

Residential Building Energy Standards (RBES) Update Stakeholder Meeting

Q&A

March 14, 2014

1. Q: Will there be a mailing to town code officials to inform them of their responsibilities to notify permit applicants about code requirements?

A: Outreach has been made to inform town officials of their new responsibilities from Act 89, Additionally Efficiency Vermont has been working with town officials and regional planning commissions to provide information about Act 89.

2. Q: What about towns that don't require building permits— are they required to comply with Act 89?

A: Act 89 specifically refers to building permits and Certificates of Occupancy. If the town does not issue building permits or certificates of occupancy then the town officials are not required to provide information.

3. Q: When in the building process would a HERS rating be used? What would be the timing?

A: HERS ratings are typically performed when a home is complete, just prior to occupancy. In some cases a rating may be derived from plans prior to construction to develop an estimate of how the completed structure will be scored.

4. Q: How would insulation grade be handled if a rating was only run at final inspection?

A: If a visual inspection cannot be made of the insulation, the score defaults to grade 3. In other words, the default assumption is that the installation would not meet the higher standards.

5. Q: How much is REScheck used for VT RBES compliance?

A: Currently there are no firm numbers, but feedback suggests that there are a number of builders who certify code compliance for their homes using REScheck.

6. Q: Should blower door testing be required? What certifications should be required for the person doing the testing? Should builders be allowed to test their own houses, or should an "independent" test be required?

A: It has yet to be decided if a blower door test would be required for either base or stretch code. It has also yet to be decided what certification would be needed *if* blower door tests are required. Additionally since the energy code is a self-certification process it is likely that the builder would be allowed to test their own homes if they have the appropriate certification or training. Further comments and suggestions about how to approach blower door testing in the code update are welcome.

7. Q: Can a commitment to meet the "Fast Track" (prescriptive path) be used to demonstrate compliance for ACT 250 at the permitting stage? Design-build projects generally at this stage are not completely designed. The MEP's are not awarded at this point. Doing a REScheck assessment during the process as the building gets designed with the design team—rather than at the permitting stage— makes more sense. REScheck at the ACT 250 permitting stage is based on assumptions, and not based on the project.

A: While Act 250 requirements are the purview of the District Environmental Commissions, the Public Service Department welcomes such input and will share it with relevant parties, such as the Natural Resources Board, as appropriate.

8. Q: If a house starts construction prior to the effective date of the new energy code, will it only need to meet the current energy code?

A: Yes. The code in effect at the time construction begins would be the version of the energy code the building would be required to meet.

9. Q: When a Vermont town official receives the permit application and drawings, does the official call Efficiency Vermont to do an energy code review and/or run REScheck or do a HERS rating?

A: The town official's obligation is to provide code information to building permit applicants and then to receive a completed RBES or CBES certificate at the completion of a project from the applicant to be entered into the land records. In this instance, typically the home builder— or whoever is applying for the permit if it isn't the builder— could contact Efficiency Vermont directly for assistance in meeting the RBES and to enroll in Efficiency Vermont's programs. While Act 89 places new responsibilities on town officials to inform permit applicants about code requirements, town officials are not expected to serve as a liaison between the permit applicant and Efficiency Vermont.

10. Q: Would Efficiency Vermont then work with the builder to schedule the inspections and blower door test— when the builder tells them they are ready for drywall and when construction is complete?

A: Efficiency Vermont could coordinate inspections and the final blower door test directly with the builder if requested.

11. Q: Is there a maximum HERS number the house needs to meet to comply with the current energy code?

A: The current RBES requires a house to score no more than 75 points to demonstrate compliance, if using the HERS compliance path. Reducing the maximum score to demonstrate compliance to 60 points for the updated code, and to 54 points for the stretch code is under consideration

12. Q: Will the new code require kitchen ventilation?

A: Ventilation requirements have not yet been determined for Vermont's RBES update. The following three options are under consideration:

1. Keep the ventilation requirements from the current RBES.
2. Adopt the ventilation requirements in 2012 IRC, which references ASHRAE 62.2. We believe, but have not yet confirmed that kitchen ventilation is required in this standard.
3. Adopt a different ventilation standard, possibly based on Building Science Corporation's proposed residential ventilation guidelines.

Comments and suggestions about how to approach kitchen ventilation in the code update are welcomed.

13. Q: If Vermont adopted a provision in RBES that required greater levels of efficiency for larger homes, would a similar requirement also apply to additions?

A: The Public Service Department is considering this but has not reached any decision. Comments and suggestions are encouraged about whether, and if so, how to approach house size in the code update, for both new house construction and additions.

14. Q: Would there be advantages to correlating the required efficiency levels to the number of square feet of living space for each occupant, or perhaps the number of bedrooms, instead of the absolute house size?

A: Using the number of square feet of living space for each occupant or the number of bedrooms might more easily identify houses that contain an unusually large amount of space for the number of people who live there. For example, a two-bedroom 3,200 square foot house might be expected to consume more energy per person than a six-bedroom 3,200 square foot house, and therefore one might conclude that the two-person house should be built to a more efficient standard. The Public Service Department has not yet considered assessing the impact that such a requirement might have in Vermont. We welcome comments and suggestions about whether, and if so, how to approach house size in the code update.

15. Q: How do the multi-family requirements work with vacation guest-type housing, especially at the resorts? Are all requirements applicable (i.e. separate electric meters)?

A: All residential defined structures should meet RBES requirements. Similarly, commercial defined structures must meet CBES requirements. The number of stories above grade

determines which code applies. The current 2011 CBES requires individual dwelling units to have separate electric meters, with an exception for elderly housing.