

Fire Research & Investigation Unit

Heads Up



BACKGROUND

A fire occurred in a shed on a residential property. The shed had been located between a house on the same property and a wooden fence on the property boundary. The fire spread to the adjacent fence, the house on the same property as well as the neighbouring house before firefighters were able to extinguish it.

An investigation of the fire found that the shed had been located too close to both the residential house on the same property and the property boundary. This led to the spread of fire to the two houses.



Figure 1 – Fire damage to fence and neighbouring property

INCIDENT DETAILS

The fire occurred on 16 February 2019. Fire and Emergency NZ was notified at 1:23pm by a witness who reported that a fire, which had started in a shed had spread to two houses. The shed was approximately two metres wide, three metres long and two metres high. It was located against the house on the same property, and extended to the boundary fence. The neighbouring house was located approximately two metres from the fence.

On arrival, firefighters found the two houses, the shed and the fence between the two properties to be well involved in fire. Firefighters extinguished the fire and called for a fire investigator who arrived on scene at 2:30pm.

The shed and a portion of the fence along the property boundary had been completely destroyed by fire. The two houses suffered significant damage, particularly the neighbouring house which was clad with weatherboard. The house situated on the same property as the shed was clad with brick veneer and experienced comparatively less damage.



Figure 2 – Fire damage to house on same property

FURTHER INFORMATION

Schedule 1 of the Building Act 2004 specifies scenarios where detached buildings such as the shed in this incident do not require a Building Consent before construction. These include a structure which:

- is not more than 1 storey (being a floor level of up to 1 metre above the supporting ground and a height of up to 3.5 metres above the floor level); and
- does not exceed 10 square metres in floor area; and
- does not contain sanitary facilities or facilities for the storage of potable water; and
- does not include sleeping accommodation, unless the building is used in connection with a dwelling and does not contain any cooking facilities.

However, the above do not apply when the building is closer than the measure of its own height to any residential building or to any legal boundary. In these instances, the exemption is not applicable and a building consent would be required.

Given that the shed reported in the incident above was placed directly against both a residential building and a legal boundary, its placement therefore did not meet the requirements of the Building Act 2004 without a Building Consent. If a Building Consent had been sought for the placement of the shed, the structure would have been

required to be designed and constructed to resist the spread of fire to both the residential house and the neighbouring property in accordance the New Zealand Building Code.

Following this incident, a small-scale survey conducted amongst retailers selling/distributing similar garden shed products was undertaken. The survey suggested that the requirements relating to the placement of detached buildings are not well understood by the retailers and are not communicated to consumers. As councils are unlikely to be informed of these minor structures, enforcement of the Building Act requirements is improbable.

LESSONS LEARNED/RECOMMENDATIONS

- A garden shed or a similar detached building is required to be placed further than the measure of its own height to any residential building or to any legal boundary, otherwise a Building Consent must be sought.
- Retailers selling garden sheds and similar detached buildings should promote to their customers the legal requirements relating to the placement of their products. This could include disclaimers in the assembly instructions (for kitset buildings) and/or information leaflets handed out by retailers.
- People considering erecting a garden shed or similar detached building on their property should refer to their local Council or to the guidance available on the MBIE website.

[\(https://www.building.govt.nz/projects-and-consents/planning-a-successful-build/scope-and-design/check-if-you-need-consents/building-consent-exemptions-for-low-risk-work/schedule-1-guidance/\)](https://www.building.govt.nz/projects-and-consents/planning-a-successful-build/scope-and-design/check-if-you-need-consents/building-consent-exemptions-for-low-risk-work/schedule-1-guidance/)

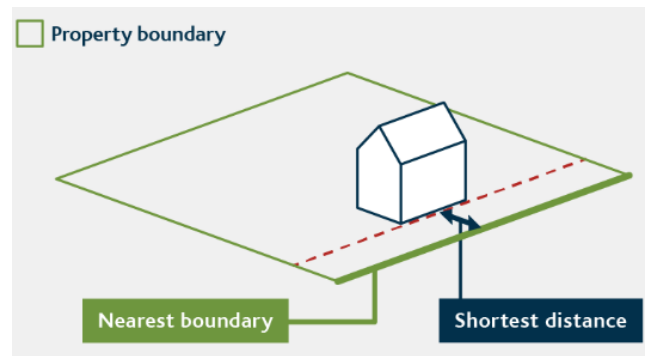


Figure 3 - Separation distance to be at least equal to the height of the shed otherwise a Building Consent is required
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