



Guideline

May 2019

Welcome to this update on technical and informative advice for the building and construction industry on issues relating to building controls and good construction practices.

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Changes are afoot

Have your say

MBIE is proposing major changes to New Zealand's building laws to improve the quality of building work. These are the most significant reforms since the current Building Act was introduced in 2004.

In summary, this consultation seeks feedback on changes in five areas:

- **Building products and methods:** Around 600,000 different building products are used in New Zealand today. The proposed changes aim to increase the quality of information about building products, hold suppliers to account for building products and their use and reduce the risk of defects in building work.
- **Risk and liability:** MBIE is proposing that a guarantee and insurance product is put in place for all residential new builds and significant alterations. Homeowners would be able to opt out of purchasing the guarantee and insurance product.
- **Occupational regulation:** MBIE is proposing changes to ensure that occupational regulation in the building sector is proportionate to public safety risks, there is confidence that practitioners have the right skills and will act professionally and those responsible for substandard work will be held to account when it occurs. The Ministry is also proposing to broaden the definition of restricted building work, restrict who can carry out safety-critical engineering work and repeal exemptions that allow unqualified people to carry out sanitary plumbing, gasfitting and drainlaying in some cases.
- **The MBIE building levy:** Several changes to the levy are proposed to help reduce building consent fees without affecting service levels for levy payers.
- **Offences, penalties and public notification:** There are proposals to make changes to the current offences and penalties with the aim of deterring poor behaviour and better aligning the Building Act with other legislation that protects people's lives and wellbeing.

Full information about the proposed changes can be found [here](#). Submissions close 5pm, 16 June 2019.

Insidious deterioration

The risk is on your doorstep

It is useful to keep in mind the substances that can lead to deterioration or make it occur faster:

- Water/moisture – essential for corrosion to occur. Where trapped, it can accelerate timber deterioration, it is essential for mould to develop and makes smooth surfaces slippery.
- Salt – salt deposition on metallic components accelerates deterioration unless regularly removed.
- Sand – wind-blown sand/dirt can erode softer materials such as the softer growth rings of timber. Sand can also build up in beachside roof spaces where concrete tiles have been installed without roof underlay.
- Chemicals – geothermal hotspots, industrial contamination, contamination from agricultural chemicals or fertilisers can also impact on material performance (the impact depends on the chemicals and the materials).

Subfloor access

Wriggle room

All suspended floors must be provided with access to the subfloor space. What is then required for access across the whole of the floor area is not particularly clear, especially to allow access under the bearers and potentially the joists.

To allow an average adult to manoeuvre on their stomach or back under a bearer would need a gap of at least 350–400 mm. Given conventional timber sizes, this would give a finished floor level above ground of 620 mm (clearance 350 mm minimum, bearer 100 mm, joist 150 mm and flooring 20 mm). It is worth noting that the underside of wood-based flooring such as particleboard must be at least 550 mm above the ground.

For existing suspended floors, options to improve access include:

- trenching (ensuring that this does not undermine the piles)
- providing additional access points to the subfloor through the foundation wall if feasible and if it does not compromise the structure
- forming new access points in the floor – this should only be considered where there is no other option as cutting any opening in a floor potentially increases the risk of moisture access into the building.

Are baseboards required?

No, but they are advisable

Does a piled foundation with a finished floor level 600 mm off the ground and direct-fixed cladding have to have baseboards?

In essence, the answer is probably no, but to leave off the baseboards means that the subfloor is now considered exposed and that will impact on fixing selection and insulation selection.

Exposed subfloors may require sheet material fixed under the insulation to hold it firmly in place.

Snippets from the BRANZ helpline

Clearing the confusion

Q: With wooden windows, does the flexible wall underlay go under or over the sill packer?

A: Over if the packer is continuous.

Q: Can an LBP sign off structural work that was done without a building consent?

A: No.

Q: How can concrete blocks be insulated without changing the block look?

A: Construct the wall as a double skin with the insulation between or adhere polystyrene sheet to the outside blocks (so that internal thermal mass is retained), then plaster over and create the block look in the plaster.

Q: How can we verify the treatment of fence posts used in deck construction?

A: H4 treated posts are not acceptable for supporting decks – support under NZS 3602:2003 Timber and wood-based products for use in building must be H5 piles. To verify performance of fence posts would need an assessment by an expert in timber treatments and durability, and even then, the building consent authority has the right to reject that opinion.

Q: Where can I get handrail details?

A: See Acceptable Solution D1/AS1.

Q: Can we replace an existing window without using flashing tapes?

A: Yes you can, provided it is clear that the existing window has not been leaking and the window and its accessories that you are installing are exactly the same as that existing. However, installing flashing tapes is considered a good back-up when the replacement window is installed.