes.

Melbourne's water storages are 34.6 per cent full compared with 40.1 per cent at the same time last year.