

This sheet constitutes a vital part of Archicentre's recommendations to you. Failure to observe the provisions of the warning sheet could jeopardise the safety of the occupants and / or lead to premature deterioration of the home.

A. MAINTENANCE OF THE PROPERTY

Painting maintenance – HEALTH WARNING

Care should be taken with old painted surfaces, particularly those painted pre-1970, as they may have a high lead content. Lead is dangerous, especially to children from conception to four years of age, as it can interfere with their neurological development. Lead is absorbed by the body through ingestion and inhalation (not through the skin). Old flaky lead paint surfaces are particularly dangerous as children may lick or swallow the flakes, which have a sweet taste.

If the old paint surface is not flaking or crumbling, painting over it is recommended to encapsulate the old paint. Lightly wet-sandpaper the surface first, carefully disposing of contaminated water. If removing the paint, don't use methods that generate dust (ie, don't dry sand or abrasive blast) and avoid burning off the surfaces if unsure of the temperature of the heat gun (temperatures over 400°C will vaporise the lead, which is highly dangerous). Chemical stripping, wet scraping or wet sanding are best. Take care in cleaning up the residue.

A number of informative publications and further advice can be obtained by visiting the website of your local EPA (Environmental Protection Authority) or the relevant federal government department. Refer also to the Australian Standard AS 4361 part 2.

Asbestos – HEALTH WARNING

Most houses built before 1983 will contain asbestos in some form. In most cases the presence of asbestos products in houses is no cause for alarm and they should be left in place.

In the past, asbestos was extensively used in many products, one of the most common being "a/c, or asbestos cement, sheeting". These sheets were often used for cladding (sometimes known as "fibro"), roofing and water-resistant underlay in wet areas. The asbestos in these products is usually firmly embedded in the cement. If the surface is undamaged the asbestos will remain embedded. Surfaces which are weathering and could release asbestos strands from the surface can be covered with paint, or better, an acrylic waterproof membrane resembling thick paint. Seek professional advice on the treatment of cracked or damaged sheets and options when considering renovations to areas that may contain asbestos products.

It may be appropriate to seek laboratory testing of the material to determine if asbestos is indeed present. Removal and disposal of asbestos cement sheet should only be undertaken by a licensed asbestos removal company. Asbestos removal can add substantially to the cost of renovation or maintenance. Specialist removalists will take precautions like:

- wearing protective masks and clothing;
- using hand tools, not power tools, for cutting;
- not abrading or breaking up the product whenever possible;
- thoroughly wetting the product prior to working with it;
- working outdoors rather than indoors; and
- wetting any residue prior to sweeping.

Toxic Mould – HEALTH WARNING

Moulds are living organisms and reproduce by releasing spores into the atmosphere, similar to mushrooms and other fungi. The spores from certain types of mould can cause asthma, bronchitis and

recurrent colds and 'flus in some people. Mould growth inside your home should always be considered potentially harmful and should be eradicated. Moulds require moisture, a food source (such as paper, paint, clothing etc) and still air. Seventy percent of mould problems are due to condensation coming from wet areas like bathrooms and laundry, while thirty percent comes from rising damp.

You can eradicate mould by cleaning it with white vinegar (which should kill the current infestation), fixing any sources of moisture such as condensation, rising damp, leaking pipes, and the like, and by improving ventilation.

Preventing brick cracking and subsidence

Extended periods of dry weather and inadequate garden watering may cause footing subsidence and cracking in brickwork, particularly if large trees are planted close to the house. Ask for the Archicentre Technical Information Sheet "Cracking in Brickwork".

Termite and borer attack

Termites can strike anywhere in Australia, though not significantly in Tasmania. Inadequate sub-floor ventilation, dampness and debris beneath the floor are conditions conducive for termite attack, which can cause significant damage within a period of weeks. Such conditions also encourage borer infestation and timber rot. Ask for the Archicentre Technical Information Sheet "Termites and Borers".

Hidden rising damp

Rising damp may be evident in winter, but is not always detectable in summer. Even minor signs of damp may indicate a far more serious underlying problem and you are advised to consult a damp control company when in doubt. Rising damp can cause increased room humidity, thus encouraging vermin infestation such as cockroaches, silverfish and dust mites, as well as toxic mould growth – all serious asthma allergens. For more information on this topic refer to the Archicentre Technical Information Sheet "Treatment of Dampness".

External timber

Most exterior timbers are susceptible to insect attack and decay. Wet rot is a common decay that can be prevented through correct and timely maintenance. Apart from aesthetic concerns, rot can affect balustrades, steps, deck flooring, support posts and exposed framing. A properly applied stain or paint finish will inhibit water entry through the face of a timber member and care must be taken to adequately protect gaps, joints and end-grain surfaces, which otherwise provide a ready means for moisture to penetrate.

All protective timber finishes will degrade with exposure to solar radiation (sun) and weather. External timber elements will require regular maintenance to maintain a weather-protective finish.

Decks and balconies

The safety of elevated timber or concrete decks and balconies should be a primary concern of any homeowner.

A typical concrete cantilevered balcony has its main reinforcement at the top, and with normal deflection a crack can develop in the concrete, just outside the wall of the building. Such a crack allows moisture to penetrate the slab, resulting in corrosion that reduces the steel cross-section over time, and consequently the capacity of the balcony to carry its design load.

