CERTIFICATION FORMS

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Have you noticed that there has been a marked increase in requests for building certifications?

As a structural engineer in the State of Victoria, I have noticed a dramatic rise in the number of requests for either a Form 13 or a Form 14 Building Certification.

It should be noted each State has a different type of building certification and Forms 13 and 14 relate only to Victoria.

So what are Forms 13 and 14?

In Victoria, Form 13 covers "Certificate of Compliance – Design", while Form 14 covers "Certificate of Compliance – Inspection".

Both certification forms are required under regulation 15.7 (2) of the "Victorian Building Regulations 1994" and are made under the powers of the "Victorian Building Act 1993".

Both forms can be issued for the whole project or as part of the relevant section of a project.

To be able to provide a Form 13 or Form 14 Certificate, in Victoria, means that you have to be a qualified Civil Engineer who is a member of the Institute of Engineers Australia (IE Aust) and also registered as a Building Practitioner.

Other Australian States such as Queensland and New South Wales do not have standard certification forms.

However, there are some formats that are recommended by the Institute of Engineers Australia, which may be adopted, to form a similar Compliance Certificate.

The only requirement in NSW is that a qualified engineer must sign off on the design documents.

To be able to provide a certification form in Queensland, the Professional Engineers Act 1988 requires you to be a qualified engineer who is registered by the Board of Professional Engineers of Queensland.

Whereas in NSW the only requirement is that the design engineer must be a member of the Institute of Engineers Australia.

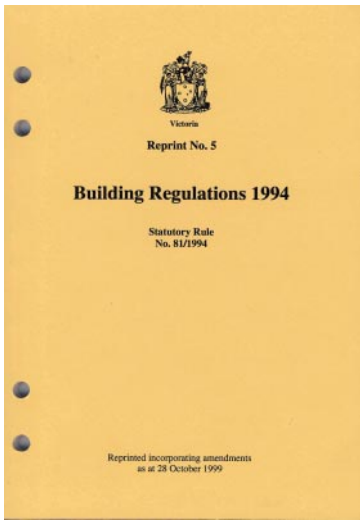
What does this all mean?

When a truss manufacturer provides an engineered truss design using proprietary software, they may at times be required to also provide design certification.

This requirement may be built into the contract or specification. Truss manufacturers (estimators, detailers) cannot provide the required certificates because they are not registered practitioners or qualified engineers.

In situations like this, they must employ an engineer, who meets all the above-mentioned requirements to provide the necessary certification documents.

Truss manufacturers, as a duty of care, are required to accept product liability, which covers detailers.


Victoria

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The registration of building practitioners was set up for building designers (eg. draftsmen, engineers etc) who provided designs but not the actual product.

The responsibilities associated with the certifying engineer are very high. The engineer must ensure that the design documents, to be certified, conform to the Building Code of Australia (BCA) and all the relevant standards.

To do so, the engineer must have a copy of all the relevant design computations and approved drawings.

In order to satisfy the above requirements, the engineer must then thoroughly check all the input and output of the computer program reports. He must also ensure that the design drawings also reflect the design intent of the computations provided.

In addition to the above-mentioned items, engineers that provide inspection certification must also have a set of the approved plans, specifications and a copy of the building permit.

In a recent letter from the Building Control Commission, engineers were reminded that under the Building Act they should not conduct inspections prior to the design certification and building permit being issued and that they are not obliged to submit or prepare Form 14's.

The building surveyor also cannot compel the production of a Form 13 certificate. However, he is entitled to ask for additional information to establish the structural soundness of a particular design.

If the builder or engineer refuses to supply a Form 13 then the building surveyor can either request the design engineer to provide confirmation of the structural adequacy from an independent (suitably qualified) third party or arrange a third party to check, for an additional fee.

Your nailplate supplier's computer design software has been developed for use by estimators and detailers who are not engineers.

Provided that the information is input correctly from the relevant plans, the programs will carry out engineering designs in accordance with all relevant Australian standards.

The abstract and status reports produced by the program should confirm that they have been certified by a company engineer who is a Registered Building Practitioner.

A design certification form should always be obtained prior to the manufacture of special beams or trusses.

Doing so will eliminate the need to provide costly rectifications and penalties that could otherwise be avoided.

If in any doubt, discuss all your concerns with your structural engineer and ensure that you have understood all the requirements as stated in the project specifications.

Being armed with all the relevant information will help reduce the likelihood of inadequate designs and simplify the certification process, for all concerned.