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Australian Standard[®]

Inspection of buildings

Part 0: General requirements



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- Association of Consulting Engineers Australia
 - Australian Consumers Association
 - Australian Environmental Pest Managers Association
 - Australian Institute of Building
 - Australian Institute of Building Surveyors
 - Building Services Authority of Queensland
 - Concrete Masonry Association of Australia
 - Engineers Australia
 - Forest and Wood Products Research & Development Corporation
 - Housing Industry Association
 - Institute of Building Inspectors
 - Insurance Council of Australia
 - Master Builders Australia
 - Royal Australian Institute of Architects
-

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Australian Standard[®]

Inspection of buildings

Part 0: General requirements

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PREFACE

This Standard was prepared by the Standards Australia Committee BD-085, Inspection of Buildings.

The objective of this Standard is to provide persons and organizations concerned with pre-purchase inspections of residential dwellings with the basic criteria necessary in order to facilitate inspections and reports that satisfy the requirements of both the client and inspector.

This Standard is Part 0 in the AS 4349 series of Standards, which covers minimum requirements for inspection of building, as follows:

AS

- 4349 Inspection of buildings
- 4349.0 Part 0: General requirements (this Standard)
- 4349.1 Part 1: Pre-purchase inspections—Residential buildings
- 4349.3 Part 3: Timber pest inspections

Notes to the text contain information and guidance. They are not an integral part of the Standard.

The terms ‘normative’ and ‘informative’ have been used in this Standard to define the application of the appendix to which they apply. A ‘normative’ appendix is an integral part of a Standard, whereas an ‘informative’ appendix is only for information and guidance.

This Standard incorporates a commentary on some of the clauses. The commentary directly follows the relevant clause, is designated by ‘C’ preceding the clause number and is printed in italics in a panel. The commentary is for information only and does not need to be followed for compliance with this Standard.

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FOREWORD

It is implicit in this Standard that an inspection in accordance with the Standard includes subjective appraisal by an inspector expert in a relevant technical field. It is not expected that this Standard will be relevant where an inspection involves wholly objective application of a prescribed technique of appraisal. In any application involving different inspectors or the same inspector being assigned to different applications will lead to variation in conclusions. The Standard seeks to apply consistent processes during the performing of the inspection and reporting to minimize such possible variations when considering a range of factors including reliability of outcomes, the economic context and flexibility to address numerous different types of inspection.

STANDARDS AUSTRALIA

Australian Standard Inspection of buildings

Part 0: General requirements

SECTION 1 SCOPE AND GENERAL

1.1 SCOPE

This Standard sets out the minimum requirements for inspection of and preparation of inspection reports on buildings and associated works by a suitably qualified inspector in order to provide advice regarding particular technical aspects of the property.

NOTES:

- 1 Pre-purchase inspection of residential buildings is covered by AS 4349.1.
- 2 Timber pest inspection is covered by AS 4349.3.
- 3 This Standard may not incorporate the requirements of State and Territory legislation. It remains the obligation of the inspector to comply with any statutory requirements.
- 4 This Standard may be applicable for inspections of residential buildings carried out for purposes other than pre-purchase inspection. This Standard does not include compliance with building regulations or assessment of a building under construction.

1.2 APPLICATION

Where particular requirements of other parts of the AS 4349 suite of Standards conflict with this Standard, the requirements of the individual part shall apply in the application of that part.

A report prepared in accordance with this Standard is not a certificate of compliance of the property within the requirements of any Act, regulation, ordinance, local law or by-law, or as a warranty or an insurance policy against problems developing with the building in the future.

Unless stated otherwise, this Standard assumes that the existing use of the building will continue.

1.3 DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of this Standard, the definitions below apply.

1.3.1 Access hole (cover)

An opening in flooring or ceiling or other part of a structure (such as service hatch, removable panel) to allow for entry to carry out an inspection, maintenance or repair.

1.3.2 Accessible area

An area of the site where sufficient safe and reasonable access is available to allow inspection within the scope of the inspection.

1.3.3 Associated works

Any area or item, other than the building proper, that is specified in the inspection agreement

1.3.4 Client

The person or other entity for whom the inspection is being carried out.

