

Site security and public access onto housing construction sites

This guidance note seeks to assist builders by explaining how a builder can ensure that entry to a site where uncontrolled hazards are present is restricted so that members of the public are not exposed to hazards on a housing construction site.

Builders need to ensure that members of the public are not exposed to risk arising from the construction of a house.

Unauthorised entry to housing construction sites may expose a person to a number of hazards that, if not controlled, could result in the likelihood of fatalities or serious injuries.

Where uncontrolled hazards are present on a site, there is a requirement that exposure to those hazards be addressed. Where this does not occur, it is expected that persons will not be exposed to those hazards.

When a risk assessment identifies the need to isolate particular site hazards and the only way of achieving this is with perimeter fencing, the installation of a fence, either permanent or temporary, which is maintained until the work activity on the site no longer presents a risk to unauthorised entrants, will assist the builder in meeting their duty of care obligation. An unauthorised person is more likely to comply with a physical barrier, such as a fence, than a warning sign.

1. Scope

This guidance applies to the construction, renovation or extension of:

- (a) detached houses
- (b) attached dwellings, separated from each other by a fire resisting wall, such as terrace, row or town houses
- (c) boarding and guest houses, hostels or similar with a floor area <300 m²
- (d) Ancillary buildings to the above, such as private garages, gazebos and carports.

Note: The above are based on classes 1, 2 and 10 of the Building Code of Australia. Multi-storey buildings, i.e. above 3 habitable storeys are not included in the scope of this guidance note.

2. When is fencing needed around house construction?

Unauthorised visitors (including children) may not be deterred by warning signs, have no awareness of the dangers that may be present on a residential building site and have no idea of the risks that they may be exposed to once they have entered a site.

These risks can include serious injury from falls from partially constructed houses and scaffolding, electric shock from “live” cables, drowning in open excavations, suffocation or crushing from collapsing material, coming into contact with hazardous substances, protruding objects, falling onto protruding reinforcement bars etc.

Ideally, all hazards and risks should be eliminated on the site, but this is not always achievable. Fencing can be an effective way of restricting unauthorised entry to a housing construction site when hazards are present.

The builder should strongly consider installing a fence around a housing construction site when it is:

- in the proximity of a school or on a route travelled by children to and from school
- close to parks or recreational areas
- in a built up area.

3. Who is responsible for installing fencing around house construction?

The builder is responsible for the health and safety of any person who may be affected by the building work on the site and is therefore responsible for the erection of fencing where required.

4. What type of fence is needed?

The perimeter fence must be adequate for its purpose and the following characteristics should be considered when determining the fence construction:

- be of a suitable height to deter entry, for example 1.8 metres high
- be constructed from dedicated materials
- be difficult to climb
- be difficult to gain access underneath
- be stable and able to withstand anticipated loads
- gates and joints in the fence should be secure and not present a weak point for entry.

Note: Sheets of reinforcing mesh should not be used for site fencing as it allows adequate hand and foot holds for children to climb over and the protruding ends of sheets could result in penetrating injuries.

In case of emergency, builders must ensure signs are clearly visible from outside the site, stating the names and contact telephone numbers of the person with control of the building work.

5. Compliance with OHS law

The advice provided in this Guidance Note is consistent with OHS law in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria and with the National Standard for Construction Work.

Further information

You can access other construction safety information and guidance from:

- The Workplace Health and Safety Queensland website: www.deir.qld.gov.au
- The WorkCover New South Wales website: www.workcover.nsw.gov.au
- The WorkSafe Victoria website: www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/construction

You can keep up-to-date with the latest construction safety news and information by becoming a subscriber to:

- SAFE newsletter, Queensland's free workplace health and safety publication:
www.deir.qld.gov.au
- Safety Soapbox, the free weekly emailed construction newsletter:
www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/construction.

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