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BC Step Code Dysfunction Spurs Changes

The BC govt launched Step Code in 2017 to boost energy efficiency in new homes. They enabled municipalities to set their own level from Step 1 to 5.

We said:

1. First launch mandatory Step Code/building envelope training via BC Housing, Licensing and Consumer Services which already requires Continuing Professional Development (CPD). Adding a course would be easy and supports consumer protection.
2. The fundamental purpose of a Building Code is consumer protection. Start at the lowest step across the province and increase uniformly based on research and proven practice avoiding unintended consequences such as leaky condo. BC's goal of Step 5 by 2032 would still be achieved while supporting consumer protection and affordability.
3. Address radon gas abatement. Studies show very energy efficient homes may draw in more radon, the second leading cause of lung cancer in Canada. BC's radon map is unreliable and constantly changing because radon is site specific, with high levels of radon discovered in regions thought to have low radon.

The government ignored this advice and enabled municipalities to fast-track Step Code without mandatory education, proven practice or province-wide radon abatement.

They also ignored the research and due diligence underway by the National Building Code including a radon review and prescriptive options to enhance affordability.

Due to these and other challenges, eighty BC municipalities have not adopted Step Code, a significant failure for a province claiming a "uniform building code."

Now it appears the BC government is planning to:

1. Launch mandatory training for Step Code through BC Housing's CPD program;
2. Mandate Step Code (Step 3 minimum) throughout the province;
3. Address the issue of radon abatement.

This resembles much of what VRBA advised years ago, although we suggested starting at Step 1 at the time. If our advice was taken, BC would likely be at Step 3 throughout the province with builder training, proven practice and improved affordability.

Even with upcoming changes, Step Code policy flaws remain, including Step 5's extremely high and unnecessary costs. Net-Zero ready is achievable for less cost at Step 4.

Also, some municipalities still undermine consumer protection and affordability by using their bylaws to leap into the highest steps.

That said, more patient councils wisely have waited for the mandated Step Code and the added security of a provincial code requirement, not just an optional local bylaw.

As for the BC government, much of this Step Code dysfunction could have been easily avoided by adopting VRBA's advice years ago.



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