

BlueBox Newsletter

Technical Briefing for Surveyors, Energy Assessors and Property Professionals *Issue One March 2008*

Commercial EPCs are GO!

According to Government plans, Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs) will become mandatory by October 2008. As a result, a number of training and assessment organisations have launched a range of products and packages that are attracting interest from those individuals who are keen to develop and broaden their role in the energy assessment sector.

However, based on our (sometimes painful!), experience of the Home Inspector and Domestic Energy Assessor initiatives, we urge you to be cautious. It is understandable to want to be the first in any new market but we have a number of concerns about this potentially exciting development:

Do you Need to Rush?

The government's programme has been set for some time and most commentators agree that this is unlikely to change. Although most Accreditation Schemes are confidently established, much of the detail for commercial EPCs is yet to be put into place. Additionally, no one quite knows how the market will react. A number of commercial building owners are keen to get EPCs for their buildings, but many are waiting to see what happens.

The commercial property sector has experienced initiatives like this before. Legislation requiring better access for people with disabilities and identifying and managing asbestos in buildings has not produced the levels of predicted activity despite the strict statutory duties imposed on building owners. We are not convinced that the sector will react differently with EPCs.



What's in this issue?

Welcome to the first issue of 2008 of our technical newsletter. It includes:

- *Commercial EPCs, developments in Scotland and Northern Ireland;*
- *DEAs - submitting your own choice EPCs for assessment;*
- *Technical updates on dangerous hot water tanks, radon and other pre inspection desk top checks.*

If you have any comments on this newsletter or would like to make a contribution, please contact the BlueBox partners office on 0845 260 3500.

Select the Course that Suits You

It is important to choose a course that suits your learning style and professional background. Understanding the construction of commercial buildings and identifying their varied heating systems is at the heart of the energy assessment of non-dwellings. Acquiring this knowledge will require significant focus and time commitment, especially if you do not have a technical background.

Our experience shows that people new to this role benefit from courses that are based on a 'learning cycle'. This usually involves three separate stages:

Stage one—acquiring the core knowledge through a series of focused tasks;

Stage two—receiving feedback and guidance on the allocated tasks, and;

Stage three—reflecting on strengths and weaknesses of the experience and setting an improvement action plan.

An essential feature of this approach is to have sufficient time for the newly acquired knowledge to 'sink in'. Intensive, fast track courses may suit some people but they are not for everyone!

Who is Offering the Course?

The domestic energy assessor initiative resulted in the appearance of a number of organisations with ambitious business plans and attractive income generation schemes. As the energy assessment sector 'matured' and the market settled, a number of these scaled down their plans and several ceased trading altogether.

Will EPCs of non-dwellings have the same effect? Whatever the outcome, a number of key questions may help you evaluate the sustainability of the players in this new market:

- How long have they been in this market? What training experience have they got? Who is involved? What are the names of the key personnel?
- What backing has the organisation got? Who are they linked to? How big is the organisation?
- Have they got any link with the commercial property sector? If they are setting up a 'panel' of building energy assessors, who are their clients? Where will they be getting their instructions from? What is their business plan?

In our opinion, all players in the sector need to be transparent and realistic about what they can achieve.

Increased Liability

The legal liability of DEAs is (and is likely to remain), limited. This is because:

- The RdSAP program makes assumptions about domestic properties and so reduces the judgements DEAs have to make. Although dwellings vary, many are similar and familiar, limiting liability. Non dwellings are more varied requiring a greater range of assessor judgements and increasing the possibility of mistakes;
- Currently, few home buyers investment decisions are influenced by energy performance. However, owners of commercial property are likely to be different and running costs may be an important part of their business plan.

Consequently, mistakes are more likely to have a cost impact and although we can only speculate at this stage, building owners may seek redress from the energy assessors more readily.

What are We Planning?

Despite our concerns and reservations, BlueBox *partners* is keen to get involved in this new sector. Our parent company, Allied Surveyors, serves many commercial clients, all of which are beginning to demand EPCs as part of a professional package.

