



Energy efficiency compliance using NatHERS accredited software

The Building Commission has published Advisory Notes **AN022** and **AN023** and Industry Bulletin **IB007** detailing issues surrounding compliance with the energy efficiency requirements for housing in the National Construction Code (NCC) using Nationwide House Energy Rating Scheme (NatHERS) accredited software. The purpose of this Industry Bulletin is to clarify the Building Commission's interpretation on the use of NatHERS.

There are two main options for complying with the deemed-to-satisfy (DTS) provisions for the energy efficiency performance of a house – NatHERS accredited software and Elemental Provisions.

The Building Commission is aware of concerns about inconsistencies in star ratings being provided by house energy rating scheme assessors for the purpose of demonstrating compliance with the NCC energy efficiency requirements. In part this appears to be due to a lack of clarity about the use of NatHERS accredited software for the purpose of compliance with the energy efficiency provisions in Part J of the Building Code of Australia (BCA) Volume One and Part 3.12 of BCA Volume Two.

BCA J0.2 and BCA 3.12.0.1 state that, to reduce heating and cooling loads, a building must achieve an energy rating using house energy rating software. House energy rating software is defined in the BCA as follows –

House energy rating software means software accredited under the Nationwide House Energy Rating Scheme and is limited to assessing the potential thermal efficiency of the dwelling envelope.

NatHERS is an initiative of the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments which facilitates consistent star ratings from software tools used to assess the potential energy efficiency of dwelling envelopes.

The NatHERS Software Accreditation Protocol was published in June 2012 and incorporated and replaced the Australian Building Codes Board's Protocol for House Energy Rating Software. The NatHERS Software Accreditation Protocol outlines the requirements and processes for the accreditation of rating software used under the NatHERS scheme.

The NatHERS Software Accreditation Protocol states that in relation to building energy efficiency standards, the NatHERS accredited software must be used in Regulation Mode and operated in accordance with the 'Principles for Ratings in Regulation Mode' document.

The output of the NatHERS accredited software is measured in star ratings. BCA minimum star rating values are prescribed in BCA J0.2 and BCA 3.12.0.1.

Building Commission position

The preceding discussion makes it clear that when a star rating is used to demonstrate compliance:

- The software used must be accredited under the NatHERS Software Accreditation Protocol.
- The NatHERS accredited software must be operated in Regulation Mode.
- The NatHERS software used must be the current version (NatHERS accredited software versions are listed on the NatHERS website – www.nathers.gov.au).

- The NatHERS accredited software must be used in accordance with the NatHERS Principles for Ratings in Regulation Mode.

For WA, NatHERS Principles for Ratings in Regulation Mode are comprised of:

- NatHERS Technical Note 1
- NatHERS Technical Note 1 Addendum

NatHERS Technical Note 1 states that “where there is an inconsistency between a regulatory requirement for carrying out a thermal performance assessment or preparing a house energy rating, the regulatory requirement prevails to the extent of the inconsistency”.

For this reason Technical Note 2 and Technical Note 2 Addendum do not apply because NCC provisions require BCA 3.12.1.2(e) and BCA J1.3(c) to be used to determine the adjustment of minimum R-Value for loss of ceiling insulation.

- An assessment declaration must be provided.

The declaration is to:

- Be signed by the assessor.
- State the version of NatHERS accredited software used, the star rating achieved, that the software was running in regulation mode and that the NatHERS Principles for Ratings in Regulation Mode were used.
- State that the assessor has undertaken training to use the NatHERS accredited software for the applicable regulatory purpose.

Information for building surveyors

When accepting an energy efficiency assessment for the purpose of compliance with Section J or Part 3.12 of the BCA, a building surveyor must:

- Consider the qualification and experience of the assessor to ensure they have the necessary competence to provide the star rating. There are no minimum qualification or experience requirements for assessors; however the building surveyor, by accepting the star rating, is in effect taking responsibility for the assessment.
- Ensure the star rating was generated using NatHERS accredited software and in accordance with this industry bulletin (NatHERS accredited software is listed on the NatHERS website – www.nathers.gov.au).
- Review the assessment documentation provided by the assessor to ensure it provides an appropriate description of the assessed building (refer to NatHERS Technical Note 1).
- Ensure the proposed building complies with all other energy efficiency provisions of the BCA not covered by the NatHERS certificate.

Disclaimer

The information contained in this bulletin is provided as general information only and should not be relied upon as legal advice or as an accurate statement of the relevant legislation provisions. If you are uncertain as to your legal obligations you should obtain independent legal advice.

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