



Builders rush to beat new B.C. code

CONSTRUCTION: Changes that took effect last month sparked a run on permits

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Single family home builders in coastal B.C. must follow the same leak-prevention techniques used by condo developers under a new B.C. Building Code that took effect last month.

The changes, effective Dec. 15, prompted a rush of Lower Mainland permit applications from builders anxious to avoid the new rules requiring a minimum 10-mm air space between the exterior siding or stucco and the building itself. Other new measures include extra flashing requirements to deflect water away from buildings.

Surrey building division manager Nick Marach said his department processed about 130 residential applications in the two days before the new code took effect, substantially higher than normal December volumes.

"Some smaller builders or those new to the business might find it a little more difficult [to follow the new guidelines] but they're working their way through it," he said in an interview. "It's a matter of course now for the bigger builders."

Marach said his department also processed about 36 commercial building applications in the last two hours of business on Dec. 14 as builders realized they also faced new guidelines, including improved seismic standards. The B.C. Building Code was last changed in 1998.

Greater Vancouver Home Builders Association chief executive officer Peter Simpson said most builders support the new rainscreen requirement for single family homes.

"We knew this was coming for some time and it's not a bad thing," he said in an interview. "It will evolve over time but in my view, the rainscreen is not the be-all and end-all [to solving water issues]. You can rainscreen a whole building but if you do a poor job of your detail around the windows, then that's where it's going to leak."

Simpson said builders who use vinyl siding already build with rainscreens but the new measures will affect those using exterior materials such as stucco and Hardie board, a fibre-cement siding.

"We've had ample time to get ready for this and frankly, no one has come to me saying they hate the rules or that they love them either," he said.

But Simpson said the industry is concerned about possible new costs that could arise from extra municipal inspections required to ensure the new rules are followed.

Langley home builder Larry Clay said he likes the new regulations because rainscreens give water an easy exit and allow for equal drying time on either side of the exterior building material, which can prevent warping. He estimates the new measures could add from 60 cents to \$1 a square foot in extra building costs for new homes.

North Vancouver home builder Doug Kerr agreed the new guidelines will increase building costs but said it's money well spent.

While leaky condos have received tremendous media attention in recent years, Kerr said some homes built in the 1970s and 1980s also suffered water damage because builders tried to make them airtight to conserve energy.

"The rainscreen system solves the problem of how to keep a home energy efficient and still allow it to shed rain properly," he said.

The new residential rainscreen measures affect all new homes built in B.C. coastal communities west of the Coast Mountains.

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