Although we have yet to finalise the details, we will be forming a partnership with a leading national organisation to offer a training course for 'level three' type buildings specially designed for DEAs and other appropriately qualified practitioners. It is likely to be a six day programme that will lead to an independent Diploma. BlueBox *partners* will deliver the core knowledge through four days of training with our partner responsible for the SBEM software training element and assessment phases.

The programme is likely to be longer and more expensive than some of our competitors but we prefer to help people build a more sustainable career as a building energy assessor in a complex and changing market place. We hope to launch the course in April.

As soon as we finalise the details we will contact you again as well as placing the information on our website. However, if you want to discuss this in more detail, please contact the BlueBox *partners* office:

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EPCs Scotland and Northern Ireland

Colleagues in Scotland and Northern Ireland have not been exposed to the Home Information Pack legislation (aren't they the lucky ones?!). Because they are still covered by the European Directive on Energy Performance of Buildings, EPCs will still have to be produced when all buildings are sold or rented. The Scottish Parliament and the Northern Ireland Assembly have chosen different ways of meeting these requirements and these have been summarised below.

Scotland

The Scottish Building Standards Agency are responsible for the development of the EPC initiative and rather than create a new breed of energy assessor, they have signed 'protocols' with a number of professional institutions. These include The Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers, Scotland (CIBSE Scotland), The Association of Building Engineers (ABE), The Energy Institute (EI), The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors (RICS), The Heating and Ventilation Contractors Association (HVCA) and BRE to deliver services in relation to Energy Performance Certificates.



These protocol agreements are simple contracts that state the organisation is committed to delivering EPCs in Scotland and their members are appropriately qualified to do so. This does not mean that professional membership will automatically result in a person being able to carry out EPCs; instead the individual will have to meet the competency standards laid down by their own institution. The overall programme is as follows:

| Category | Date of Introduction |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Construction | Introduced on 1 May 2007 |
| Sale (dwellings) | Autumn 2008 |
| Sale (non-dwellings) | 4 January 2009 |
| Rental | 4 January 2009 |
| Public buildings | Must be on display by 4 January 2009 |

The situation for dwellings is slightly different. This is because domestic EPCs are to be part of the 'Home Report' that has just been approved by the Scottish Parliament.

From 1 December 2008, properties for sale will have to be marketed with information, now branded as the 'Home Report'. This is a pack of three documents: a Single Survey, an Energy Report and a Property Questionnaire. The Home Report will be made available on request to prospective buyers of the home.



Because the Single Survey contains a valuation of the property, only a properly trained Chartered Surveyor will be allowed to produce the Single Survey and the EPC. The role of Domestic Energy Assessor simply will not exist north of the border. Although these new arrangements build on the current buying and selling process in Scotland, additional training will be required especially around the 'Single Survey' product. We will keep you up to date with developments.

Northern Ireland

As previously mentioned, the initiative is being administered by the Northern Ireland Assembly and EPCs will be produced as stand-alone documents, not linked to a HIP or Home Report.

The current timetable for both dwellings and non-dwellings will be:

- new build **early 2008**
- sales **mid 2008**
- rentals **January 2009**

Much of the detail has yet to be finally settled, however for dwellings, RDSAP will be used, as will the English and Welsh DEA qualification and accreditation structure. Like in England and Wales, SBEM and Dynamic Simulation Models will be used for non dwellings. We will provide further updates in future Newsletters.

Safety of Hot Water Cylinders

The recent inquest into the sad death of a young child revealed that the accident was caused by a malfunctioning electric immersion heater. It resulted in the splitting of a water storage tank above the child's bedroom. Although many surveyors and inspectors may not be directly responsible for spotting this type of danger, since over 3.5million UK homes could have similar hot water heating systems, it is important to be able to identify the most important signs.

The systems at most risk are hot water cylinders heated by electric immersion heaters that are linked with poorly supported cold water storage tanks installed more than ten years ago.

