



NEWS

Answers to questions from Fire Separating Wall Seminars

13 December 2004

Answers to questions from Fire Separating Wall Seminars held at Kedron Wavell Services Club on 6 December and the Greek Club on 7 December.

Why are lightweight walls still allowed as party walls?

Lightweight construction is permitted under the Building Code of Australia (the BCA). Any materials and systems adopted by the BCA are tested and verified by the methods prescribed under "Acceptance of Design and Construction" under Section A2.2 of the BCA. If installed in accordance with Australian Standards including manufacturer specifications the system meets the requirements of the BCA.

Who carries out the sound testing on party walls?

Sound ratings are given when walls such as lightweight construction, masonry construction and other similar firewall systems are tested. If the particular type of construction is installed in accordance with the tested system then the required sound rating should be achieved. No "insitu" testing is carried out unless there is a specific need to ensure the system has been installed correctly.

What else is available other than block for party walls that fully complies with the Act?

Lightweight construction or other combinations but they must be a tested system.

Is there an improved method of connection to party walls?

There is no specific method of connection to fire separating walls or walls bounding sole occupancy units required to have a fire resistance level. It is important that the tested system is NOT compromised by structural connections. All trades and professions need to be aware of this issue.

Will BSA take action against a subcontractor responsible for performing defective work on a fire separating wall?

BSA may take action against any licensee for performing defective building work.

Why is there no emphasis on designers, councils, private town planners or owners to be aware of FRL's?

Building designers are licensed by BSA and accordingly are required to be competent to hold a licence as is any person who holds a licence. Building certifiers are licensed irrespective of whether they are private building certifiers or local government certifiers. Town planners are not

required to be licensed and generally are not involved in the actual construction of the building. The same applies to owners.

The Building Certifiers and Builders are the last to see the plans. That means all other parties are assuming the FRL is correct, but need to be told at the last minute they are not. Why doesn't BSA educate planners, owners and designers?

Answer as per Question 6

Why should the builder be responsible to inform their client on fire walls and termite protection, why not the architect and designers or BSA?

All licensees are expected to be competent in their chosen profession or trade. As a general guide there is nothing to prevent any of the above informing their clients of the requirements. Generally the builder is the last person to see the owner and may need to coordinate the information to be given to a client.

What occasions would warrant different values in FRL's e.g. 90/120/60?

Fire resistance levels are determined under the BCA depending upon the type of construction eg Type 1, 2, or 3. This is calculated based upon the use of building , number of storeys etc.

If two units or townhouses have been titled into separate lots does the fire separating wall have to extend out to the ends of the verandahs even though these verandahs are on the outside of the building? (Both units or townhouses have been constructed as one building separated by the fire wall.)

This issue has been the subject of much debate over the past twelve months. BSA is of the opinion that the mere fact that the townhouse/units have been titled does not effect the original assessment certification. BSA believes that each design must be assessed by a building certifier or building designer on an individual basis. It is suggested that this be discussed with building certifier or building designer.