

Beware of non-compliant external wall cladding systems

In residential buildings in Victoria the use of external wall cladding systems such as those incorporating polystyrene have dramatically increased in recent years.

These systems are not referenced as a Deemed-to-Satisfy (DtS) solution in the **Building Code of Australia** (BCA). The cladding systems must therefore be presented as an Alternative Solution in a form that a building surveyor can assess and be satisfied that the material, form of construction or design meets the Performance Requirements of the BCA.

The Building Regulations Advisory Committee has considered this matter and has noted that any Alternative Solution must demonstrate compliance with the Performance Requirements of the BCA, or the solution must be at least equivalent to the DtS provisions. A combination of both methods may also be used.

The relevant building surveyor (RBS) is required to ensure that the process outlined in 1.0.8, 1.0.9 and 1.0.10 of BCA Volume Two is followed when considering an application for a building permit.

As part of 1.0.9 the RBS may seek evidence to support that the use of the material, form of construction or design meets a Performance Requirement or a DtS as described in 1.2.2 of BCA Volume Two.

1.2.2 lists amongst other things, a report from a Registered Testing Authority (eg CSIRO) and a Victorian or National (CodeMark) certificate of accreditation as evidence of suitability. Currently there are no certificates of accreditation for polystyrene cladding systems.

However, a number of systems have been assessed and reported on by CSIRO through their Building Products and Systems Appraisal Scheme. The validity of the Technical Assessments can be checked on the CSIRO Appraisals website (<http://www.cmmt.csiro.au/services/appraisals/>) or by contacting CSIRO Enquiries. CSIRO is discontinuing the CSIRO Appraisal Scheme and all Technical Assessments will no longer be valid after 31 December 2009. Some current Technical Assessments may expire prior to this.

It is important to check that appraisals and technical reports cover all relevant BCA Performance Requirements of the cladding system proposed to be used and that the



appraisal is current where it is being utilised to assist with the preparation of the Alternative Solution.

Architects and Registered Building Practitioners, especially building designers should take care in selecting and specifying polystyrene or other external wall cladding systems that have at least been assessed by an appraisal body in order to assist the RBS in determining whether this form of construction is an acceptable Alternative Solution.

RBS's, when assessing an application for a building permit, must be satisfied that the applicant has provided appropriate evidence that all relevant Performance Requirements will be met. The RBS must also give due consideration to the conditions or limitation of any material or system provided to them by the applicant. Expansion and construction joint provisions may need to be determined by engineering principles. Some products may only address bending, shear or fastening testing. These tests alone do not represent a complete appraisal or compliance with P2.1 of BCA Volume Two.

It is important that RBS's act properly in accordance with Victorian building controls by ensuring that the Alternative Solution meets the relevant BCA Performance Requirements to avoid potential problems associated with the installation of an external building fabric which does not comply with the BCA.

If involved with the use of a non-compliant external wall cladding system, the RBS or other Registered Building Practitioner associated with such a project could be the subject of an investigation and resultant sanctions of the Building Practitioners Board.