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Step up scrutiny to curb illegal renovations
Ng Wai Hong

I REFER to last Friday's report, 'Illegal storey in house: Buyers lose case', about the couple who lost their case against the sellers of a 1 1/2-storey property.

The Building and Construction Authority (BCA) had informed the parties that the property had an illegal storey added to it.

This was a case that was in the making for a long time.

Innocent parties have wasted resources when they are not familiar with the building rules and regulations and believe that the property they are purchasing has duly complied with such regulations.

The illegal structure may not be a mere transgression of building rules - where a backyard shed is built right up to the rear perimeter wall.

Situations may arise where neighbours are so much nearer to you because walls and roof eaves are being built with less than the permitted distance set back from the boundaries of the property.

Or your property is now less private because your neighbour is looking down at you from his third-storey bedroom window.

If rectification work is required for these transgressions, it could be very costly. In the last 10 years or so, there have been a lot of renovation work all over the island. I have seen many renovations or reconstruction of houses which do not seem to abide by BCA rules.

I believe this may be attributed first to inconsistent application of these rules by the regulators.

Second, too much reliance on certification by the architect/engineers who submit the building plans and endorse that the plans have conformed with all aspects of building regulations.

Third, too little groundwork by regulators to confirm that the actual construction adheres to these regulations.

As an example, in certain housing estates, properties can be redeveloped but the new structure should not exceed 2 1/2 storeys.

However, it is evident when you drive around the housing estates that several of these renovated structures are actually three-storey buildings.

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**BCA will act on illegal renovations**

I REFER to the letter, 'Step up scrutiny to curb illegal renovations' (July 3). We acknowledge Mr Ng Wai Hong's concerns about illegal renovations and appreciate this opportunity to address them.

We assure readers the Building and Construction Authority (BCA) places great emphasis on structural safety of all building works.

Before construction can begin, owners or developers are required to engage qualified professionals, such as a professional engineer or registered architect, to submit building plans for approval by the Commissioner of Building Control (CBC).

These qualified professionals are well versed with the requirements of building regulations, as well as Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) development control parameters such as building setbacks, building coverage, intensity and height.

With the building owner/developer and builder, the qualified professionals have statutory responsibilities to ensure building works are in compliance with the Acts & Regulations.

In addition to certification and supervision by the qualified professionals, BCA carries out random and spot inspections at construction sites to ensure works are carried out according to approved plans and meet regulatory requirements. On completion, BCA will check all new buildings before issuing the Temporary Occupation Permit (TOP).

Notwithstanding the above, there are some minor renovation works which building owners can carry out without approval of plans or a permit from the CBC, as they do not affect the structural integrity of the building. These are illustrated in our Build It Right guide which is available at the BCA website ([www.bca.gov.sg](http://www.bca.gov.sg)).

BCA takes a serious view of any non-compliance with its building regulations, whether during construction or after issue of the Certificate of Statutory Completion. We will not hesitate to take appropriate enforcement action against parties responsible if investigation reveals non-compliance such as unauthorised building works at any point in time.

We would like to remind readers it is prudent for potential buyers of an existing property to check it is free from unauthorised structures. Legal searches are some checks done routinely during conveyancing to surface any unauthorised structures that are investigated by BCA and URA. Potential buyers may, with the consent of the owner, buy a copy of the approved plans from BCA.

**Reply by Ong Chan Leng**  
**Director (Special Functions Division)**  
**Building and Construction Authority**