

Look to other countries to build wisely

Dear BUILD,

I have been reading BUILD for some time now and have wanted to write on a number of occasions with regard to certain articles. I have, however, refrained from doing so. After reading the article by Michael Camilleri 'Do people want or get sustainable houses' (April/May 2006, pages 64-65) I was compelled to write.

Michael's report was spot on. Although New Zealand are aware of climate change, many fail to associate this with houses. A recent survey carried out in the UK showed that 40 million tonnes of CO2 emissions came from domestic housing compared with 20 million tonnes from car usage. However, the British government, unlike to New Zealand government, has and is continuing to implement changes to house building to reduce the effects of CO2 emission.

Do you not think the job of our government is to do something to make our homes more efficient? 'But they are' I hear you said, and I agree. However, at the pace they are going it will take another 20 years before we catch up with Europe or the USA.

A few things would have an immediate impact on more energy-efficient building. After all, the Europeans have been building far longer than us and it's about time we took a leaf out of their book. Here is what the UK does:

- solid masonry outer shells, 100mm minimum, with a 100mm cavity
- 200 x 100mm air bricks to vent the cavity, and soffit vents to take the hot air out of the roof void
- PVC damp-roof courses as opposed to malthoid, which breaks down
- PVC cavity closer to stop damp penetrating through windows and doors
- Solid plaster on internal masonry walls and a full skim coat on plasterboard (we just tape and stop the joints)
- PVCU double-glazed windows as opposed to single-glazed aluminium
- 250mm minimum insulation to roof spaces and internal walls
- Eave overhangs mandatory

Look at how we build here, we've only recently introduced a 40mm cavity – what good is that? I guess better than none. Weep holes the size of a pencil don't let water out, nor are they good enough to let air into the cavity to dry it out if water penetrates the outer walls.

Aluminium single-glazed windows and doors – the worst material you could ever use with the exception of steel for thermal efficiency. Timber is a lot more thermally efficient and we have it in abundance. Too expensive, maybe? PVCU is used in 80% of the world, and for at least 40 years or more. It's long lasting, can be recycled, needs no maintenance, and is a lot more thermally efficient than aluminium.

Is it because the people who make the decisions are a little behind the times and wouldn't know PVCU windows if it hit them on the head? I guess that's why there are no provisions in building code for PVCU.

It is time the policy makers got off their high horses and took a look at building practices in other parts of the world. Otherwise New Zealand will continue to build shoddy, leaking, damp and inefficient homes for years to come. (From a former President of the UK Federation of Master Builders.)

Ken Miller
By email