



Plumbing Newsflash

PLUMBING RAINWATER TANKS INTO DOMESTIC DWELLINGS

Purpose

To provide clarification on the plumbing into houses of water supplied from rainwater tanks.

Background

From 1 March 2006, the *Standard Building Regulations 1993* (SBR) referenced a model rainwater tank standard under Part 25 (Rainwater Tanks) of the *Queensland Development Code* (QDC). The standard comes into affect where called up in a council planning instrument.

A previous Newsflash, released on 24 February 2006, discussed the model rainwater tank standard and described those areas within the house where the standard would require tank water to be used. Some confusion has arisen as to whether or not rainwater tanks can also be plumbed to other areas of a dwelling in addition to the minimum uses specified in the standard.

Legislation

The *Plumbing and Drainage Act 2002* calls up the Plumbing Code of Australia which in turn calls up AS/NZS 3500, the national plumbing and drainage standard.

AS3500.1:2003, Section 14, Installation of Water Supply System from Rainwater Tanks, specifies minimum requirements for the installation of a water supply system from a rainwater tank where the tank is collecting water from roof catchments and is installed in an area where water from a network utility operator is provided to the property.

Clause 14.4, Provision for Augmentation of Supply, states that:

where provision is made for augmentation of the rainwater supply by either top up of the rainwater tank with water from another supply, or by connection of another supply to any point downstream of the rainwater tank outlet, the installation shall include backflow protection, in accordance with Section 4 and Table 14.1, to protect the other supply system.

NOTE: The other supply may be a drinking water supply or an alternative water supply.

The Standard Plumbing and Drainage Regulation, Section 45 Water storage tanks, states that:

(1) A pipe carrying water supplied by the local government or other service provider must not, without a local government's written approval—

(a) be connected to a water storage tank used to store water obtained from another source; or

(b) be discharged into a water storage tank used to store water obtained from another source.

(2) If the local government gives an approval under subsection (1), a backflow prevention device must be installed on the pipe carrying the water supplied by the local government.

Interpretation

Part 25 of the QDC specifies where water from a tank can be required to be used. These are the uses which local governments can make mandatory. As such, they represent minimum uses of the water. Homeowners may also use water from the tank for other uses in addition to those specified in Part 25 of the QDC as long as the installation is in accordance with the plumbing legislation.

There is nothing in the legislation or supporting codes and standards which states that a water supply from a rainwater tank cannot be connected to a domestic dwelling.

There are however, provisions which state that the water supply from the rainwater tank cannot be connected to the water supplied by local government without the knowledge and approval of the relevant local council and that an appropriate backflow prevention device must be installed to ensure that cross-contamination does not occur.

The use of rainwater for drinking water

The Australian Standards require that only drinking water be supplied to plumbing fixtures or outlets for human consumption, bathing, food preparation or utensil washing. Rainwater can qualify as drinking water and can be plumbed as drinking water. Queensland regulations do not prohibit the plumbing of rainwater tanks to supply drinking water. The Australian Standards allow councils to refuse to authorise cross connection between a rainwater supply and a town water supply. Where this is the case, it is still possible to plumb rainwater separately into the house.

However, it should be noted that town water provides the safest form of drinking water. Queensland Health does not recommend the use of water from rainwater tanks for drinking and food preparation where town water is available. Most councils also prefer that people use town water over rainwater for drinking as it is more closely monitored. However, if a person chooses to use rainwater for drinking or any other purpose, then that person is responsible for ensuring the quality of the water is fit for its intended use. More information on using rainwater tanks and potential water contaminants is available at http://www.nphp.gov.au/enhealth/council/pubs/documents/rainwater_tanks.pdf.

More information about maintaining rainwater tanks is available at <http://www.health.qld.gov.au/phs/documents/ehu/30632.pdf> and <http://www.arid.asn.au/documents/ARIDHandbookflyerfeb06.pdf>.

Contact Officer

For further information in relation to this Newsflash, please contact Building Codes Queensland on (07) 3239 6369 and quote Newsflash 241.

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