

Report to the Technical Research Committee

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Development of the Alberta Building Code

With the release of the National Codes, Alberta Municipal Affairs began the development of the next editions of the Alberta Building and Fire Codes. Alberta will adopt changes in the model national codes without further review. Change proposals will be accepted until March 31, 2011, with public consultation on proposed changes through the summer and into the fall. Municipal Affairs is anticipating that new editions of the Alberta Building and Fire Codes will be adopted by government in the summer 2013.

It is the intention of Alberta to adopt the sections on soil, gas, and radon. Sections related to spatial separation, fire protection during construction and secondary suites need to be reviewed before adoption as Alberta already has requirements in these areas.

Code Changes Related to Fire in Alberta

Alberta continues to deal with changes to the Fire Code that deals with protecting adjacent properties during construction and changes to the Building Code that deals with spatial separation, especially the 10-minute rule.

A working group at the provincial government level was hoping to garner agreement around a series of changes in the construction of all homes that would eliminate the need to construct homes differently in areas outside of 10-minute response. In areas outside 10-minute response, where separation was 1.2 metres or less to the property line, windows are not allowed.

In October, the City of Calgary (as a member of the provincial working group), submitted a proposal that asked that all single and two-family buildings be constructed with *enhanced* fire protection when the limiting distance was less than 1.5 metres, and that windows in buildings on opposing sides of the property line be offset by a minimum of 2 metres when the spatial separation was less than 3.0 metres between buildings. This assumed the building was not sprinklered.

Alberta builders supported the expansion of the list of items that could provide additional fire response time such as fire retardant treatment, enhanced window options, fire shutters etc. This would recognize spray applied fire retardants being used to meet Fire Code requirements for protection during construction. However, builders did not support offset windows and did not support the additional separation from 1.2 metres to 1.5 metres.

The province has opted to allow more time for the municipalities of Edmonton and Calgary to work through options with the builders. Edmonton has commissioned a fire simulation study that will look at the effect of window size, glazing and treated materials on fire response time. Results are expected in January 2011.

Sprinklers in Alberta – Update

In December of 2009, Calgary City Council asked administration to prepare a feasibility report on mandating sprinklers in newly constructed one and two family homes.

The report went to City Council in December 2010 and Council opted not to mandate sprinklers by bylaw. Instead they opted to encourage the Province to adopt recommendations from the HIRF report that were still not adopted, to propose changes to the Alberta Building Code regarding sprinklers and pursue changes to the Alberta Safety Codes Act to allow more latitude for municipalities to institute bylaws beyond provincial legislation.

Mandatory sprinklers are not supported by the province at this time. Education sessions organized by the industry on sprinklers has prompted some builders to look closer at installing or offering sprinklers to homeowners.

Residential Construction Practices Update

The CHBA - Alberta Board has crafted a position related to concerns by the province on construction quality and, in particular, building envelope issues. The position supports mandatory third-party warranty for all builders and a minimum warranty higher than current levels, which could include building envelope coverage. It supports enhancing education through the Professional Home Builders Institute in Alberta as well as enhanced inspections for water penetration above grade. CHBA - Alberta has proposed a “Consumer Rights and Responsibilities” document that would include: right to be informed, right to complaint/dispute resolution, right to professional service, responsibility to ask questions, to maintain their home, and to share information. This document will be available to all consumers at the time of purchase and will increase consumer awareness of all aspects of their home purchase.

C+ Classification for Seniors Housing

Builders in Alberta favour the creation of a “C Plus” classification for wood frame stacked buildings to help ease the demand for affordable, comfortable, safe seniors housing. The current B2 classification for wood frame construction is an institutional occupancy, and is restricted to two stories. The current C classification covers all residential, but lacks sufficient safety features for seniors housing. CHBA - Alberta has proposed a C+ classification for senior’s wood-frame apartments of four stories. This classification would require wider hallways, wider doorways, an upgraded fire sprinkler system, wired smoke alarms and a 2 hour firewall to provide a “horizontal egress” alternative to residents to areas of refuge. This proposal would be in addition to the new B3 classification just released in the 2010 National Building Code.