

AECB publishes a water standard that works

AECB - the sustainable building association

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AECB Water Standards

Delivering buildings with excellent water and energy performance

VOLUME 1: THE WATER STANDARDS

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AECB publishes a water standard that works

The sustainable building association AECB has launched a Water Standard applicable to new homes, the refurbishment of existing dwellings and also to non-domestic buildings. The Standard sits alongside the Association's well-established CarbonLite Energy Standards.

The Water Standard is aimed at architects, designers, house builders and specifiers and has two levels, Good and Best Practice, with a third Experimental category.

The new standards prioritise reductions in the kinds of water use that are most environmentally damaging, targeting:

- * Hot water use, as hot water accounts for almost 90% of the carbon footprint of all domestic water.
- * Water use in times and places of drought stress – addressing peak summer demand, and demand in drought stress locations.

The AECB standards are designed with the behaviour of real people in mind. They look at appliances in turn, and set standards of performance for each that users are likely to find acceptable, while achieving efficiency in energy and water use. In this way the standards are able to offer robust savings in water and energy use, and reduce the risk that low-energy and/or low-water appliances (eg ultra-low-flow shower heads) will be fitted just to score well on the Code for Sustainable Homes Assessment, then removed by house occupants after installation, and replaced with something that uses large quantities of water.

Perhaps surprisingly, the AECB standards do not give “credits” for rainwater or greywater recycling systems. The standards take a holistic approach to these systems, and account for the energy and carbon costs of pumping and treating rain and grey water. These costs often exceed the carbon cost of mains water, so the standards do not encourage them.

By contrast, under the Code for Sustainable Homes it is possible to trade “points” for water recycling to allow higher hot-water use appliances – resulting in higher water use plus a double energy whammy, first to pump the recycled water, then second, to supply more hot water.

The standards also include measures to encourage good plumbing design, again to cut energy wastage. This issue is not taken into account in the Code for Sustainable Homes Water Calculator.

"The water calculator within the Code for Sustainable Homes is a fundamentally flawed approach to driving water efficiency in the home. The problems arising from this method are becoming increasingly apparent as more homes are built to the CSH" explains Marcus Zipperlen, at the Centre for Alternative Technology.

The AECB standard is available as a free download from:

<http://www.carbonlite.org.uk/carbonlite/waterstandards.php>

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Notes for the Editor

The AECB (formerly Association for Environment Conscious Building) was founded in 1989 to promote sustainable design and construction in the UK. Its membership comprises over 1500 industry professionals including architects, builders, property developers, local authorities, housing associations and construction product manufacturers and suppliers. Tackling climate change is an urgent priority for the AECB and it has, amongst its membership, many of the UK's leading practitioners in low energy building. www.aecb.net

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