

Suitability of construction material

The non-compliant use of building materials, and the issue of non-compliant building materials entering the Australian building supply chain, has been in the media a lot lately following the Metropolitan Fire Brigade's Post Incident Analysis Report into the Lacrosse Docklands apartment fire in November 2014.

It is the responsibility of all participants in the industry to be diligent in ensuring building materials are suitable for use and meet the standards set by the Building Code of Australia (BCA). The Victorian Building Authority (VBA) has provided the below advice to assist builders, building surveyors, draftspersons and architects to identify and use suitable products.

It is essential that only building materials that are compliant for the particular use are specified, approved and used in the construction of a building. This responsibility applies to all industry stakeholders that have an involvement in the manufacture or supply of building materials, and the design, approval and construction of a building.

Clause A2.2 of Volume One and Clause 1.2.2 of Volume Two of the BCA set out specific requirements to ensure a building design, or part of a design, complies with the requirements of the *Building Act 1993* (the Act) and *Building Regulations 2006* (the Regulations). It also outlines the methods available to demonstrate evidence of the suitability of materials. These methods apply for a building solution that is either a Deemed to-Satisfy (D-t-S) solution or an Alternative Solution.

Forms of evidence

Evidence to support the use of materials as required by the BCA may be in the form of:

- a report issued by a Registered Testing Authority (Registered with NATA or an authority recognised by NATA)
- a current Certificate of Conformity issued under the Australian Building Codes Board CodeMark scheme
- a Certificate of Accreditation issued by the Building Regulations Advisory Committee
- a certificate issued under section 238 of the Act by a registered engineer in the appropriate discipline
- a current certificate issued by a product certification body accredited by the Joint Accreditation System of Australia and New Zealand ([JAS-ANZ](#))
- any other form of documentary evidence that correctly describes the properties and performance of the material or form of construction, and adequately demonstrates its suitability or that a calculation method complies with an ABCB protocol.

All certificates noted above must be read very carefully to gain an understanding of what requirements of the BCA the building material complies with. Certificates commonly contain limitations or conditions for the installation and use of the building material. For instance, a common condition is a requirement that the building material or product must be installed in a particular manner or in accordance with a technical manual supplied by the manufacturer.

If there is any doubt about a certificate providing clear evidence of suitability that a building material is compliant for a particular use, the certifier who issued the certificate should be contacted for clarification. If the matter cannot be clarified satisfactorily, the certificate should not be accepted. In the case where a relevant building surveyor (RBS) refuses to accept a certificate, the building permit applicant may apply to the Building Appeals Board for a determination of the matter.

The role of building materials and product manufacturers/suppliers in providing the evidence

Manufacturers and suppliers are reminded that a RBS cannot issue a building permit unless they are satisfied the proposed building work complies with the Act and Regulations.

Manufacturers or suppliers can assist the building permit application process by making relevant BCA referenced Standards test results or other forms of evidence of readily available.

Role of designers of buildings

When specifying a building material, the building designer should ensure that the building material meets the requirements of the BCA and is supported by appropriate evidence of suitability noted above.

The role of building surveyors in confirming the suitability of material

The RBS is required to ensure that all building materials meet the requirements of the BCA. Before issuing a building permit, the relevant building surveyor must be provided with evidence that demonstrates that the material or the form of construction complies with the BCA. If a RBS is uncertain whether a material meets the requirements, they must request evidence of its suitability before they can issue the building permit.

The role of the builder

The builder is required to construct a building in accordance with the building permit documentation approved by the RBS. Where a building material or product is proposed to be substituted by the builder, they must seek the approval of the RBS and provide the same level of evidence of suitability or other form of evidence of compliance before the alternative building material can be installed