

Building Standards Advisory

Promoting construction of safe, healthy, habitable buildings

COVID-19 Best Practices for Inspections

The Government of Saskatchewan has declared a State of Emergency (SOE) along with many local authorities that have taken measures to limit the spread of COVID-19.

The following recommendations emphasize the need for caution and are intended to help everyone. The recommendations are also intended to ensure that local authorities are able to meet their legislative responsibilities for the administration and enforcement of construction, accessibility and energy efficiency standards to ensure buildings are safe, healthy, habitable and energy efficient.

In light of the COVID-19 outbreak, local authorities, building officials and support staff should practice safe social distancing and safe hygiene guidelines in interactions with the public. The following recommendations are intended to provide for the safety of all while allowing regulatory function associated with building construction to continue:

General Precautions

- The Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) has recommended the practice of social distancing and has set a minimum social distance of two metres.
- Practice proper cough and sneezing etiquette (into the bend of your elbow).
- Wash your hands often with soap and water; if soap and water are not available, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer.
- Wipe down surfaces and materials with disinfectant after every customer interaction.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.
- Avoid close contact with people who may be ill.
- Leverage technology wherever possible to limit physical interaction.
- Encourage the submission of building permit documentation electronically along with permit issuance and where possible, communicate online or via telephone.
- Additional information on COVID-19 can be found at www.saskatchewan.ca.

Inspections

- Inspections should be prioritized based on urgency, such as inspections associated with critical stages of construction.
- Where risk of COVID-19 transference may be prevalent, such as high-density, multi-family occupancy type buildings, inspections should be deferred until there are no health-related concerns.
- Where a specific health and safety concern related to COVID-19 has been identified at a site, defer any inspections until there are no health-related concerns.
- All inspections should incorporate social distancing and sanitation practices, as per SHA recommendations, to limit the risk of spread of COVID-19.
- Where in-person inspections are necessary, they should be conducted visually with minimal physical contact with materials or surfaces on site.



Proceed with inspections where it is safe to do so and add precautions, such as:

- Call before you attend a site inspection and ask if anyone is ill, traveled recently or is self-isolated. If the response is “yes”, defer the inspection until there are no health-related concerns.
- Attend the site if no contact can be made by phone, but ask the same questions as above when arriving on site (the person that was contacted on the phone may not be on site) – again defer conducting the inspection until there are no health-related concerns.
- Reschedule any deferred inspections due to health and safety only when there are no health-related concerns.
- Use SHA guidelines maintaining personal space (social distancing – two metres), sanitize (wash hands before and after exiting sites, where available, or use hand sanitizer), and do not touch your face.
- Utilize physical barriers, such as doors or windows for conversations when appropriate.
- Take only necessary equipment into the structure to complete the inspection.
- Utilize any additional personal protective equipment (PPE) as determined by on-site risk assessment, such as disposable gloves, respiratory protection, eye protection, etc.
- If possible, disinfect or dispose of PPE after each use.

Where building officials are unable to limit the risk of exposure as described above, they should consider deferring the inspection until there are no health-related concerns.

Remote Video Inspection

Remote Video Inspection (RVI) processes can benefit the local authority that are using them with savings in travel time, use of vehicles, and other aspects of inspections. The programs can benefit the permit holder and those representing the owner with more timely inspections and thereby allow faster resolutions to problems and more flexibility to the construction schedule, increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of inspection programs.

- Local authorities can consider implementing RVI using video conference software or smartphone apps. – for example, WhatsApp, FaceTime, Skype or Google Duo.
- If a RVI process is to be undertaken, it should incorporate the following:
 - The camera should be operated by the owner or permit holder, or an individual authorized by the owner or permit holder.
 - The building official who is remotely located should have the ability to communicate directly with the camera operator to perform a thorough inspection. The camera operator should operate as directed by the building official. The RVI should be live as pre-recorded inspections do not allow the building official to direct the inspection, which could hinder confirmation of compliance.
 - Someone on site – the camera operator, or another individual – should be prepared to verify dimensions using a tape measure at the remote building official’s direction.
 - The person who performed the work being inspected should be available to answer questions with respect to the construction under RVI.
- Local authorities may find it useful to determine types of inspections that are not suited for RVI and develop policy to that effect.
- Not all inspections may work with an RVI such as:
 - Foundation and framing inspections which may be too complex;
 - Inspection of confined spaces such as attics and crawl spaces which may pose physical challenges; and
 - Final inspections or occupancy permit inspections which require in-person involvement and which may have to be deferred until there are no health-related concerns.



- An RVI can be considered a physical inspection, and as such, scheduling, co-ordinating, documenting and processing can mirror the regular inspection process, or it can be modified from the standard as the local authority determines is appropriate.
- Although RVI may be a viable option during the COVID-19 period, the process relies on the availability of technology understanding that many areas of the province lack the necessary internet or cellular service.

Inspection Documentation

- It is recommended to adopt a flexible approach to complete the mandatory inspections, but to ensure that inspections are properly documented.
- The use of alternative approaches to obtain compliance include the use of photographs, video, RVI, or leveraging technology to achieve the same outcome as an in-person site inspection.
- Regarding inspection documentation, reference can be made to COVID-19 based on the SOE in effect on March 18, 2020.
- Whatever approach a local authority elects to use, it is recommended that documentation be created to ensure record-keeping is consistent with the local authority's needs and legislative requirements.

Responsibilities

- *The Uniform Building and Accessibility Standards Act* establishes the legislative responsibilities for building owners, building officials and local authorities in Saskatchewan.
- The owner is responsible in ensuring a building is designed, constructed, erected, placed, altered, repaired, renovated, demolished, relocated, removed, used or occupied in accordance with building standards.
- The appointed building official has an integral role in administration and enforcement as a legal representative of the local authority.
- The local authority is responsible for administration and enforcement of the Act, the Regulations, and Orders and decisions of the Saskatchewan Building and Accessibility Standards Appeal Board.
- Although the COVID-19 outbreak may have altered how a building owner, building official and local authority interact; co-operation and communication between the parties remains vital. This is particularly important where alternative methods of communication and information exchange are needed.
- It is understood that during the construction process, deficiencies or violations may occur and noted either via electronic messaging or actual site inspections. It is expected that such deficiencies or violations will be corrected by the owner but where evidence shows otherwise, the local authority and building official have a responsibility to ensure that all necessary enforcement measures are undertaken to ensure compliance is achieved.

If you have any questions, please contact buildingstandards@gov.sk.ca.

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<p>This advisory is published by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Government Relations for purposes of providing information to users on the topic contained herein. In case of conflict between <i>The Uniform Building and Accessibility Standards Act</i> (the UBAS Act) and Regulations, the National Building Code 2015 (NBC 2015), the National Energy of Canada for Buildings 2017 (NECB 2017) and this advisory, provisions of the UBAS Act, Regulations, the NBC 2015 and the NECB 2017 shall apply.</p>	