

Unacceptable not to have an *Acceptable Solution* - Concrete Masonry and the Building Code

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Since taking office in November 2008 the National-led Government has based its building and construction policy platform around a wish to reduce compliance cost, and generally remove what it considers obstacles to sector productivity.

As a “trade” association committed to representing the interests of New Zealand’s cement and concrete industry, and the wider building and construction sector, CCANZ is generally supportive of any evaluation and possible legislative or regulatory reform. This includes the mooted review of the Local Government Act, Transport Management Act, Resource Management Act and Building Act and Building Code in so far as they may facilitate the removal of compliance barriers that have restricted development in the past.

However, it is with a sense of irony that CCANZ currently finds itself in the position of advocating for increased regulation with regard to the Building Code, in particular Clause E2 - External Moisture.

Clause E2 is the Building Code provision that seeks to safeguard people from illness or injury that could result from external moisture entering the building. In terms of functional requirements, this provision stipulates that buildings must be constructed to provide adequate resistance to penetration by, and the accumulation of, moisture from the outside.

CCANZ holds the view that by not containing an Acceptable Solution for concrete or concrete masonry systems within the E2 provision the Building Code (unintentionally) disadvantages the concrete industry, as well as those wishing to design, build or own a home that uses these systems.

CCANZ understands the Department of Building and Housing’s (DBH) position to be that as concrete and concrete masonry systems do not have a weathertightness issue they do not require an Acceptable Solution. While one can understand the DBH logic, it does not address the situation that has emerged amongst Building Consent Authorities (BCA) across the country, one that threatens to undermine the overall objective of reducing compliance costs and streamlining consent processes.

The periodic refusal of increasingly risk averse BCAs to grant consent for concrete masonry designs, on the basis that the Building Code does not contain an Acceptable Solution for concrete masonry, has led to inconsistencies between those BCAs that have adopted a pragmatic approach and those that have chosen an overly cautious and prescriptive interpretation of the regulations.

The end result of this unfortunate situation is that it is now more difficult for the weathertight advantages of concrete and concrete masonry systems, along with

their thermal, fire resistant, and durability properties to enhance New Zealand's building stock.

As residential applications of concrete masonry clearly need careful thought to ensure the Building Code requirements of E2 are explicitly met, the concrete industry, in particular the New Zealand Concrete Masonry Association (NZRMCA) has worked closely with BRANZ to publish *Concrete Masonry: Guide to Weathertightness Construction*. This freely available Code of Practice (www.nzcma.org.nz) enables designers to access a comprehensive set of instructions that provide weathertightness for all applications of masonry.

As a de facto Acceptable Solution, *Concrete Masonry: Guide to Weathertightness Construction* is sufficient. However, without the "official" seal of approval that comes with inclusion in the Building Code, concrete and concrete masonry systems will remain disadvantaged, and this country's housing stock will continue to be overly prone to moisture ingress and eventual rot.

If the New Zealand concrete industry is mature enough to acknowledge the contradiction of demanding additional regulation within a current environment characterised by a collective call for reduced compliance, then DBH must appreciate the seriousness of not having a concrete masonry Acceptable Solution in Clause E2 of the Building Code. Furthermore, if DBH already accept the weathertight credentials of concrete and concrete masonry systems, then to allow this anomaly to remain is to fail in the objective of addressing the systemic failures identified following the leaky building crisis.

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