The New Zealand Building Code

The New Zealand Building Code is the first schedule to the Building Regulations 1992. All building work must comply with the Building Code.

What is the Building Code?

The Building Code does not contain prescriptive requirements. It states how a building is to perform (given in qualitative or quantitative terms), but does not prescribe detailed requirements for design and construction. Such details are found in the non-mandatory Compliance Documents, which the Department of Building and Housing produces to help people meet the requirements of the Building Code.

The Building Code consists of two preliminary clauses and 35 technical clauses. Each technical clause contains an objective, functional requirement, and performance criteria. The objectives correspond to the purposes of the Building Act.

Note 1: The objectives of the Building Code correspond to the purposes of the 1991 Building Act - which has been replaced by the Building Act 2004. The Building Code is currently being reviewed to align it with the 2004 Act.

Note 2: The Building Regulations 1992, and subsequent amendments, were made under the 1991 Building Act - but are now treated as if they are regulations made under the Building Act 2004.

Note 3: A number of new regulations have been made under the Building Act 2004. More are scheduled.

Controlling structure

Compliance Documents and the Building Code - how they fit together
In combination, the New Zealand Building Code and Building Code Compliance Documents have a five-level structure that follows an international approach to performance-based building regulations.

The five levels are:
- Objectives
- Functional requirements
- Performance criteria
- Verification methods
- Acceptable Solutions

In New Zealand the structure works like this:

New Zealand Building Code Mandatory

Originally established under Part VI of the Building Act 1991, and set out in the First Schedule to The Building Regulations 1992. It is a performance-based code in which each technical clause has three criteria.

- **Level 1. Objective** - The social objectives which the building must achieve.
- **Level 2. Functional requirement** - Describes what the building must do to satisfy the social objective.
- **Level 3. Performance** - Qualitative or quantitative criteria which the building must meet in order to comply.

Compliance Documents Non-mandatory

Issued by the Department of Building and Housing, these documents provide methods of compliance with the Building Code. They contain:
Level 4. Verification Methods - Tests and calculation methods by which an alternative solution may be evaluated for compliance.

Level 5. Acceptable Solutions - Examples of prescriptive solutions which provide a means of compliance.

Compliance Documents do not have the same mandatory status as the Building Code. They are always described either generally as the Compliance Documents, or referred to specifically by their unique identification numbers. For example, G8/VM1 and G8/AS1 as given in the example below.

An example of how the building controls are written follows. In this instance, it is Building Code clause G8 Artificial light.

Example - G8 Artificial light

Objective G8.1 The objective of this provision is to safeguard people from injury due to lack of adequate lighting.

Functional requirement G8.2 Spaces within buildings used by people shall be provided with adequate artificial lighting which, when activated in the absence of sufficient natural light, will enable safe movement.

Performance G8.3 Illuminance at floor level shall be no less than 20 lux.

Verification Method G8/VM1 1.0 Illuminance 1.0.1 An acceptable verification method for the measurement of illuminance is contained in NZS 6703 Section 11. (Continues with paragraphs 1.0.2 to 1.0.5)

Acceptable Solution G8/AS1 1.0 Illuminance 1.0.1 To provide a minimum illuminance of 20 lux, the total wattage required per m² of floor area is shown in Table 1. (Continues with paragraphs 1.0.2 and 1.0.3)

Further information Using alternative solutions to achieve compliance with the Building Code.

Purpose of a Compliance Document

A Compliance Document is one way of establishing compliance with a particular clause of the New Zealand Building Code. A design that complies with a Compliance Document must be accepted as complying with the provisions of the Building Code to which the Compliance Document relates.

However, complying with a Compliance Document is not the only means of complying with the Building Code. There may be alternative ways to comply with the Code.

Amendments to Compliance Documents

These Compliance Documents are current as at 20 November 2005.

Those who download a Compliance Document should check for amendments to that Compliance Document on a regular basis. See Record of amendments.

The Department of Building and Housing may amend or replace the whole, or any part of, any Compliance Document at any time. The Department publicises amendments through its publications Codewords and Building Controls Update.

The Department also offers an email notification service to communicate amendments to Compliance Documents. However, the Department does not notify every person downloading Compliance Documents from this website. Those wishing to be notified of amendments must sign up in order to receive email notifications.

Building Code Compliance Documents

The New Zealand Building Code consists of 35 clauses. Each clause sets out performance
standards that buildings must meet. These cover aspects such as durability, fire safety, energy efficiency and access. Compliance Documents (previously known as Approved Documents) are published by the Department of Building and Housing. They provide a prescriptive means of complying with the clauses of the Building Code, that is, buildings built to the method described in a Compliance Document are automatically deemed to comply with the Code - they're sometimes referred to as 'cook book' solutions because they prescribe a 'recipe' for ensuring compliance.

There are 35 Compliance Documents (and a New Zealand Building Code Handbook). Each document contains step-by-step building methods called 'Acceptable Solutions' (for example, what insulation is needed to comply with energy efficiency requirements of the Building Code), and 'Verification Methods' (calculations, tests) that can be used to demonstrate compliance with the Building Code.

Compliance Documents may reference in whole or in part other publications such as New Zealand Standards.

The documents are not mandatory, but nevertheless are important because they are endorsed by the Department, and designs based on them must be accepted by Building Consent Authorities (includes councils). The Compliance Documents are reviewed and amended by the Department as required. See record of amendments.

You can use other alternative ways of building provided these also come up to the required performance standards stipulated in the Building Code. These other methods are known as 'alternative solutions'.

If you use an alternative solution when you apply for a building consent, your Building Consent Authority will look at the alternative solution and decide whether it will meet the requirements of the Building Code. You will need to provide sufficient information to show how your alternative solution will meet the requirements.

Further information More detail on how the Building Code and Compliance Documents fit together as building controls, including the role of New Zealand Standards

Further information

The controlling structure: More detail on how the Building Code and Compliance Documents fit together.

Read about the role of Building Code Compliance Documents, which are available for free download.

For a wide range of practical information on building, renovating, and maintaining a home visit the ConsumerBuild website: www.consumerbuild.org.nz

Useful links

Department of Building and Housing

Info for Builders/trades/designers

Wellington City Council Building Services

Information for designers, builders and specialist trades work

There is a copy of all the Compliance Documents in the Systems folder on the sever