

# When Codes and Standards Are Out of Sync



Codes and Standards play an integral role in the construction industry but when the two conflict, it can cause serious issues.

Released in September last year, AS3850:2015, the Standard for Prefabricated concrete elements, is in discord with the National Code of Practice. The conflict between the two documents is causing confusion and there is an urgent need for this confusion to be resolved.

The goal in updating the Standard was never to further confuse the market., but until Safe Work Australia updates the Code or produces a guide, that is what's happening – confusion, caused by two documents that in some situations have conflicting requirements. The agreed goal was always to have two complementary documents – the Standard, which is the technical guide, and the Code, which would be the supporting 'how to' guide.

The Code has been out of sync with the Standard since the Standard's release in September, and Safe Work Australia is now in the process of making revisions. Because of potential consequences, any delay in the Code's review is too long.

There are other reasons for an urgent revision of the National Code. There have been many changes since the Code was released in February 2008. It was produced by the Australian Safety and Compensation Council, which has been superseded by Safe Work Australia – yet the document still bears the old Council's name.

The National Code was declared under the Australian Workplace Safety Standards Act 2005. This Act has not been in force since November 2009. The Code is also in conflict with other codes of practice, such as the Construction Work Model Code of Practice and the Safe Design of Structures Code of Practice. Even though the Code can still function under the superseded versions of the Acts and Council, updating the Code is also an opportunity to address these conflicts.

The other concern is national adoption. When the National Code was released in February of 2008, not all states supported the use of the Code, making compliance unwieldy for companies that operate or provide services in more than one state or territory.

Whether companies manufacture precast, provide engineering services or build, it is confusing for them to know exactly which code to follow. Even though a particular State WorkCover authority might adopt one code, history tells us that when an incident or accident becomes litigious, every code gets brought into the picture. It would be so much simpler if the states were consistent.

Whilst a couple of the states elected not to adopt the 2008 National Code, there needs to be a

harmonised national approach by all State WorkCover authorities going forward, and the called-for new Code or guidance material presents an ideal opportunity for this to occur. If we acquiesce and tolerate different codes applying in different states, the unnecessary complexity will simply add to the confusion.

Confusion in the market results not only in increased costs, but more importantly, it compromises safety. Every party, from Safe Work Australia to State WorkCover authorities to industry associations to industry practitioners, have a responsibility to work in sync with one another to clarify roles, responsibilities and requirements. All parties need to do everything they can to ensure safe, high quality outcomes.

As six months have passed since the release of the revised Standard, Safe Work Australia needs to make revising the National Code of Practice a high priority so that it works in harmony with AS3850:2015 across all states and territories of Australia.