1.3.5 Defect

Fault or deviation from the intended condition of a material, assembly or component.

1.3.6 Inspection

Close and careful scrutiny of an item carried out either without dismantling or with partial dismantling as required, supplemented by means such as measurement, in order to arrive at a reliable conclusion as to the condition of an item.

1.3.7 Inspector

Person or organization responsible for carrying out the inspection.

1.3.8 Limitation

Any factor that prevents full achievement of the purpose of the inspection.

1.3.9 Major defect

A defect of sufficient magnitude where rectification has to be carried out in order to avoid unsafe conditions, loss of utility or further deterioration of the property.

1.3.10 Minor defect

A defect other than a major defect.

1.3.11 Purpose of inspection

The inspection requirement as identified by the client.

1.3.12 Scope of inspection

The type and extent of inspection undertaken in response to the stated purpose of the inspection.

1.3.13 Significant item

An item that is to be reported in accordance with the scope of the inspection, which may be a feature that is present or a feature that is absent.

1.3.14 Subfloor space

Space between the underside of a suspended floor and the ground.

1.3.15 Roof space

Space between the roof covering and the ceiling immediately below the roof covering.

1.3.16 Site

Allotment of land on which a building stands or is to be erected.

SECTION 2 INSPECTION AGREEMENT

2.1 GENERAL

An inspection agreement shall be entered into before the inspection is carried out. The inspection agreement shall include the defined purpose, scope and acceptance criteria, in accordance with this Section.

The inspection scope and acceptance criteria shall be defined by the client and agreed to between the client and inspector. Any changes to the purpose, scope or acceptance criteria shall be agreed to by all parties at the appropriate time.

If required by the client, the inspector shall provide details of qualifications and experience before the inspection is carried out.

NOTES:

- 1 The inspection agreement should be in writing and signed by all parties to the agreement.
- 2 The purpose of the inspection agreement is to mitigate disputes and unnecessary disappointments.

C2.1 *The general purpose of this Section is to ensure that there is agreement between the parties before the inspection is carried out. It has been found in the past that many disputes arise because the inspection carried out did not cover aspects that were expected by the client, or the extent of reporting was less or otherwise different from what was expected. It is recommended that the agreement be in writing; however, it is recognized that, in many cases, time is not available for this or inspections are sufficiently routine to make written agreement unnecessary for every inspection.*

2.2 PURPOSE OF INSPECTION

The client shall identify what is to be accomplished by the inspection by nominating the purpose of the inspection, including any specific requirements or conditions.

C2.2 *As the client has initiated the inspection it is necessary for the client to nominate the purpose of the inspection. If this does not happen it is not possible for the inspector to be sure that the client's needs will be addressed; however, it may be that the inspector, who is an expert in the types of inspection available, will counsel or otherwise assist the client in defining the purpose of the inspection.*

2.3 SCOPE OF INSPECTION

2.3.1 General

The scope of the inspection covers the type, extent and boundaries of the inspection. The scope shall be suitable for the defined purpose of the inspection and shall include details of the inspection process, limitations and extent of reporting in accordance with Clauses 2.3.2, 2.3.3 and 2.3.4.

The scope shall include a description of the physical locations to be inspected.

C2.3.1 *The scope describes the inspection to be carried out in order to satisfy the stated purpose. It is effectively what the inspector offers to do. The scope will include the activity to be undertaken by the inspector, for example, types of testing/inspection to be undertaken, the physical extent of inspection such as special areas, equipment to be used and the likely limitations. This will help the client to determine whether or not the suggested scope will satisfy their purpose.*

2.3.2 Inspection process

The process or processes to be undertaken by the inspector shall be identified.

C2.3.2 *It may be a requirement that the inspection will comprise or include some process of testing. In that case the process of testing to be applied should be agreed, together with some indication of the extent or intensity of the testing. Where the testing will include some destructive component (for example cutting of holes in the building fabric), format approval should be obtained from the owner. This agreement should include responsibility for rectification of any damage due to testing and for any consequential damage.*

Examples of inspection processes are the following:

- (a) Visual appraisal under normal or special lighting.*
- (b) Testing with nominated equipment.*
- (c) Concrete sampling and testing.*
- (d) Thermographic imaging.*

2.3.3 Limitations

Limitations that are expected to be present, or that may occur, shall be identified where possible.

