



Richard Lind  
President, CHBA

## Working to Keep the National Building Code on Track

The process of developing our building codes never stops. Anyone can suggest a change and each change is reviewed by a committee representing the various interests in our built environment, including builders.

Regulation is a provincial matter but the provinces have agreed that, as much as possible, changes should be made to the National Building Code (NBC) first before being adopted provincially. The NBC and the National Fire and Plumbing Codes are developed by volunteers supported by the Canadian Code Centre, part of the Institute for Research in Construction at the National Research Council.

There are hundreds of changes on the table, many more than can be dealt with in the time available. Some changes have been waiting since before the current NBC was published and some even longer. That is one reason why the Canadian Commission on Building and Fire Codes, the committee of volunteers that oversees the process, has set priorities for the work of its technical committees. The next edition of the NBC will be published in 2010 and the CHBA is hard at work making sure things stay on track.

The first set of proposed changes are out for public review and I encourage members to review them online at [www.nationalcodes.ca](http://www.nationalcodes.ca) and let us know what you think. The CHBA has been involved in this process at each step along the way but that doesn't mean that the proposed changes can't be improved or even dropped if problems are identified.

The Standing Committee on Houses and Small Buildings, which is responsible for Part 9 of the NBC, recently had a three-day meeting where a number of controversial proposals were dealt with. A proposal to require fire sprinklers in all new houses was rejected while another to increase the number of smoke alarms was passed by a slim majority. There will be another meeting of the Standing Committee in the spring, before the next public consultation in late 2008 or early 2009. Finally, after the comments from the public are reviewed, a final version of the revised NBC will go to the Canadian Commission on Building and Fire Codes for approval.

There are a number of big ticket items on the agenda for the spring meeting and the CHBA intends to make sure the builders' voice is heard. Here are some highlights.

### Spatial Separation

A number of construction-related house fires in Alberta have raised concerns among both industry members and fire officials. As a result, full-scale tests have been conducted under controlled conditions and results show that a fire in one unit can spread to the adjacent unit in less time than it takes for fire-fighters to arrive and begin attacking the fire. We need to take steps to decrease the

likelihood of this happening; the question is how to do this without unduly increasing costs.

The CHBA-Alberta has been working with provincial officials for several years to try to find practical solutions and this work forms the basis for the proposals before the Standing Committee. The CHBA has raised questions about the need to make wall cladding non-combustible if soffit openings are closed and windows are limited in size and location. Also, we don't want to trade fire risk for moisture problems if attic ventilation is compromised. The CHBA will insist on clear answers to these questions at the spring meeting of the Standing Committee.

### Radon

With the introduction of more stringent radon guidelines by Health Canada, we know that the health of a significant number of Canadian households is at risk from this invisible gas and that something must be done about it. Homeowners will have to learn to test their houses for radon and take steps deal with it if they find high levels in their homes. But the Code must also be changed to reduce the likelihood of radon getting into homes in those areas of the country where it is a problem and to make it easier to deal with when it occurs.

The CHBA has proposed changes to the Code that will be considered by the Standing Committee in the spring, along with several other proposed changes to the existing radon requirements submitted by others.

### Lateral Loads

Traditional house construction has proven to be strong enough to resist collapse in earthquakes and hurricanes. But the trend toward open plans and large windows has made houses more vulnerable to these events. The area of the country most at risk from earthquakes is British Columbia and the CHBA has made sure that B.C. builders are represented on the task group that will recommend how to deal with this problem.

The Canadian Wood Council has developed simple ways to determine if a design is adequate and how to increase its strength if required. Some design features may have to change to meet the new requirements but this must be weighed against the risk of not addressing this potential problem.

### Keeping the Code on Track

The CHBA strongly supports the current objective-based approach to Code development. It is consistent with our belief that any proposed changes to the NBC need to be tested vigorously before being considered. Regulation — and that's what Building Codes are — should always be a last resort.

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proposed changes subjected to a thorough analysis:

- We need to know the problem being addressed is real, and substantive.
- We need to know that the NBC is the appropriate avenue for addressing the problem; that the issues involved fall within the scope of the NBC.
- We need to know the costs and benefits of the proposed change.
- We need to know that there are not other non-regulatory mechanisms to address the problems and that a Code change is the only effective option.

