

Fact Sheet 9: Can I live in a shed, or can I convert my shed into a house?

Background

This fact sheet describes the differences between building structures that people can legally inhabit, and those types people cannot legally inhabit. It also provides information about the conversion of a shed to a house.

What's the difference?

The difference between a shed and a house is not about appearance.

Although a shed may look like a house and a house may look like a shed, there are technical differences between the two. The Building Code of Australia sets the national technical standards with which building construction must comply to ensure that minimum standards of relevant health, safety (including structural safety and safety from fire), amenity and sustainability objectives are achieved. That Code is made law in the Northern Territory through the Building Regulations.

A building structure commonly referred to as a 'shed', is classified under the Code as a 'class 10' building. These buildings, include sheds, garages and carports, and are grouped under that classification as 'non habitable' buildings.

A house is classified technically as a class 1a building. These are 'habitable' buildings.

A shed (class 10) and a house (class 1a) may share some common features. For instance, some sheds (class 10) have a bathroom. However, these features on their own, do not mean the building can be classified as a house (class 1a).

How do I convert my shed (class 10) to a house (class 1a)?

To convert a shed (class 10) to a house (class 1a) technical modifications may be required to meet the Building Code of Australia requirements to enable the structure to be appropriately certified as a house (class 1a).

Examples of modifications include such things as the replacement or installation of a concrete slab; footings; termite risk management systems; ceiling heights; glazing; damp proofing; window sizes; ventilation; energy efficiency and fire separation.

A building certifier must be engaged to determine what building work will be required to convert the shed (class 10) to the standards of a house (class 1a). The certifier may require plans be drawn that detail the building work to be undertaken.

Before starting on the conversion, consider whether it is feasible and cost-effective. If unsure, a certifier should be able to advise you of the scope of work required in the conversion. When that advice has been sought, consider obtaining quotes for the alterations.

Permissible uses of land under the Northern Territory Planning Scheme should also be investigated. For example, the Planning Scheme permits only one house (class 1a) building per lot for land zoned SD (single dwelling). If a shed (class 10) is converted to a house (class 1a), the cost of re-converting the house (class 1a) to a shed (class 10) should be assessed. The setback requirements from boundaries are also different for houses (class 1a) and sheds (class 10). These may present difficulties if converting a building from one classification to another.

If it is feasible and cost-effective in a particular case, and the shed (class 10) is altered to comply with the technical standards of a house (class 1a) –the building may still look like a shed, but it could be inhabited legally. That building type would be considered a house (class 1a) that has been converted from a shed (class 10).

Are there options?

Because sheds (class 10) are not built to the same technical standards as houses it is not always practical or economical to convert a shed (class 10) to a house (class 1a).

Some alternatives are:

- Small houses that meet the minimum requirements for floor space (class 1 – habitable building).
- Pre-fabricated houses (class 1– habitable building).
- Units / flats (class 2 – habitable building).

Building Advisory Services is responsible for enforcing the legislation relating to building control. Building Advisory Services investigates complaints and allegations about non-compliance with building control legislation. It includes allegations of people living in a shed.

For further information about building rules and regulations contact the Building Advisory Services Branch in your region, or visit www.nt.gov.au/building

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