



Building newsflash number – 458

Review of inspection requirements for single detached houses and garages

Purpose

To seek feedback on proposed options to improve the inspection requirements for single detached houses and garages, carports and sheds.

Background

On 18 May 2010, building newsflash 426 advised of the publication of a revised inspections guideline titled 'Inspecting single detached class 1a and class 10 buildings and structures and updated inspection guidelines' (Attachment 1).

The newsflash indicated the Building Regulation 2006 (BR) required a licensed building certifier to inspect and certify the footing and final stages of a building. Feedback received on the newsflash revealed highly divergent views on this matter and a number of industry stakeholders have asked the Department to review the policy relating to inspection requirements. Feedback is therefore being sought on options to improve the inspection requirements.

The BR requires building certifiers to ensure the footing and final stages of a single detached dwelling are inspected and certified when satisfactorily completed. The provisions also allow a building certifier to accept and rely on inspections and certificates from competent persons for the slab and frame stages. However, they do not allow competent persons, unless they are a licensed building certifier, to certify the footing and final stages. These two stages can only be certified by the licensed building certifier responsible for the building approval or another licensed building certifier. For more background information please see newsflash 426.

Options for comment

Based on feedback, the options developed to guide further consultation are:

Option 1—amend the BR to further clarify the requirement for a building certifier to attend the site to carry out footing and final stage inspections.

The footing inspection stage covers key elements such as establishing and confirming the house or structure is in the correct location on the allotment, and confirming the structural aspects are correct before concrete is poured.



Amending the BR to clarify that building certifiers must attend the site at the footing and final stages will help remove any confusion about the inspection process. It will also help ensure these key aspects are carried out to a high standard, protect the public interest and reduce the need for costly or impractical alterations down the track.

However, it will not address concerns about flexibility and the issue of the availability of building certifiers to undertake inspections. Some building stakeholders and parts of the building certification industry consider there are insufficient certifiers to undertake this work and that a strict interpretation of the BR causes problems in remote areas.

Option 2—allow cadet building certifiers and competent persons to carry out final inspections and set a maximum supervision ratio for cadets of 1:2 (one supervising certifier for two cadets).

Removing the mandatory requirement for building certifiers to carry out final inspections may free up resources and allow them to be reallocated to focus on the footing inspection stage. When compared to the footing stage, the final stage of construction poses fewer risks to the overall use and occupation of a house.

The final stage, while still important, is effectively the summing-up of requirements contained within the building development approval. Ensuring these requirements are met will mean a building is sufficiently complete and able to be occupied. The final stage is also less time-critical in terms of site inspections. The footing stage has time-critical issues, such as concrete pours, that cannot be delayed for reasons of safety and structural integrity.

Given the life safety aspects in a final stage, such as the location and operation of smoke alarms, cadets should be properly supervised, experienced and educated before carrying out these inspections. One way to ensure this could be to increase the time a cadet must be employed by a building certifier or Local Government before they are permitted to carry out these inspections to two years. It may also be beneficial to increase the supervision ratio (for example 1:2 certifier to cadets) to add another aspect of quality assurance.

One advantage this option provides to building certifiers and building certification organisations is flexibility in resources. By removing the requirement that only a building certifier can inspect the final stage it is expected that this will release these qualified individuals to focus on the footing stage. Another advantage is the increase in available certifiers to provide suitable supervision to cadets to take on the footing inspection role. While they would not be required to personally undertake the final inspection, building certifiers would still need to sign the final inspection certificate to ensure that all required certificates had been received.



Option 3—allow competent persons to inspect the footing stage, subject to certain conditions.

Competent persons (who may not be licensed building certifiers) would be permitted to inspect the footing stage, subject to there being inspections and certification from a registered land surveyor and a registered professional engineer. The focus is on ensuring appropriately qualified persons are used in this process. The registered land surveyor would establish and confirm the house is in the correct location on the allotment, while the registered professional engineer would confirm the structural aspects are correct before concrete is poured. These two professionals will cater for the aspects of the footing stage considered to be the most crucial.

Subject to the inspections by a registered land surveyor and registered professional engineer, a cadet building certifier with an appropriate level of experience (suggested two years) would be allowed to carry out the footing inspection instead of the licensed building certifier. A supervision ratio of may also need to apply to cadets in this instance. This option improves flexibility but it also lessens direct regulatory control by the person responsible for approving the building work.

Legislation

Building Act 1975

Building Regulation 2006

Have your say

Please provide your feedback by close of business on **7 February 2011**.

Comments can be submitted by:

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