The CHBA takes this approach because regulation always has a cost, both in terms of money and lost opportunity. The Code should be used where it is appropriate and effective. A rigorous Code development process offers the best assurance that this will be the case.

**GST Cut Helps Home Buyers, Owners, Renters**

The Harper government's decision in early November to cut the GST to five per cent, effective January 1, 2008, will significantly improve housing affordability, according to the CHBA. "This is great news for both home buyers and owners," CHBA President Richard Lind said. "It will help all owners who are considering renovations and all Canadians who make major household purchases."

Lind said that the announcement in Finance Minister Jim Flaherty's Economic Statement fully honours the Conservatives' 2006 election commitment to reduce the GST by two per cent. "We are pleased to congratulate a government that keeps its campaign promises."

The CHBA welcomed transitional rules for the further one per cent reduction. This reduction applies to home buyers who purchase after October 30, 2007 and take possession after January 1, 2008. As well, those who purchase before October 30 and take possession after January 1 will be able to apply to Canada Revenue Agency for a transitional rebate that reflects the reduction to 5 per cent.

The combined reduction in the GST from seven to five per cent will mean savings of \$3,840 on the purchase of a new home priced at \$300,000. Together with the existing new housing rebate, the five per cent GST rate will restore the effective rate of federal sales tax on new homes up to \$350,000 to the level that applied before the introduction of GST in 1991.

Lind said the GST reduction will also help to encourage private investment in new rental housing, which is needed to increase the supply of rental units that people can afford.

The CHBA also congratulated the government for

reducing personal and corporate tax rates. The Economic Statement said the corporate tax rate will be cut to 15 per cent, beginning with a one per cent cut in 2008, and the small business rate will go down to 11 per cent in 2008, one year earlier than scheduled. These measures will help businesses to generate economic growth and create jobs, Lind said.

**Updating the R-2000 Standard**

The CHBA National Board of Directors has approved a recommendation that the Association act rapidly to propose an updated R-2000 Standard in order to renew the Standard's status as the industry's voluntary, market-driven, leading-edge environmental standard, encompassing both energy-efficiency and other environmental features. The CHBA will also make representations to the Minister of Natural Resources, Gary Lunn, that renovated homes be eligible for an R-2000 designation providing that the renovation work meets R-2000 requirements.

As well, the CHBA will continue to endorse regional initiatives, such as Built Green™ and Energy Star, and support the on-going updating of their efficiency and environmental requirements.

**National Conference in Whistler**

Today's new home builders and renovators are building dreams—one home at a time. And "Building Dreams" is the theme for the 65th CHBA National Conference at the Fairmont Chateau Whistler, April 4 to 6, 2008.

Conference Chair Tom Cochren says that Whistler is the perfect location because it is a wonderland built on dreams. "It's the location of the 2010 Olympic Winter Games and it has an unbelievable reputation for skiers and snowboarders," said Cochren. "Whistler Village is a pedestrian-only community. Once you park your car, you won't need it again until you leave. The village offers a relaxed atmosphere, great shopping, a wide range of dining choices, and a terrific nightlife. And it is a safe, family-friendly environment. What better place to hold our National Conference?"

Cochren points out that delegates will have an exciting business program to look forward to in Whistler. Featured speakers include Michael "Pinball" Clemons, current Head Coach of the Toronto Argonauts, Bob McDonald, host of CBC Radio's award-winning Quirks and Quarks, Brian Gluckstein, one of Canada's most well-respected designers, Leonard Brody, one of Canada's leading technology forecasters and business strategists, and Joel Cohen, writer and co-executive producer from the long running hit TV show The Simpsons. Special guest Jessica Holmes, a fast-rising star from the CBC's Royal Canadian Air Farce, will join CHBA President Richard Lind at the closing President's Gala.

For additional information on the Conference, including travel, accommodations, and activities in the Whistler area, plus on-line registration, visit [www.chba.ca/conference](http://www.chba.ca/conference).

