

MASTER BUILDERS



ROMINA DE SANTIS, technical adviser at Master Builders WA, answers your questions about home building



THE QUESTION

Our last water bill was very high and it has been creeping up, but I know our water usage has not changed and our garden is not huge. We have water-saving showerheads and dual-flush toilets. As a family of four we practice waterwise tips and do not waste water. How can I check if there are leaks in my home?

THE ANSWER

Start inside the house.

Look in the kitchen, bathroom/s and laundry for dripping taps.

This is an obvious one, but sometimes children do not turn off taps fully or over-tighten a tap, the delicate seals are damaged and cause dripping and leaks.

Next, check the washing machine or dishwasher for leaking.

The connection point of these appliances is often obscured by cupboard contents, as they are set and forgotten about when the appliance is first installed.

Cupboards with a musty smell should be further investigated.

Damp patches on the walls may also indicate a leak.

Even a slow leak or drip can waste hundreds of litres of water.

You can check your toilet cistern for leaks by placing a few drops of food colouring in the tank.

Without flushing it, look for colouring in the toilet bowl. If the colour runs into the bowl, then this indicates a leak.

In the garden, a leak can easily continue without detection for a long time.

Look for damp and unstable paving and very healthy patches in your garden.

Have a look around your garden at:

- Outdoor garden taps/hoses
- Garden irrigation (including sprinklers)
- Automatic solenoids and manual isolation valves
- Exposed pipe work

Check your hot water systems and air-conditioning units.

Rather than call a plumber to do the investigating, which could amount to hours of searching rather than fixing the problem, you can conduct a leak detection test yourself:

Step 1: Ensure no water is being used in your house (turn off all water appliances, such as washing machines and evaporative air conditioners).

Step 2: Read the black and red numbers on your meter.

Record the black numbers from left to right. The black numbers represent kilolitres (1000L) and the red numbers represent litres.

Step 3: If the dial is not visibly moving, take another reading after 15 minutes.

Step 4: If the red numbers have changed, the test confirms there is a leak and further investigation is needed.

Remember all plumbing work carried out in WA must be completed by a licensed plumber or tradesperson working under the direction of a licensed plumber.

So, if you find the culprit, get a professional to fix the problem and ask them to give you advice on other water-saving options you could implement.

There are lots of great water-saving tips on the water corporation website.

Visit www.watercorporation.com.au.

For more information about building, visit the Master Builders A-Z Building Information Directory at www.mbawa.com. If you have any questions about home building or purchase issues, email romina@mbawa.com

RESTRICTIVE PLANNING POLICIES A BURDEN

A Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA) report released last month confirms restrictive planning policies are pushing homeownership out of reach. Master Builders director Michael McLean explains.

THE RBA analysis shows that house prices are being driven up by various state and local government regulations, which significantly increases the cost of land.

As the RBA report clearly states, “the average Sydney house, valued at \$1.16 million in 2016, represents a \$395,000 structure on a \$756,000 block of land”.

Similar ratios exist in Perth and other capital cities.

Western Australians should be shocked to know they are paying more for the hidden costs of planning and zoning than they are for their actual home.

The cost of actually building your new home has remained relatively stable over the past 30 years, while house prices have risen exponentially.

The majority of this price increase relates to land, which is largely a result of government policies that cause zoning restrictions.

These restrictions appear to have a more widespread impact on the lives of ordinary Australians than any other regulation.

Master Builders supports the findings of the RBA report and has been saying for some time that housing affordability issues are fundamentally caused by worsening land affordability.

Research commissioned by Master Builders Australia has shown that reforms to these restrictive and inefficient zoning laws could improve housing supply by more than 20,000 new homes nationally over the next five years.

Improving supply is the first critical step in improving housing affordability and keeping the dream of homeownership within reach of all Australians.

The McGowan government has appointed experienced planner Evan Jones and the Member for Perth John Carey to head up a planning reform team to examine how WA’s planning regime can operate more efficiently.

This review is extremely timely, as the government is keen to increase infill housing targets to close to 50 per cent in conjunction with its Metronet precincts.

Getting local governments to adopt a progressive and flexible approach to planning approvals will be the key to the success of any planning reforms.

Some local councils like Rockingham, Wanneroo and Swan are leading the way for others to follow.

Each of these councils was rated the highest by builders in our Best Practice survey of local authorities this year.

It is pleasing that the WA Planning Commission is being more assertive in getting local councils to make provision for appropriately designed micro lots within their communities.

Cleverly designed two and three-level cottage-style homes on micro lots are one way to boost homeownership by reducing the spiralling cost of land.

Examples of these micro lots can be found in Ellenbrook, across the road from public open spaces and close to public transport and shopping centres.

The trend towards infill housing in the form of subdivided large blocks of land, townhouses, unit developments and apartments is, in my opinion, irreversible.

Buying greenfield lots of land in the outer suburbs will always be popular, especially if close to public transport, places of work or lifestyle choices.

But lifestyles are changing and the younger and older generations are more content to downsize into a dwelling close to the people and things they value most.

In these changing times, our planning system needs to adapt to help boost the supply of housing where people want to live – otherwise housing will become less affordable than what it should be.

Evan Jones and his planning reform team will soon be issuing a green paper setting out a range of options to improve our planning regime for the foreseeable future.

If you have an interest in affordable housing, I would encourage you to read this document and provide your feedback.

Master Builders will be responding because we want to improve homeownership rates in WA and reduce the ridiculously high number of different planning schemes (146) in our state alone. Planning reforms will also encourage more innovation from the architectural/design profession and building fraternity.

The Master Builders Australia report: Unlocking Supply, Consideration of Measures Aimed at Improving Housing Supply provides more detail around the benefits of zoning reforms.



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