

Mandatory inspection of certain fire and smoke resisting building elements

Did you know?

Are you aware that from 2 June 2018 new mandatory inspections will be required for certain fire and smoke resisting elements during the construction of a building? The new inspections result from evidence that construction required to resist the spread of fire was not being carried out adequately in every instance, leaving some building occupiers vulnerable to potential injury in a fire scenario. The inspections will be required under new regulation 172 of the *Building Regulations 2018* which come into force on 2 June 2018.

Objective

The objective of the new fire and smoke construction inspections is to increase and improve the level of compliance for lightweight fire/smoke rated wall and floor systems in residential buildings. The proper construction of a lightweight fire rated wall system requires coordination and management of multiple trades, often including a carpenter, a plasterer, a plumber, an electrician, a mechanical contractor and others.

The inspection of such a system both during construction and its near completed state is a specialised inspection that can only be carried out by the relevant building surveyor (RBS) or an authorised person appointed by the RBS for that purpose.

Who will be effected?

The new inspections are likely to impact on all sectors of the industry and will need to be managed very carefully so as not to disrupt construction sequencing in an adverse manner. Building designers and architects should include the details of fire resisting construction on drawings so that builders can properly quote and construct the building, and RBS' can approve the

building work and determine the schedule of inspections to satisfy regulation 172.

Builders and developers are encouraged to liaise closely with the projects RBS so that the details of inspections can be understood before construction commences and notifications to the RBS are made at the correct times providing the RBS with the required notification for timely inspection.

***Note:** The person who is in charge of the carrying out of building work is responsible for ensuring that the inspection is called for at the right time and for the right part of the building work to the satisfaction and agreement of the RBS. Like existing mandatory notification stages, the building work must not continue beyond the agreed stage of inspection until approval has been obtained.*

What inspections are required in which building?

The new regulation 172 requires additional mandatory inspections in each storey of Class 2 or 3 building or Class 4 part of a building for:

- Lightweight construction required to resist the spread of fire in at least one sole occupancy unit.
- One of each stair, lift or service shaft of lightweight construction required to resist the spread of fire.
- The components and junctions of the building elements listed above.

The new regulation 172 also requires a mandatory inspection of the fire protection method for one of each service penetration in any building element required to resist the spread of fire on each storey in Class 2, 3, 9a, 9c building or Class 4 part of a building.

As there are a number of elements to be inspected (i.e. for the lightweight fire rated wall system under construction in a SOU, stair/lift shafts and services once they are installed and protected) this may require multiple inspections - although it is possible for these inspections to take place at the same time and for multiple floors to be inspected at the one time if construction sequence permits. This will be determined on a case by case basis.

It is recommended that the builder consider calling for the first inspection during the construction of the first SOU so that any potential issues are resolved before proceeding with the remainder of the works for that floor or remainder of the building.

The RBS does not have any discretion to reduce the inspections from that listed above. Section 10 of the *Building Act 1993* cannot be implemented to avoid the new inspections as it applies to design and not administrative regulations.

Consequence of non-compliance

It will be important to ensure the building work is ready for inspection and compliant at the time the builder notifies the RBS to cause the work to be inspected. A failed inspection will result in a direction being issued for rectification of the work and the calling for a further inspection.

Want to know more?

If you have a technical enquiry, please email technicalenquiry@vba.vic.gov.au or call 1300 815 127.

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