



ENERGY STAR®

Residential New  
Construction



## Technical Bulletin: Pre-Drywall Inspection Is Always Required

May 1, 2023

Partners have periodically asked if there are alternative verification protocols available when a builder or developer installs drywall before the pre-drywall inspection has been completed by the Rater.

**The only recourse when drywall has been installed prior to visual verification is to remove the drywall to allow the inspection to occur.** A visual inspection is necessary to verify the Minimum Rated Features of ANSI / RESNET / ICC 301 as well as the mandatory features of the ENERGY STAR Single-Family New Homes and Multifamily New Construction program, such as minimum insulation levels, Grade I or II insulation, air sealing details, a complete air barrier, advanced framing details, and ductwork installed without kinks and bends.

EPA recently spent considerable time evaluating several possible alternatives but concluded that no other protocol would deliver the same certainty as a pre-drywall inspection that all program requirements have been met. In fact, a pre-drywall inspection is always required as part of the certification process precisely because there is no viable substitute.

### Assessing What Drywall Must Be Removed

The value of the pre-drywall inspection is more than just assessing that the **typical** assembly within the home or apartment meets the program requirements, but also to identify outliers that must be corrected prior to certification, such as a missing air barrier behind a tub, a knee wall that has not been insulated, or an HVAC chase that has not been sealed.

It is for this reason that **all** drywall that potentially conceals Minimum Rated Features or mandatory Items from the ENERGY STAR checklists must be removed if it was installed prior to a pre-drywall inspection. It is not sufficient to remove only portions of drywall to inspect a subset of areas. This effectively means, for example, that all the drywall that conceals insulation must be removed.

The only potential exceptions are areas that can be fully inspected even with drywall in place. For example, some minimum rated features and mandatory requirements at the ceiling plane can be inspected from the attic. In such cases, the ceiling drywall would not need to be removed.

Furthermore, it is not acceptable to complete a Sampled Rating on a home that has missed the pre-drywall inspection. For example, a home that was pursuing a Confirmed Rating could not be converted to a Sampled Rating to avoid the requirement. Sampled Ratings require a random selection of homes within the sample set, which cannot be accomplished if one or more homes are incapable of being inspected.

### Reinforcing EPA's Current Policy

To reinforce EPA's current policy that a pre-drywall inspection is always required and that drywall must be entirely removed to fully verify all Items if it has been installed prior to the inspection, EPA will be making the following edits with the next Revision:

- The ENERGY STAR Certification Process in the ENERGY STAR Program Requirements documents will be revised to explicitly state that a pre-drywall inspection is required. Sample language from the Single-Family New Homes program is as follows:

"Using a Rater, verify that all requirements have been met in accordance with the Mandatory Requirements for All Certified Homes and with the inspection procedures for minimum rated features in ANSI / RESNET / ICC 301, Appendix B. This will require a minimum of two inspections: one at pre-drywall and the other at final."

- In addition, a new Footnote will be added to the Rater Pre-Drywall Inspection Date(s)" field on the Rater Field Checklists. Sample language from the Single-Family New Homes Program is as follows:

"Any Item that will be concealed by drywall (e.g., wall insulation) must be verified during the pre-drywall inspection. If drywall is installed prior to the inspection, then it must be entirely removed to fully verify all Items. It is not sufficient to remove only portions of drywall to inspect a subset of areas. Furthermore, it is not acceptable to complete a Sampled Rating on a home that has missed the pre-drywall inspection. Additional information is available in the Technical Bulletin: Pre-Drywall Inspection Is Always Required."

## Action Items for Energy Rating Companies and their Builders

Completing a pre-drywall inspection is one of the essential checkpoints for ensuring that program requirements have been met.

- Raters and builders should coordinate to ensure that a process is in place for scheduling pre-drywall inspections and ensuring that crews do not install drywall until the inspection has occurred. Consider who is responsible for ensuring that the inspection has occurred before proceeding with drywall installation - the site supervisor, the Rater, or the drywall crew? Some builders have used red and green placards in the garage to clearly indicate whether the drywall installation crews can proceed - red for stop and green for go.
- Have a plan in place for the rare case where drywall is installed prior to inspection. If the builder intends to proceed with certification, who will be responsible for the cost of drywall removal? Alternatively, would the builder consider foregoing certification of the home? Note that skipping certification of homes that missed the pre-drywall inspection will not endanger a builder's 100% commitment with EPA.

## Additional Resources

For information on checklists, state and region-specific requirements, and more, visit the [ENERGY STAR Residential New Construction National Program Requirements page](#).

View past [ENERGY STAR New Homes technical bulletins](#).

Questions? Email us at [energystarhomes@energystar.gov](mailto:energystarhomes@energystar.gov)

Best regards,

The ENERGY STAR Residential New Construction team

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