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## Govt plans to scrap one-size insulation rule

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Rules for houses will change – in a move designed to bring down costs for new builds

### BUILDING REGULATIONS

**Miriam Bell**

The Government has announced it will overhaul the nation's insulation regulations, allowing more flexibility in the system which it hopes will help drive down house building costs.

The new system will move away from the current "schedule approach" which describes how much insulation is required in a house in different parts of the country to a new "whole of house approach", in which a builder can use online tools to calculate or model how much insulation is needed based on total heat loss.

"I've heard clearly from the industry that the current one-size-fits-all approach to insulation requirements is needlessly driving-up costs," Building and Construction Minister Chris Penk said. "The most prescriptive compliance pathway currently available for insulation – known as the Schedule Method – doesn't allow for design tradeoffs that can affect a home's energy efficiency, like adjusting window size.

"This has led to designers and homeowners having to over-insulate in certain areas to achieve Building Code compliance, offering little extra energy efficiency benefit at a significant cost," he said.

Penk claims that the new methods – called adaptable calculation and modelling methods – have been shown to save up to \$15,000 on the cost of a new build home.

Penk has been consulting on the changes for some months. *The Post* reported in December that the changes were being consulted on. An MBIE discussions document was released then and submissions ran until February.

At the time, the industry, including green

build advocates, were mostly supportive of the proposals, which change how required insulation was calculated rather than dropping insulation standards. Concerns revolved around cost, overheating of homes through over-insulation and potential mould issues.

The changes applying to calculating insulation requirements for new build homes, not for requirements in renovations.

The Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment will now remove the schedule method, "in favour of more flexible alternatives". It will be removed from the Building Code's "acceptable solutions and verification methods for energy efficiency" by the end of the year and the sector will get a 12-month transition period to adjust to the changes.

As a part of the changes, MBIE will also consult on a "more tailored approach" to insulation in the Northland, in order to cut building costs in New Zealand's warmer and more remote northern climes.

"I've heard from the district council that building costs in the Far North are approaching \$5000 per square metre. They're pushing for change to deliver more homes for locals at a reasonable price – an ambition I fully support," Penk said.

"In my view, recognising Northland's unique climate with a separate zone is a sensible step that could lower costs and unlock much-needed housing supply," he said.

Certified Builders chief executive Malcolm Fleming said the removal of the "blunt instrument" that was the schedule method was good news and demonstrated the minister was listening to the industry.



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“Interestingly, the cost savings the minister estimates will come from using the calculation and modelling methods are very similar to the estimates from a study we conducted last year.”

It made sense to introduce a new climate zone for the Far North as it was currently in the same climate zone as Auckland and Thames, but was much warmer, he said.

“These are sensible and pragmatic changes to the H1 regulations. They’ve been in action for two years now, and it is not uncommon to make appropriate adjustments to such systems as time goes by.”

Master Builders chief executive Ankit Sharma said they understood why the Government had made the decision to remove the schedule method from the Building Code.

The schedule method proved too rigid and often led to over-costing projects without delivering meaningful improvements to energy efficiency, he said.