The thermostat on the immersion heater can fail allowing the cylinder to heat up beyond the recommended temperature. The boiling water expands up the expansion pipe and discharges over the plastic cold water tank. The hot water distorts the plastic tank which then splits allowing very hot water to cascade into the room below.



What to Look For

Problems are likely to occur with systems over ten years old in houses built between 1945 and 1975 or where the quality of the installation or repair work carried out is poor. The greatest risks occur where cold water tanks are situated over sleeping areas. If the hot water cylinder is in a bedroom, it is likely that the cold water tank will be somewhere close by.

Warning Signs

The typical indicators include:

- Excessive noise from the cylinder when it is boiling;

- Very hot water from the hot water taps;
- Excessive moisture and condensation in the roof space;
- Hot water coming out of the cold water taps;
- Warm water in the WC cistern and pan (the classic 'hot flush!');

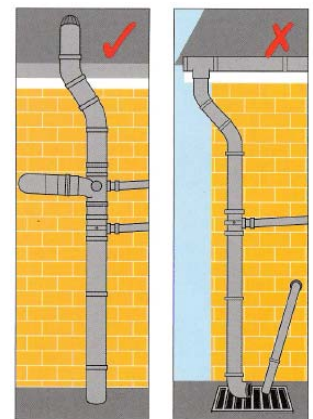
Cold water tanks that are not properly supported underneath are most at risk. If you spot these signs you should include the matter in your report.

Grey Water Connections to Surface Water Drains

The Environment Agency and water authorities are emphasising the problems caused by home owners connecting grey water appliances (washing machines, dishwashers, etc.) into surface water drainage systems. Not only can this quickly result in the pollution of nearby water courses, it can also lead to the water authority taking action against the owner as 'the polluter pays'.

It is important to spot this feature during inspections and surveys and key indicators include:

- It only affects properties with separate surface water systems. These usually have double the usual number of inspection chambers;
- recently installed appliances with non-standard or poor quality connections.



This feature must be reported to the client as the water authority will pursue the owner of the property rather than the person who carried out the substandard work. For more information, visit www.environment-agency.gov.uk/subjects/waterquality/

Schedule of Courses and Training Activities

We have listed below a selection of the BlueBox *partners* courses and training events planned for the next period:

NAEA DEA Revision Course

A half day revision course for those who are preparing for the National Association of Estate Agents exams for DEAs.

18th March 2008—Coventry

Residential Property Inspection and Appraisal Programme

This is our career development programme for qualified DEAs who want to become technical members of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors. It utilises the Diplomas in Home Inspection and Residential Valuation and assists participants through the 'TechRICS' qualification. Please contact the BlueBox *partners* office for the schedule of dates for these phases.

Domestic Energy Assessor Training (New Entrants)

Based in Coventry, this is our popular course for those with little or no experience of energy assessment.

Module 1—12th May 2008

Module 2—4th June 2008

Module 3—18th June 2008

Module 4—2nd July 2008

Module 5—11th July 2008

Residential Valuation for Mortgage Purposes Diploma Course

Based in Coventry, this freestanding course is for those who already have their Home Inspector Diploma and want to progress to Technical membership of the RICS.

Module 1—4th September 2008

Module 2—14th October

Module 2—25th November 2008

The Property Inspection 'Masterclass' Series

This series of one day courses are designed for practitioners who want to broaden and deepen their knowledge of residential property inspection and assessment and is based on an inspection of a real property.

The next series is set for:

20th—22nd May 2008.

