
PROTECT HEALTH AND SAFETY IN BC BUILDING CODE



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President, VRBA

The foundation of building codes is health and safety. Consumer protection must always be the first consideration for code changes.

VRBA does extensive research before supporting changes such as fast-tracking energy efficiency in the BC Step Code.

Past unintended consequences due to inadequate government research include leaky condo, as well as asbestos and urea formaldehyde insulation.

All were the result of fast-tracking energy efficiency in homes without due diligence.

There are enormous financial and health costs to mitigate these issues. Government still refuses to provide a rebate for safe removal of asbestos, even though the material was approved and subsidized by their Canadian Home Insulation Program (CHIP).

The latest health and safety issue is toxic radon gas shown to increase in energy efficient homes.

Radon is invisible and odorless, seeping into homes through cracks in floors and foundations.

Radon is not a problem outdoors but can be harmful when entering homes, resulting in the second leading cause of lung cancer in Canada.

In 2017 the BC government enabled municipalities to fast-track energy efficiency via the Step Code, despite concerns about radon.

VRBA wrote to local municipalities saying, “In the interests of consumer protection, we continue to recommend municipalities avoid the Step Code and wait for the energy efficiency review presently underway by the National Building Code committee that has included radon mitigation as a key consideration.”

We followed up with letters outlining the hazards of radon:

- Radon is site-specific and every home should be tested. Contrary to BC’s radon map, there are no safe regions for radon.
- In addition to lung cancer, radon is linked to lymphoma, myeloma and leukemia, the cancer most often found in children.
- Canada’s radon maximum of 200 bq is likely unsafe over the long-term, especially for children and those with health issues. The World Health Organization’s maximum is 100 bq.

However, Saanich, Victoria and others adopted the Step Code and even bypassed steps, leaping into higher levels of energy efficiency.

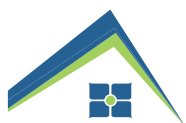
The BC government now admits radon “presents health risks. With no safe levels of radon exposure...The National Building Code, upon which the British Columbia Building Code (BCBC) is based, requires a radon rough-in be installed in all small residential buildings.”

BC is proposing mandatory radon mitigation rough-ins throughout the province, five years after introducing the Step Code.

The lesson is municipalities do not have the expertise to fast-track building codes. Their goals to be leaders in energy efficiency must not undermine health and safety – the foundation of building codes.

VRBA continues to advocate for a single building code standard based on National Code diligence supported by research, proven practice, and affordability.

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