



The Eco Design Advisor Service Information Sheet for Interested Participant Councils

Why Eco Design advisors?

A BRANZ study found there was a lack of factual, independent, tailored advice for homeowners, consumers and industry about sustainable building and how to improve house performance.

They initiated the Eco Design Advisor service to fulfil that need.

The location of the service inside local Councils is a key factor in providing homeowners with confidence that the advice is independent, trustworthy and meets Council policies and the requirements of the Building Code. Furthermore, the advisors undertake regular training, attend industry conferences and share resources with each other to keep abreast of industry trends. Their recommendations are backed up by third-party research undertaken by organisations such as BRANZ and Beacon Pathway.

Initial research undertaken by BRANZ showed that the face-to-face nature of the advice was a key part of the success of the service. People are able to discuss their plans for new homes or renovations on a one-to-one basis, and a home assessment enables them to have the confidence that the information provided is specific to their circumstances.

Why Sustainable Homes?

Beacon Pathway's research has demonstrated that there is considerable scope to improve the sustainability of New Zealand's new and existing homes. New Zealand homes are generally cold, damp, unhealthy and inefficient in energy and water use:

- New Zealand homes are on average 6°C below World Health Organization recommended minimum temperatures in winter;
- 45 percent of all New Zealand homes are mouldy;
- New Zealand has the second highest rate of asthma in the world, and an excess winter mortality of 1600, a much higher rate than in other OECD countries;
- 300,000 New Zealand homes have an unflued gas heater;
- the air inside New Zealand homes can be more polluted than outdoor air; and
- cold damp homes pose serious health risks, particularly for the most vulnerable groups in the community who spend the most time at home.



Even new homes do not perform as well as they could. Although insulation standards are much higher than they used to be, new building techniques bring their own problems, particularly for home ventilation and indoor environment quality.

In short, the challenge for New Zealand is to improve the 1.6 million homes that we already have, and to ensure that when we build new homes (averaging around 16-20,000 per year), that we don't continue to make the same design mistakes.

Current Eco Design Advisors

Currently there are Eco Design Advisors across New Zealand in Auckland City, Waitakere City, Hamilton City, Tauranga City, Western Bay of Plenty District, Kapiti Coast District, Hutt City and Nelson City. The positions are located in various parts of the participant Councils, often in the Building area where there are strong work synergies. The current positions are a mix of part and full time roles.

What's Involved for Participant Councils?

As part of having an Eco Design Advisor service, participant Councils need to allow for the position to:

- undertake free or low cost in-home consultations with homeowners as the primary role of the service
- provide free phone advice and short consultations at Council offices for homeowners regarding their new home or renovation plans
- undertake presentations and networking with industry and community groups and local professional and industry organisations in order to both promote the service and increase the understanding of sustainable building in the local Council area
- participate in fortnightly conference calls across the advisor network – this is a key part of keeping up to date with best practice approaches and latest research findings
- participate in twice yearly training conferences – usually one of these will be in Wellington (to allow BRANZ technical advisors to attend) and the other in a different location
- collect information about consultations and the outcome of these to enable researchers to identify ways to optimise the service and the advice offered.

Benefits of the Service to Local Councils

Participant Councils have identified a number of benefits to them having an Eco Design Advisor service. These include the following:

- Delivering positive and proactive advice for residents before they lodge building consents, which reduces administrative delays and compliance costs during the consenting process



- Results in new buildings and extensions to houses that meet higher standards of design, construction, durability and reduced use of natural resources
- Improves the energy and water efficiency of all houses through better insulation, more efficient space and water heating, as well as energy and water efficient appliances, tap fittings and plumbing systems
- Providing tangible action in relation to Council Sustainability Policies, Energy Policies, Water Policies and Climate Change programmes
- Delivering an improved quality of life for current and future residents of their city/district
- Developing internal staff capacity to promote the principles and practice of sustainability
- Having an EDA on staff allows easy access to specialist environment design advice on the council's own projects
- Very positive public feedback – the EDA service is one of the few “carrots” councils offer in the building compliance area
- Shows the council as being proactive and leading in sustainable issues
- Provides access to factual and impartial advice to a cross section of the community for free, many of whom would not pay for such advice or information, yet gain significant value from it.
- EDA recommendations can assist with other council responsibilities such as efficient water management and waste minimisation

How the Service Has Performed

A range of evaluations have been undertaken of the performance of the Eco Design Advisor service and all of these have identified the service as being highly effective and delivering on a wide range of key outcomes. In particular these evaluations have identified that:

- There was a very high degree of satisfaction from participant homeowners and designers with the service offered;
- The service was having a significant impact on the values and long-term behaviours of the participant homeowners and designers;
- The service was resulting in significant improvements to the designs and performance of the dwellings which had been the subject of in-depth consultations; and
- The method of delivery of the service (free consultations including in-home visits) was an effective method of achieving these outcomes.

In addition the service has provided additional value to the participant Councils through:

- Developing streamlined consent processes for key sustainable building technologies such as solar hot water systems

Providing input into related Council programmes. For example Kapiti Coast District water demand management programme, Nelson City Solarsaver programme, Waitakere Retrofit Your Home programme.



Further Information

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