DEA Qualification Submitting your 'Own Choice' EPCs for Assessment

Trainee DEA Dora Appleby has recently submitted her 'own choice' EPCs to Elmhurst Energy for assessment (successfully we are pleased to say!), as part of the NAEA's diploma. Based on this experience, she has put together some hints and tips for others who are at this stage:

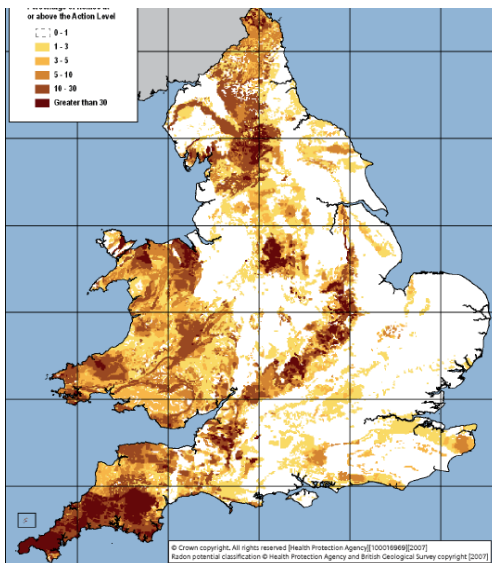
- Take as many pictures as you can. It is important to take close-ups showing details which can easily be seen by the assessors;
- Pictures are best fitted into a table grid and labelled so identification is made easier. Also the pictures should be consistent with your inspection;
- Make sure the check list which Elmhurst supplied, accompanies your submission and is properly completed. Failure to do this will cause delays.
- The three completed 'own cases' should be sent together in the same package as the assessor will not mark them separately.
- Your submissions should be neat and tidy presented in their own folder. They should be legible enough to be read and understood by any assessor.
- On-site notes — use the additional space at the bottom of the page. This is useful when you want to explain something that does not have a space on the form.
- Keep photocopies of all your submissions just in case they get lost!
- After sending in your submissions keep a regular check on your e-mails because this will be the only form of communication with the assessors and you may miss your one and only chance to correct/re-submit!

Dora Appleby, March 2008



New Radon Maps

In many parts of the country, Radon can pose a significant threat to health. As a result, surveyors and inspectors should be aware of the specific levels of this invisible gas in their area. The Health Protection Agency (which is responsible for compiling information on radon levels), has updated the Indicative Radon Atlas of Great Britain. It now gives a general indication of radon levels for 1km square based on the highest probability for that area. This may have changed local profiles slightly. If you haven't seen the new map (published November 2007), then you can download a free copy from www.hpa.org.uk.



More precise information on individual properties can be obtained from www.UKradon.org. For a small fee, home owners and their advisers can obtain a more accurate assessment of radon levels for individual homes. According to Government statistics, radon is the second highest cause of lung cancer and so it is important to bring this matter to your client's attention.

Other Pre Inspection Checks

Over the last few years, more information has become available on the internet and some of this is useful to those who work in a property environment. During the course of our training activities, it has become clear that some practitioners are not fully aware of this development and, since courts would see the information as being in the 'public domain', it is important to keep up-to-date.

We have quickly reviewed some of the most useful sites:

www.environment-agency.gov.uk - information on flooding, pollution, land use and much more. Searchable by post code;

www.hpa.org.uk/radiation/radon/index.htm

radon information

www.bgs.ac.uk - British Geological Society. Information on ground conditions and radon.

www.imagesofengland.co.uk - location of listed buildings. This is not complete but can be very useful.

www.smokecontrolareas.co.uk—this gives information on the location of smoke control areas. Important where properties have open fires.

www.groundstability.com— this is a website run by the Coal Authority and can tell you whether a mining report is required.

Microsoft 'Virtual earth' and Google's 'Earth'

Although these 'virtual earth' programs are often seen as the play things of 'sad anoraks', we are finding them increasingly useful (it may also say something about us!). Using the various '3D' and 'birds eye' views, you can get some useful information about local topography, water courses, neighbouring uses, etc. that might be hard to detect from a visual inspection on-site. You can't actually see us waving at you from our office window but technology developing in the USA will soon allow you to 'walk' down virtual streets. This will bring new meaning to 'desktop surveys'! If you use other web based information, please let us know and we will pass it on.



Contact

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