

BC Update 182: Proposed ban on retrofitting foil insulation into residential buildings

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The Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment is beginning consultation on a proposal to issue a ban, under section 26 of the Building Act, which will prevent people retrofitting residential buildings with foil insulation.



The proposed ban follows strong feedback raised by submitters during consultation on proposed changes to the Residential Tenancies Act 1986 (that will require insulation and smoke alarms in rental properties) on the need to eliminate the risks posed by foil insulation products.

The risk with retrofitting foil insulation is that the person installing it could accidentally pierce a live electrical cable with the fasteners (e.g. staples or nails) that they are using to attach the foil to the building structure. The foil, being metallic, conducts electricity and can become live if it comes into contact with live electrical wiring – potentially enlivening the entire underfloor of a building. To date, there have been five reported deaths in New Zealand caused by electrocution associated with foil insulation in a residential building, as well as one reported non-fatal electric shock.

The proposed ban will relate to the installation of foil insulation in existing residential buildings only – not to its installation in new buildings as the method of installing the foil is different and there is usually no electrical installation in the building at the time the foil is installed.

The ban is proposed to be in place by 1 July 2016, when the changes to the Residential Tenancies Act come into force.

As the Residential Tenancies Act will require landlords to assess the extent of insulation in their buildings, we expect landlords and tenants will be getting under their floors to conduct checks on existing insulation. This could pose an electrocution risk if existing foil insulation has been incorrectly installed and the underfloor area is live.

WorkSafe NZ has developed proposed guidance on electrical safety and the safety risks around working with, and removing, existing foil insulation. WorkSafe is currently consulting on this guidance and intends for it to be finalised by 1 July 2016.

Anyone concerned about how to work around foil insulation in the meantime should consult WorkSafe's proposed guidance or employ a registered electrician. A public register of registered electricians is available on the [Electrical Workers Registration Board \(http://www.ewrb.govt.nz\)](http://www.ewrb.govt.nz) website.

MBIE is also working on changes to its Building Code Acceptable Solution H1/AS1, which currently includes foil insulation as a means of complying with the Building Code for underfloor insulation. The proposed changes to H1/AS1 will remove the ability to use foil insulation as an Acceptable Solution. These changes will be consulted on from about June and are intended to be in place by the end of this year.

More generally, information about the standards that must be complied with when installing insulation, under changes to the Residential Tenancies Act, are included in Standard NZS 4246 Energy Efficiency - Installing Insulation in Residential Buildings. Standards NZ are currently revising this standard and beginning the final consultation round on it.

Read MBIE's [media statement on the proposed ban and a list of frequently asked questions \(http://www.mbie.govt.nz/about/whats-happening/news/2016/mbie-to-consult-on-proposed-foil-insulation-ban\)](http://www.mbie.govt.nz/about/whats-happening/news/2016/mbie-to-consult-on-proposed-foil-insulation-ban).

Read MBIE's [consultation document on the proposed ban \(http://www.mbie.govt.nz/info-services/building-](http://www.mbie.govt.nz/info-services/building-)

[construction/consultations/consultation-foil-insulation](#)) on the MBIE Corporate website.

Download the draft revised Standard NZS 4246 Energy Efficiency - Installing Bulk Thermal Insulation in Residential Buildings (<https://shop.standards.govt.nz/default.htm?action=viewDraft&mod=drafts&draftId=DZ+NZS+4246%3A2016>) from the Standards New Zealand website.