

Canadian Home Inspectors & Building Officials National Initiative

BACKGROUND

The Canadian home and building inspection industry consists primarily of home/property inspectors (HPI) and public, or municipal building code officials (MBCO). Home/property inspectors provide inspection services primarily to existing residential buildings. They are a significant force in providing real estate pre-purchase and residential renovation inspections. Municipal building code officials are responsible for monitoring new construction and minimum levels of health, fire and life safety under the building codes and various related bylaws. The size of these two sectors combined amounts to approximately 7,000 individuals with the majority represented by various regional and provincial associations.

CMHC research has shown that currently there are a number of private inspection associations and organizations across the country each with different inspection standards and levels of qualifications. The difference in standards for certifying private inspectors in Canada has caused confusion in the minds of consumers as well as within other sectors of the housing industry. Also indicated in the research, is the considerable variation in the availability and quality of the home inspection service offered across Canada, with large regional differences. At the time of the research, the majority of practitioners appeared not to belong to any professional inspection association or a qualified private firm. As a result, the consumer and the housing sector could not be assured of a minimum standard of private inspection services.

In 1996, CMHC conducted an industry survey and convened a meeting of industry leaders. The 1996 survey indicated that there is a strong desire to have a unified national body that represents the private inspection industry and the public building officials, but as separate entities.

In June 1997, a report was published entitled, “A Strategy to Provide Coordination of the Canadian Home Inspection Profession” which outlined a strategy to develop certification for the entire home inspection profession at a national level and to develop national standards leading to:

- Industry regulation
- Standards of performance for training
- Base qualifications for individuals entering the profession.

ISSUE

The National Initiative stems from both sectors wanting to address the issue of public accountability and professionalism to consumers and their clients.

The private inspection industry is highly fragmented, comprised of a number of associations, franchises and individual firms with varying qualifications. There is no national organization with which the housing sector can interact. This has been an issue for the sector and has received CMHC attention for almost a decade.

The MBCO have also made several attempts to agree on training standards with DACUMs (acronym for Developing A CURriculum) at the provincial level. The most recent DACUM was developed in Ontario in 1995, but it has not been approved for validation. Given the future changes to the next edition of the National Building Code, i.e., changing from prescriptive-based to objective-based, existing DACUMs for MBCO may need to be updated.

Some of the associations representing the HPI and MBCO sectors have established certification designations and comprehensive training programs. These designations and programs are within a province or region's jurisdiction rather than at the national level. Under current arrangements, both sectors recognize the need for national occupational standards, certification and training to bring "professionalism" to the industry and to help establish a structure that can be used to educate and protect the consumer. Improvements are deemed necessary for the following reasons:

For HPI:

- Certification programs vary across Canada in terms of minimum requirements, level of certification, type of courses required, and examinations to become certified.
- Certification programs at the provincial level are not transferable across Canada.
- Some provinces or territories do not have any certification programs.
- Some jurisdictions have colleges and government departments providing courses while others do not. These courses are not necessarily based on any national standards.
- Anyone can work as a HPI without certification by a provincial association. Thus, associations cannot enforce certification or standards resulting in little protection for consumers.

- There is little public or sector recognition for those who have taken the courses.
- There is no national code of ethics, and those which do exist vary from province to province.
- Although some of the training materials are shared, there are limited controls over the quality of the courses or accreditation of the training institution.
- Few courses include on-site or practical training, or information on how to deal with clients.

For MBCO:

- Different provincial/territorial acts have resulted in the implementation of different ways to certify/license the building officials under their jurisdictions.

In order to undertake this task, the first step was to establish one recognized body to speak on behalf of the two sectors, i.e., HPI and MBCO at the national level. As a result, a transitional steering group, comprised of nominated private inspection industry representatives from across the country, was formed and is working under the newly formed Canadian Association of Home and Property Inspectors (CAHPI). Also, the Alliance of Canadian Building Officials Association (ACBOA) has recently formed to unite all of the provincial municipal building code officials associations.

NATIONAL INITIATIVE

Project objectives

An agreement was reached in 1999 between CAHPI and ACBOA to join forces and work together to build a recognizable and professional home and building inspection industry to better serve the general public and their clients. Both groups have recognized the need for consistent national standards, certification and training. Funding for this private/public partnership comes from CAHPI, ACBOA, Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) and CMHC.

The overall objectives of the national initiative are:

- To elevate the status of the Canadian home and building inspection profession in the minds of the consumer, home inspectors, building officials, government and key stakeholders across Canada.
- To establish minimum national occupational standards, code of ethics and criteria for inspector certification so that the general public can have confidence that all certified inspectors meet the requirements of the national certification process.
- To ensure that inspections comply with the same performance standard throughout Canada.
- To approve, support and coordinate provincial/regional accrediting bodies to administer, certify and provide disciplinary control of private-sector home inspectors.

