

Rhode Island Residential Codes – FAQs



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1. When does the new code go into effect?

The new suite of building codes (including the new state energy conservation code, SBC-8) was adopted on July 1, 2013. A brief concurrency period July 1-October 1, 2013 provided an option as to which code a building permit would adhere; each chosen option was approved by a code official. **Every permit application after October 1, 2013 must be in compliance with the 2013 State Building Code (SBC).** The SBC-2 for 1- and 2-family dwellings, and SBC-8 for 3-family (or more) dwellings and commercial buildings govern energy efficiency. See www.ribcc.ri.gov.

2. What is required to meet the new building air leakage testing requirements?

Air sealing has been required for more than a decade, but one of the most significant energy code changes is the requirement to demonstrate compliance by testing a building's air leakage. See N1102.4.1.2 (SBC-2), and R402.4.1.2 (SBC-8). Specific rules dictate how to set up the dwelling unit and test with a blower door. The results must be reported to the building official in the form of Air Changes per Hour at 50 Pascals ("ACH50"). As of March 2014 no pass or fail threshold number exists. The only requirement is that the building or dwelling unit be tested with a blower door. However, note the many air sealing requirements, including the air barrier and insulation installation Table N1102.4.1.1 (SBC-2) or R402.4.1.1 (SBC-8).

Reference - SBC-2 N1102.4.1.2 and SBC-8 R402.4.1.2

3. When can the blower door test be performed?

The blower door test can be performed "any time after all penetrations of the building's thermal envelope have been sealed." If no additional holes will be created between conditioned spaces and unconditioned spaces, the test may be executed.

Reference - SBC-2 N1102.4.1.2 and SBC-8 R402.4.1.2

4. What is a mid-point blower door test?

This test is performed while a building is under construction and before wallboard is installed. It is difficult to perform on a conventionally framed and insulated home because attic ventilation and the unconditioned basement are not separated from the living space. However, if conditions allow, the test helps to identify air leaks within the thermal envelope that can then be remediated.

5. Who is approved to perform the blower door test for code compliance?

The code says "Testing shall be conducted by an approved third party where required by the building official." The Building Code Commission is currently reviewing legislation that will approve statewide credentials. As of March 2014 there is no standard in place. The certifications under consideration for performing blower door and duct leakage testing are BPI, HERS, and ACCA 12. Before the test is conducted, the testing agent's qualifications should be reviewed by the building code official. The builder is not allowed to perform the test for code compliance.

Reference - SBC-2 N1102.4.1.2 and SBC-8 R402.4.1.2

6. Who is approved to perform the duct leakage test?

Unlike the situation with blower door testing, no clear guidance is provided on the qualifications for duct testing. As of March 2014, the Building Code Commission is reviewing legislation that will approve individuals as "Energy Specialists" statewide, and which will provide guidance. Before the test is conducted, the testing agent's qualifications should be reviewed by the building code official.

Reference - SBC-2 N1103.2.2 and SBC-8 R403.2.2



7. Is a blower door test required for a residential gut rehab?

If all wall cavities, ceilings and floors are exposed, then all code requirements pertaining to air sealing and air barriers—including blower door testing—apply.

Reference – SRC-Chapters 5-6 which reference SBC-1 and SBC-8; State Building Code Administrative Section RIGL 23-27.3-100 Et Al - Sections 23-27.3-106.0 - 23-27.3-106.5; and SBC-2 N1101.3 and SBC-8 R101.4.3; and the same references as for Question 1.

8. Is a blower door test required for an addition?

The addition must comply with code requirements pertaining to new construction. The rest of the dwelling unit does not need to comply. However, because it is often difficult to separate a single family home from the addition, if construction costs of the addition are less than 50% of the physical value of the existing structure, then the test requirement may be waived by the building official.

Reference – SRC-Chapters 5-6 which reference SBC-1 and SBC-8; State Building Code Administrative Section RIGL 23-27.3-100 Et Al - sections 23-27.3-106.0 - 23-27.3-106.5; and SBC-2 N1101.3 and SBC-8 R101.4.3; and the same references as for Question 1.

9. Is a duct blaster test required if I am adding a minimal amount of duct work?

The code states that ducts shall be sealed and verified by testing. However, if the duct work cost is less than 50% of the entire system cost, then the test requirement may be waived by the building official.

Reference – SRC-Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 which reference SBC-1 and SBC-8; State Building Code Administrative Section RIGL 23-27.3-100 Et Al - sections 23-27.3-106.0 thru 23-27.3-106.5 and SBC-N1103.2.2 & SBC-8 R403.2.2

10. Where can I get a copy of the new codes?

See www.ribcc.ri.gov (RI Building Code Commission) or www.riboa.net (RI Building Officials Association). You may also purchase the 2012 International Building Codes and IRC and IECC, and download the state specific amendments at <http://sos.ri.gov/library/buildingcodes>.

11. Can I see a list of contractors who perform the energy tests?

There is no state-approved Energy Specialist certification as of March 2014. However, you may find certified energy raters at: https://www1.nationalgridus.com/files/AddedPDF/POA/EE5152_ContactList_10_12.pdf lists National Grid-approved BPI certified contractors.

www.BPI.org lists certified energy raters.

www.resnet.us lists certified energy raters.

www.nehers.org lists New England-based energy raters.

12. When will there be a number to pass or fail a blower door test? What happens if it fails?

A metric may be set in the next code adoption cycle. Until then, a test is required and the results must be reported to the building official in the form of Air Changes per Hour at 50 Pascals (“ACH50”). As of March 2014 no pass or fail threshold number exists.

13. What is the process if there is a difference of opinion on the interpretation of the energy code?

After verifying the applicable energy code and discussing with the local building official, unresolved differences can be directed to the Building Code Board of Appeals. The application is available at: <http://www.ribcc.ri.gov/documents/bcsc/Appeal%20Application.pdf>.