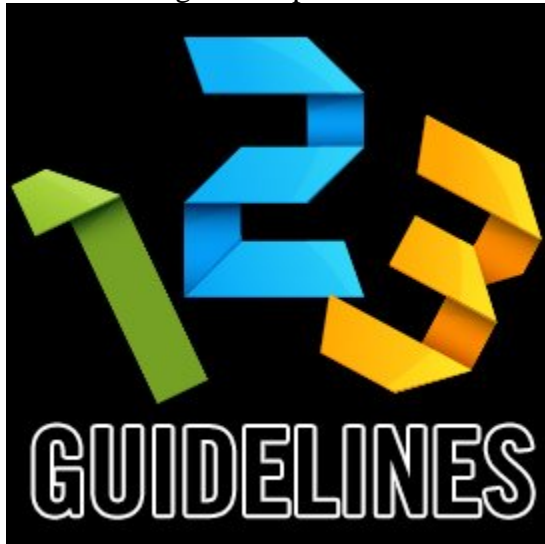


Fire safety guideline developed for midrise wood construction

by Patricia Williams Jun 9, 2016

In consultation with key stakeholders, the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing has developed a best practice guideline for fire safety during construction of five- and six-storey wood buildings in the province.



"While following these best practices may not eliminate all risk, the practices should minimize the risk of a significant construction site fire occurring in the first place, as well as to reduce the spread and impact of such a fire should one occur," the document states.

"Builders are encouraged, where possible, to follow these suggested best practices or to devise equally effective approaches that achieve a similar level of performance."

The publication comes in the wake of changes to the Ontario Building Code that came into effect in January 2015 allowing construction of five- and six-storey buildings of predominately wood construction.

The guideline — which is not a regulation — was drafted in consultation with the Ministry of Labour and the Office of the Fire Marshal and Emergency Management.

Input was provided by the Canadian Wood Council (CWC) and its Ontario Wood WORKS! Program, the Residential Construction Council of Ontario (RESCON), the Ontario Home Builders' Association and the Ontario Building Officials Association, among others.

The document, which was released May 9, has been formally endorsed by RESCON, the Canadian Wood Council and Ontario Wood WORKS!

"A culture of safety during construction is paramount if we are to realize the benefits that this form of modern, sustainable construction can offer to communities across the province," CWC president Michael Giroux said in a statement.

"CWC encourages the construction industry to follow this guideline which represents a collective commitment to safety."

The document suggests best practices in a multitude of areas including fire safety plans, site security, "hot work" protocols, construction processes, storing combustible and highly flammable materials and fire protection and firefighting measures.

"It is really an all-encompassing document," said Michael Steele, director of technical standards at RESCON who participated in the consultations.

"This gives everyone a clear understanding of what needs to be done to minimize the risk of fire during construction. That really is the key to ensuring that sites stay as safe as possible.

"In the end, I think it is a very good document."

RESCON hopes publication of the guideline will spur increased wood construction in the province, as does Ontario Wood WORKS!

"This guideline is a very important and progressive step forward in developing the full potential of higher wood buildings in Ontario," Marianne Berube, executive director for the Ontario program, said in a statement.

"Advances in wood science and building technology have resulted in stronger, safer and more sophisticated products that are expanding the options for wood construction, resulting in more choices for builders and architects."

Plans for development of the guideline were announced by the government Sept. 30, 2014 in conjunction with tabling the building code amendments related to midrise wood buildings.

Development involved detailed research and analysis of how different areas of the construction industry deal with risk management, said Steven Street, technical manager at Ontario Wood WORKS!

In addition to building and wood industry stakeholders, consulted groups also included fire services, professional designers and insurance companies.

Street said each group that was engaged in the process "obviously" had different concerns and reasons for participating.

"Their involvement should mean more adoption of the practical advice and suggestions contained within the document," he said.

The first six-storey wood-framed building to be constructed in Ontario was the Templar Flats in Hamilton.

"To the best of our knowledge, there are seven or eight (midrise) buildings underway or (that) have finished the wood framing stages," Street said.

He said an estimated 20 to 25 other wood projects, the majority of which are five or six storeys, are in various phases of development in the province.

British Columbia was the first province to permit six-storey wood buildings.

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