Timber members can rot or be subject to insect attack; whilst metal support brackets and fixings are prone to rust or stress fractures.

All outdoor decks and balconies should be regularly checked for visible signs of deterioration. If in doubt, seek the advice of a qualified Structural Engineer or Building Surveyor.

B. BUILDING REGULATIONS

Building code changes – SAFETY WARNING

The Building Code of Australia is regularly updated, making it likely that many houses will not comply with current safety provisions. You are only required by law to bring the house up to new standards when undertaking renovation work, however you should consider upgrading from a safety and regulatory point of view.

Examples of recent provisions

- Where glass is within 500 mm of the floor or ground it will need to be generally of a greater thickness than before, or laminated safety glass, (exact requirements may vary between States).
- Handrails on balconies, porches, pathways etc which have a metre or more drop must now be one metre in height themselves, be non-climbable and with maximum openings of 125 mm between uprights or similar.
- Party walls must now be built up to the underside of the roof lining or above, in all cases where the wall has to be "fire-rated" (eg, walls between houses).
- The installation of all "domestic solid fuel burning appliances" now needs a building permit for fire safety reasons.

Pool Regulations – SAFETY WARNING

Due to numerous child drownings, regulations governing pool fencing have become stricter over recent years. The intent of the Australian Standard AS1926 adopted by the Building Code of Australia (BCA) is to prohibit a child's unsupervised access to swimming, wading pools, deep ponds or water features. Each state's requirements are slightly different, so check with your local council's building department for the relevant details. Fines are now in place for non-compliance.

Roofing – SAFETY WARNING

Minor roofing faults can cause serious structural damage if not rectified. Make sure your roofing and gutters are inspected regularly, particularly after severe storms or winds. Care should be taken to maintain roof-mounted solar hot water units or pool heating systems to avoid leaks, which may affect flashings and guttering, particularly where the recirculating water may contain corrosive chemicals.

Water Supply – SAFETY WARNING

Greywater diversion is increasingly popular, however it should be noted that dispersal of untreated waste-water onto open ground is a health hazard. Most waste-water is contaminated and should be treated to a minimum standard before re-use. Contact your local council or water authority for advice.

Security – SAFETY WARNING

Deadlocks, window locks and security bars can prevent escape from a burning home. Homeowners should be extremely careful not to lock themselves inside a home unless they are certain they can release the locks immediately in the event of fire.

Fire Prevention – SAFETY WARNING

Hard-wired smoke alarms are mandatory in new homes. Archicentre recommends that hard-wired alarms be fitted to older homes as well, and that they be linked to a monitored security system if present. Wireless alarms should have their batteries replaced regularly or be fitted with long-life lithium batteries.

An appropriately located, hand-held extinguisher and/or fire blanket is also recommended.

Reduced scrutiny by authorities

Electrical wiring should not be attempted by amateurs. Any work suspected to have been carried out by amateurs should be checked by a licensed contractor.

Safety switches are now mandatory for new homes. Archicentre recommends that old fuses and switchboards be replaced with safety switches as a matter of urgency.

The trend towards trade self certification rather than assessment by governing utilities (eg: Water, Electrical, Sewerage, Drainage Authorities) continues with certificates of compliance less the responsibility of the utilities and more the responsibility of tradespeople. You should therefore ensure, for your own protection, that electrical and plumbing work is only undertaken by contractors registered with their relevant authority, usually denoted by a registration number, and request a compliance certificate at the work's completion. You should select contractors who are insured against accident and negligence.

Builder/owner-builder work

In many states, builders need to provide "guarantees" on their work. This broadly means the builder takes out insurance, on behalf of their client, so that defects which become apparent after several years from completion can be remedied at no extra cost to the homeowner.

The work must be of significant value to invoke this guarantee (eg, a minimum of \$12,000 in Victoria), and in some states, work like plumbing is exempted.

So when you engage a builder for significant work, make sure he is registered with the appropriate authorities and the work is insured.

Owner-builders don't need to guarantee themselves that their building work is up to standard (although in Queensland, for example, they need a Building Services Authority owner-builder permit). However, in some states owner-builders need to provide insurance if selling within seven years of the building permit or similar regulation, to protect subsequent owners. In such states, it is necessary first for the vendor to arrange an inspection and report on the building work, by a building professional like Archicentre, after which the relevant insurance may be obtained.

Each state's requirements for building guarantees are different, so check with your building surveyor, your Building Services Authority or similar authority.

Illegal construction

By law, illegal existing extensions, renovations, home improvements and repairs become the responsibility of the home buyer. They may be dangerous, and if substandard, they may have to be demolished prior to further building work.

Check with the vendor or your solicitor to ensure that all such works have been undertaken with local council building approval or personally make building approval enquiries of your local council's building department.

Further information on safety issues and practices can be found in the Archicentre/Kidsafe Australia/Asthma Foundation Home Safety Checklist Technical Sheet available from Archicentre.

National Telephone 1300 13 45 13

www.archicentre.com.au

Archicentre Limited

ABN 34 001 866 520

A wholly owned subsidiary
of The Royal Australian Institute of Architects