NOTES:

- 1 The inspector may be able to anticipate the limitations of an inspection based on past experience.
- 2 Known limitations relating to access, as set out in Clause 3.2, should be included.

C2.3.3 *Restriction of full achievement of the purpose of the inspection due to limitations not expected by the client is a common source of dispute. For this reason it is important that the inspector, who is the party more likely to appreciate the types of limitation that might occur, should ensure that the client is informed on this aspect prior to engagement.*

Likely limitations will be apparent to the inspector as soon as the purpose of the inspection is revealed. For example, if the proposed inspection comprises visual appraisal of a building, any obstructions or inaccessible areas will become limitations on the inspection. Generally, limitations of this type are appreciated by the client, once identified. Nonetheless, experience has shown that clients can have unrealistic expectations and it is best that limitations be identified as fully as practicable and agreed to as part of the engagement agreement.

Inspection limitations that could be present, and which the client should have an appreciation of, could include the following:

- (a) Predictable: areas not accessible due to elevation, space occupied by furniture, denial of entry to property.*
- (b) Not predictable but not uncommon: rain, blocked doors, animals, physical circumstances not suitable for proposed test.*

2.3.4 Extent of reporting

The extent to which items are to be reported shall be nominated. The extent of reporting comprises the significant items for the particular inspection.

NOTE: For example, one client may need a report on major defects only, whilst other client may require a more detailed inspection that also covers specified types of minor defects.

2.4 ACCEPTANCE CRITERIA

The criteria that the inspector will use during the inspection to assess the presence or otherwise of significant items shall be nominated and agreed. The acceptance criteria shall be clearly defined and recorded and shall adequately address the purpose and scope of the inspection.

C2.4 *The intention of the acceptance criteria is to avoid disputes that may arise through misunderstanding the basis of assessment, which the inspector will use during the inspection. For example, the threshold level at which an item becomes 'significant' in terms of the particular inspection may be contentious. If an inspection involves assessing the presence of cracks in a slab, the inspector may consider only cracks more than 0.5 mm wide to be significant, whereas the client may consider any discernible crack to be significant.*

SECTION 3 INSPECTION

3.1 GENERAL

The inspection shall be undertaken in accordance with the terms of the inspection agreement and all statutory obligations.

NOTE: The requirements of relevant Australian Standards should be followed.

3.2 ACCESS

3.2.1 Areas of inspection

The inspector shall inspect accessible areas included in the scope of inspection.

The inspector shall not enter or inspect areas where safe unobstructed access is not available. The extent of accessible areas, as defined by the presence of safe and reasonable access, shall be determined by the inspector, based on the conditions encountered at the time of inspection.

An elevated area is not deemed to be an accessible area unless it is within the scope of the inspection and safe and reasonable access appropriate for the method of inspection is available.

Areas sprayed with chemicals shall not be inspected unless it is safe to do so.

NOTES:

- 1 Reasonable access does not include removing screws and bolts or any other fastenings or sealants to access covers, unless included in the scope of the inspection.
- 2 'Elevated area' includes the roof, roof space, crawl space deck, balcony, access way, landing feature of a building and the like, generally elevated above the ground and not intended for normal use by occupants.

If, in the opinion of the inspector, restrictions on access have compromised satisfaction of the purpose of the inspection, a recommendation shall be made as to the necessity to gain access to allow further inspection.

3.2.2 Denial of entry

Accessible areas shall not include any part of the property where entry is denied to the inspector.

C3.2 *Clearly there can be no expectation that an inspector will attempt to access parts of the property where it is unsafe to do so, as it would be a breach of statutory obligations to do so. It is the responsibility of the inspector to assess the level of safety associated with any particular activity and limit the extent of inspection accordingly.*

3.3 INSPECTION RECORDS

The inspector shall record the following information prior to or during the course of the inspection:

- (a) The name of the client.
- (b) The address of the property inspected.
- (c) Date of inspection and time of inspection.
- (d) The identity of the person who physically carried out the inspection.