Structure of the Steering Committee for National Occupational Standards

The Canadian Home Inspection and Building Officials (CHIBO) Steering Committee for National Occupational Standards was first formed and convened in April, 2000 with a mandate to develop uniform national occupational standards for those employed as home inspectors and municipal building officials.

The national committee is comprised of seven representatives from the MBCO sector and seven representatives from the HPI sector. There is also a non-voting independent chair and a project manager as well as a number of ex-officio members.

Potential stakeholders:

- Inspection franchise operators
- National Research Council
- Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation
- Human Resources Development Canada

- Ontario Ministry of Housing
- Quebec municipal inspection industry representative (Quebec is not a member of ACBOA)
- Consumers
- Governments at all levels
- Assembly of First Nations
- Mortgage insurers
- Lending institutions
- Canadian Real Estate Association
- Home/Building Inspection public and private sectors
- Canadian Home Builders' Association
- Association provinciale des constructeurs d'habitations du Québec
- Home warranty programs
- Canadian Federation of Municipalities

COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Open communication is an important element in the success of this project. To ensure that interested stakeholders are kept apprised of the initiative, minutes of the meetings will be made available to them.

Other related communication initiatives include:

- Posting information on MBCO and HPI websites
- Issuing press releases to inform the public of milestones
- Articles and news bulletins to be inserted in Home Inspector and Building Code Officials' newsletters
- Updates and presentations to be provided at conferences and association meetings
- Updates and status reports to be provided to stakeholders via electronic mail

WEBSITE ADDRESSES

- Canadian Association of Home Inspectors:
www.cahi.ca (this site includes links to provincial/regional HPI associations)

The Alliance of Canadian Building Officials Association does not currently have a website, however, provincial MBCO associations have sites at:

- Ontario Building Officials Association:
www.oboa.on.ca
- Nova Scotia Building Officials Association:
www.nsboa.ca
- Saskatchewan Building Officials Association:
www.sboa.sk.ca

THE FIRST STEP—OCCUPATIONAL SKILLS ANALYSIS

The first major step of this national initiative is to undertake an occupational skills analysis which would later serve as the cornerstone for the development of a curriculum (DACUM) and the implementation of national training and certification for public and private members of the home and building inspection sector.

The objectives of this phase of the project are as follows:

- Review existing documents and literature related to the development of occupational standards, training programs, including reviewing existing occupational standards.
- Facilitation of three (3) workshops. One workshop will be with the HPI, one with the MBCO and a third workshop will include both groups to determine the core competencies both sectors have in common. Workshop participants will be identified by the CHIBO committee. The purpose of the workshops is to:

- Accurately identify and describe the blocks of activities within the skill sets.
- Identify the tasks performed within these blocks.
- Identify the sub-tasks of each major task, which when combined assures the completion of the task.
- Identify the enabling objectives: the knowledge and abilities which enable the individuals to perform the sub-tasks.
- Identify tools and equipment required to perform the sub-tasks.
- Develop occupational analyses including one for the HPI, one for the MBCO and one that focuses on the common elements between both sectors.
- Validate and create endorsement for the national occupational standards.
- Translate and publish the national occupational standards.

NEXT STEPS

It is anticipated that the occupational analysis phase of this project will be completed by March 31, 2001. Following its completion, future tasks include the development of DACUMs and any necessary training material, national certification programs, and standards of performance to build a recognizable and professional home and building inspection industry to better serve the general public.

INTERIM MEASURES—USEFUL QUESTIONS TO ASK

In the absence of national standards, the following questions can be useful to select a 'qualified' private home inspector:

- How long have they been working as home inspectors?
- What qualifications do they have?
- What training or education do they have?
- Do they belong to an industry association?
- Can they provide references?
- What does the inspection include?
- Is the inspection strictly visual?
- Can the client accompany the inspector during the inspection?
- Are there re-inspections if necessary, to inspect repairs?
- Do they also do renovation work?
- Are they working on behalf of a real estate agent?
- Will a written report be provided?
- When will the report be provided?
- Will they identify current problems as well as those that are imminent?
- Do they have errors and omissions insurance?
- Do they have any disclaimers or limitations as part of their contract? (Some inspectors limit their accountability to the amount of the contract.)

The following questions are useful when working with Municipal Building Code Officials:

- Are the municipal bylaws being interpreted properly?
- What is the time frame for getting a response?
- Will a written report be provided?
- When will the report be provided?

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Housing Research at CMHC

Under Part IX of the *National Housing Act*, the Government of Canada provides funds to CMHC to conduct research into the social, economic and technical aspects of housing and related fields, and to undertake the publishing and distribution of the results of this research.

This fact sheet is one of a series intended to inform you of the nature and scope of CMHC's research.

To find more *Research Highlights* plus a wide variety of information products, visit our website at

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