SIGNIFICANT CHANGES COMING TO THE FLORIDA BUILDING CODE

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The Florida Building Code seeks to establish unified and consistent minimum standards in the design, construction and compliance processes, and regulations for the safety, health, and general welfare of building occupants. The Code also protects property investments and saves the state and local governments money in mitigation costs linked to natural disasters, including hurricanes.

Florida law requires the Florida Building Commission to update the Florida Building Code every three years, and the 2020 Code update process involved at least thirty-three technical advisory committee meetings, over 1200 proposed code modifications, and approximately 352 public comments.

The Florida Building Code, 7th Edition (2020), which takes effect on January 1, 2021, contains significant changes from the prior edition, including noticeable changes to roofing and wind load requirements and energy conservation.

- ***Roofing Requirements - Building, Residential and Existing Building***

  The 7th Edition contains changes to the requirements for roof assemblies, which seek to strengthen the code to improve resistance to wind damage and water infiltration. For example, there are several changes to both new construction and roof replacement, including changes to roofing underlayment (sealed roof deck). The revisions also include changes to wind loads on roofs; roof mitigation; roof diaphragms resisting wind loads in high wind regions; soffits; and cable and raceway-type wiring methods on roofs.

- ***Wind Loads – Building and Residential***

  The wind criteria in the 7th Edition has been updated to correlate with ASCE 7-16 (Minimum Design Loads and Associated Criteria for Buildings and Other Structures). ASCE 7-16 includes notable changes to the wind load provisions, including a new Risk Category IV wind speed map; a new wind load criteria for rooftop solar panels; and revised (higher) design wind pressures on roofs of buildings with mean roof height ? 60 feet; new wind load criteria for attached canopies.

  The wind speed map in the 7th Edition (Residential) remains unchanged. In High-Velocity Hurricane Zones, where a single wind speed for each Risk Category is specified for Miami-Dade County and Broward County, the Risk Category IV wind speeds are:

  Miami-Dade County - Risk Category IV Buildings and Structures: 195 mph
  Broward County - Risk Category IV Buildings and Structures: 185 mph

- ***Energy Conservation Volumes – Residential and Commercial***

The 7th Edition also includes important residential provision changes including a new electric resistance space heating prohibition for prescriptive projects in Climate Zone 2; updated residential minimum equipment efficiencies; a new whole-house mechanical ventilation minimum fan efficacy stipulation for heat recovery ventilations or energy recovery ventilations; modified mechanical ventilation vent fan energy use standard reference design specification for performance compliance; an increased lighting efficacy requirement; a blower door testing requirement clarification for certain performance projects; a performance compliance duct testing exception change that clarifies ducts must be tested if an air leakage of less than the default; new dehumidifier provisions and dehumidifier performance compliance specifications (if the proposed project has a dehumidifier); and revised service water heating performance compliance specifications.

There are also changes to the commercial provisions in the 7th Edition, including removal of the automatic receptacle control requirement for energy standard for buildings except low-rise residential buildings compliance; a new building card key control requirement for hotels, motels and boarding houses updated equipment minimum efficiency tables, and extensive revision and reorganization of indoor and exterior lighting devices and controls sections.

Updating the Florida Building Code is a vital, ongoing process to protect Floridians and their property. Opponents of code changes argue stricter or new building code requirements increase the costs of construction, which are passed on to property buyers through taxes or insurance premiums. The Florida Building Code however serves as a crucial tool during the insurance claims process as it governs a property owner's obligations to meet minimum threshold requirements and impacts an insurance company's duties to issue payment for these increased costs to comply with such ordinances or laws in the event a property is damaged by a covered peril. It is important for every property owner to not only recognize the Florida Building Code serves as a roadmap for the repair or reconstruction of a property but also that there are insurance coverages available in the event a property owner is required to incur costs to bring the property up to the constantly evolving code.

Unsurprisingly, the Code development process for the 8th Edition (2023) Florida Building Code is already underway.

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