- (e) Ambient conditions at the time of the inspection where these are relevant to the inspection.
- (f) Description and identification of the buildings or other structures.
- (g) Identification of any area or item (included within the scope of the inspection) that was not inspected, and the reasons that prevented inspection.
- (h) The observations of the inspection, including data record where applicable.

C3.3 *The site records may be or may not be included in the report provided to the client. In some cases, the entire report may be generated on site; however, it is considered good practice for an inspector to take and keep records of observations during inspection. These records would normally contain the raw and unadorned information collected on site as distinct from the considered information included in the final report. If a problem arises after the inspection it is often very useful to all parties, and particularly for the inspector, to have available records of observations made on site. For example, the site observations may include a number of measurements recorded by the inspector during the inspection. The final report may contain only a summary of the measurements and derived conclusion; however, in the event of problems it may be very useful to know the actual measurement made during the inspection in a particular location.*

SECTION 4 REPORT

4.1 GENERAL

An inspection report, in accordance with Clause 4.2, shall be provided to the client unless specifically excluded as part of the inspection agreement. The report shall be provided in writing or otherwise in a form that will enable the client to retain a permanent record of the report.

The report shall contain sufficient data to enable a similarly suitably qualified inspector, who was not involved in the inspection, to check the report and independently verify the conclusions reached by the original inspector.

C4.1 *The inspection of buildings includes subjective appraisal by an experienced practitioner and, normally, considerable reliance is placed on the results of the inspection. In such cases, the client should receive not only an indication of the inspector's considered opinion but also sufficient supporting information to enable the client to form an opinion regarding the basis of the conclusions and the weight that should be attached to such conclusions.*

4.2 REPORT CONTENT

The inspection report shall include, but not be limited to, the following elements:

- (a) *Identification of parties:*
 - (i) The name, address, and licence or registration number (where applicable) of the inspector responsible for the inspection.
 - (ii) The identity of the person who carried out the inspection.
 - (iii) The name and address of the client.
- (b) *Property details;*
 - (i) The address of the property inspected.
 - (ii) Description and identification of the buildings, parts of buildings or other structures inspected.
- (c) *Inspection details;*
 - (i) Date of inspection.
 - (ii) Details of the purpose, scope and acceptance criteria of the inspection.
 - (iii) Ambient conditions at the time of the inspection.
- (d) *Limitations* Identification of any area or item (within the scope of the inspection), that was not inspected, the reasons that prevented inspection, and recommendations, if any, for further investigation.
- (e) *Observations* Information collected during the inspection sufficient to enable an independent inspector to assess the validity of the conclusions reached.
- (f) *Significant item:*
 - (i) A list or similar record of significant items in accordance with the inspection agreement.
 - (ii) Any items which, in the opinion of the inspector, are a present or imminent serious hazard.

(g) *Conclusions:*

- (i) An indication of the extent to which the scope of the inspection was fulfilled and, if appropriate in terms of the inspection agreement, recommendations for further inspection or assessment to be carried out by a suitably qualified specialist inspector or other consultant.
- (ii) Conclusions with respect to the identified purpose of the inspection, or sufficient advice to enable the client to logically and simply form an opinion regarding the original purpose.

NOTES:

- 1 In some jurisdictions it may be a statutory requirement that the person responsible for the inspection be the same person who undertakes the inspection.
- 2 Where estimation of the cost of rectification is included in the scope, the basis for such estimate should be indicated. For example, the estimation may be based on indicative cost data, quotations or opinion derived from the past experience of the inspector. It should be emphasized that the cost of work is ultimately dependent on what a contractor is prepared to do the work for.

4.3 CONDITIONS

An inspection report may be conditional upon the following:

- (a) Prevailing weather conditions or recent occupancy and use of services that might affect observations.
- (b) Information provided by the client or agents of the client.
- (c) Deliberate concealment of defects.
- (d) Any other relevant factor limiting the inspection.

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Sydney NSW 2001
Phone: 02 9237 6000
Fax: 02 9237 6010
Email: mail@standards.org.au
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