

Minor changes to the Plumbers, Gasfitters, and Drainlayers Act

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The Government has decided to make some minor changes to the Plumbers, Gasfitters and Drainlayers Act to enhance the effectiveness of the Act.

An MBIE review has found that overall the Act is working well to ensure that sanitary plumbing, gasfitting and drainlaying is done properly in the interests of public health and safety. The proposed changes will ensure that restrictions on plumbing work are proportionate to the risks to public safety.

The Review is part of a series of reforms to the building laws to lift the efficiency and quality of building work in New Zealand, provide fairer outcomes if things go wrong, and instil greater confidence in the sector.

The proposed changes

Removal of exemptions for sanitary plumbing work

At the moment, householder and area exemptions allow the government to designate areas of New Zealand where sanitary plumbing work can be done by people with no relevant qualifications. The proposed changes include taking away the ability to make exemptions to the registration and licencing requirements for performing restricted plumbing work in certain parts of the country.

Exemptions that allow unlicensed people to work under supervision will also be removed, although further work will see a new licence class developed to formally recognise their skills and experience.

The proposed changes will not affect the kind of work that is considered lower risk, and that homeowners can undertake themselves, such as installing washing machines and dishwashers, or replacing or repairing taps.

Removing these exemptions will ensure that sanitary plumbing work that requires specialist skills and experience such as installing, repairing or replacing toilets, showers and waste water systems are performed by those with relevant qualifications.

Other changes

Other proposed changes include further work to develop a pathway to self-certification for plumbers and drainlayers, minor changes to complaints and disciplinary processes and definitions under the Act, and changes to ensure the Plumbers, Gasfitters, and Drainlayers Board has the right mix of skills and experience.

Next steps

A draft Bill for these proposed changes is expected to be introduced in early 2022 which will then be referred to a Select Committee for review and to seek public feedback on the impacts of the proposals.

Further details from the review

DIY plumbing homeowners will be able to carry out themselves

There are health and safety risks to manage when undertaking sanitary plumbing and it's safest for a properly trained and authorised person undertake this work. Insurance policies could be affected if an unauthorised person undertakes sanitary plumbing on a property.

Sanitary plumbing

An authorised plumber must do the following work:

- Installing or removing:
 - Any sanitary fixture (such as a bath, a shower, a sink, a basin, a toilet pan, a bidet, a urinal, and a laundry tub)
 - Any sanitary appliance (such as a washing machine or dishwasher)
- Installing or removing the pipes and fittings that supply water to sanitary fixtures and appliances
- Installing or removing the associated traps, waste or soil pipes, ventilation pipes and overflow pipes connected with sanitary fixtures and appliances.

Non-sanitary plumbing

A homeowner can DIY the following work:

- Installing or removing a bedpan washer, a bedpan steriliser, a dishwasher or a washing machine in cases where the work doesn't involve fixing or unfixing the pipes that supply water
- Installing or removing a shower that is installed over a bath and that is supplied with water through the bath taps (e.g. those that have a push on rubber connection on the outlet of the bath taps)
- Repairing or replacing taps, ball valves, tap washers or plugs
- Installing, removing and undertaking any plumbing work associated with a sanitary fixture or sanitary appliance on a ship, boat, aircraft or vehicle
- Installing or removing a pipe for reticulating water in any central heating or cooling system downstream of a testable backflow prevention device that is used exclusively for that central heating or cooling system.

Next steps for developing and implementing a self-certification model

The Government recognises a self-certification model for plumbers and drainlayers will help to increase efficiency. The Review found there are gaps in the existing system that will need to be addressed first, including updating the licensing system to ensure that certifiers have the required skills and implementing a credible auditing regime to monitor compliance and detect non-compliant work. These are outlined in more detail in the Sapere Report Self-certification in construction industry trades, which you can find on this page.

The Government and the PGD Board will work together to ensure industry readiness.

On-farm reticulation systems

Removing the requirement for a plumber to be required for any reticulation work that shares a water source with sanitary fixtures will be progressed once it can be sufficiently amended while still protecting public health and safety.

There is risk that badly designed pipework or poorly installed protections against contamination cause contaminants to enter the potable water supply. In particular, through failure to properly install appropriate backflow preventers at the correct places or poorly designed and installed plumbing that carries foul water. If contaminants enter the potable water supply, this can cause illness to any person consuming the potable water and secondary infection to other persons.

About the consultation process

Targeted consultation was undertaken early in the review process to gain insights into how the Act was operating, identify other areas for improvement, and to ensure the scope of issues investigated were appropriately tested with industry. This process informed the seven key areas that formed the scope of the Statutory Review Report.

Broader public consultation on the proposal to repeal the exemption for householder and rural plumbing, and for doing restricted building work was undertaken in April 2019 as part of the consultation on the Building System Legislative Reform Programme. Feedback during consultation confirmed that these exemptions are very rarely used and are not promoted by Councils or Building Consent Authorities, and no new exemptions have been approved since 1994. This confirms these exemptions are outdated and were implemented to recognise labour shortages and geographic limitations at the time that no longer exist today.

An expert and independent review of self-certification was conducted to inform recommendations about whether to progress this model. This was conducted by Sapere and highlighted for key elements that require further work before this can be progressed.

[Statutory Review Report of the Plumbers, Gasfitters, and Drainlayers Act 2006](https://www.building.govt.nz/https://www.mbie.govt.nz/dmsdocument/13715-statutory-review-report-of-plumbers-gasfitters-and-drainlayers-act-2006)

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- [mbie.govt.nz](https://www.mbie.govt.nz)

[Sapere Report – Self-certification in construction industry trades](https://www.building.govt.nz/https://www.mbie.govt.nz/dmsdocument/13712-sapere-report-self-certification-in-construction-industry-trades)

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