



BUILDING CODES, REGULATIONS AND YOUR HOME

Building codes are changing all the time as safety standards improve and materials and construction techniques evolve. Please use this checklist to make sure your home complies.

The National Construction Code (NCC) is the overarching regulatory framework for building in Australia. It refers to various standards and legal requirements that are regularly updated, making it likely that many houses will not comply with current building requirements. By law, you are only required to bring the house up to new standards when undertaking renovation work, however, you should consider upgrading from a safety and regulatory point of view.

Some examples of recent changes to the code are:

GLASS

Where glass is within 500mm of the floor or ground it will need to be generally of a greater thickness than before, or laminated safety glass, (exact requirements may vary between States).

HANDRAILS/BALCONIES ETC.

Handrails on balconies, porches, pathways etc which have a metre or more drop must now be at least one meter in height themselves, be non-climbable and with maximum openings of 125mm between uprights or similar.

HIGH WINDOW SAFETY

Where an openable window is less than 1.7m above a floor which level is higher than 2m. off the ground, the opening must be protected by a safety device – say a 125mm limited opening. This is to avoid a fall risk from upper storey windows.

DECKS AT BOUNDARIES

Decks at boundaries now require fire separation. Timber framing and decks of any height above the ground need to be set away from property

boundaries by 1m. or be provided with a fire rated material – such as compressed cement sheet or masonry at the boundary.

ATTACHED STRUCTURES

Attached structures such as gazebos and verandahs are often added to pre-existing buildings – extending to boundaries. These require building permits – as they constitute structural works. Checking the legitimacy of these elements is important on the basis of siting regulations, fire separation and structural design – especially if connection to the main buildings occurs to fascia elements – as these are not structurally designed timbers.

PARTY WALLS

Party walls must be built up to the underside of the roof lining or above, in all cases where the wall has to be "fire-rated" (e.g. walls between houses).

DOMESTIC FUEL BURNING APPLIANCES

The installation of all "domestic solid fuel burning appliances" now needs a building permit for fire safety reasons.

POOL REGULATIONS

Due to numerous child drownings, regulations governing pool fencing have become stricter over recent years. The intent of the Australian Standard AS1926 adopted by the NCC is to prohibit a child's unsupervised access to swimming, wading pools, deep ponds or water features. Each state's requirements are slightly different, so check the details with your local council's building department. Fines are now in place for non-compliance.

ROOF REGULATIONS

Minor roofing defects can cause serious structural damage if not addressed. Make sure your roofing and gutters are inspected regularly, particularly after severe storms or winds. Care should be taken to maintain roof-mounted solar hot water units or pool heating systems to avoid leaks, which may affect flashings and guttering, particularly where the re-circulating water may contain corrosive chemicals. The design and installation of items such as box gutters, rainwater heads, overflow pops are all matters requiring detailed scrutiny by the homeowner.

WATER SUPPLY

With rising costs and more emphasis on using water wisely, many people are diverting grey-water (that is, household waste-water from the bathroom, hand basin, shower, and laundry) onto the garden. While greywater diversion is increasingly popular, be aware that dispersal of untreated waste-water onto open ground is a health hazard and can contaminate ground later used for food production. Most waste-water is contaminated and should be treated to a minimum standard before re-use. Contact your local council or water authority for advice.

HOME SECURITY

Deadlocks, window locks and security bars can prevent escape from a burning home. Homeowners should be extremely careful not to lock themselves inside a home unless they are certain they can release the locks immediately in the event of fire.

FIRE PREVENTION

Hard-wired smoke alarms are mandatory. It is recommended that hard-wired alarms be linked to a monitored security system if present. Wireless alarms should have their batteries replaced regularly or be fitted with long-life lithium batteries. An appropriately located, hand-held extinguisher and/or fire blanket is also recommended.

ELECTRICITY SAFETY

Safety switches are now mandatory for new homes. Old fuses and switchboards should be replaced with safety switches as a matter of urgency.

If you would like to talk to an Archicentre Australia architect – a building expert - about a particular matter, please call Archicentre Australia on 1300 13 45 13 or go to www.archicentreaustralia.com.au