BWOF Compliance & Auckland Council Audits

Whilst some of this information is specific to the Auckland region, there is also good general BWOF information that is relevant to all Parishes.

Auckland Council has increased its focus on building safety and compliance following the tragic Loafers Lodge fire in Wellington in 2023. As part of this initiative, Council teams have been undertaking proactive audits of commercial buildings across the region, including churches, halls and parish buildings that require a Building Warrant of Fitness (BWOF). This does not include residential properties e.g. vicarages

Auckland Council audit process – What parishes need to know

Why might we get audited?

Auckland Council audits approximately 20% of buildings with BWOFs each year, so you may be contacted for an audit.

Scheduling the Audit

You don't need to schedule an audit, if your property is selected, an Auckland Council auditor will reach out to the email address listed on your building record to schedule a site visit. If the time doesn't suit you, you can reschedule the meeting so long as you give notice.

Contact Details

You may need to verify that your contact details (email and phone number) in your BWOF records are current to ensure you receive all audit notifications. Some Parishes have had trouble with this because of the ownership structure of Diocesan properties, with the owner being the General Trust Board. If this is causing you an issue, I may be able to help. Please send an email direct to me and I will try and assist.

Do we have to have an Audit?

If your property is selected, you must attend the audit as they are compulsory. It's important that someone from your Parish is present when the auditor attends the site, preferably someone familiar with the building and the fire safety systems.

Can our Independent Qualified Person (IQP) help?

Yes. You should let them know you are having an audit. They can assist by attending the audit, preparing your documentation, and checking everything is up to date. Depending on your arrangement with your Independent Qualified Person (IQP) there may be additional charges, so best check with them what their charges are. However, if you have several buildings with complicated systems, it's probably a good idea to have them attend.

Does our BWOF need to be current at the time of audit?

Yes, you cannot have an expired BWOF and it needs to be on display in a public place. If it has expired or not on display, you need to get in contact with your BWOF agent urgently to get that remedied. It's important to schedule your BWOF annual renewal early so that if any work needs to be attended to it can be done before the expiry date. It also takes time for your BWOF renewal application to be processed by Auckland Council. Your IQP should be helping you manage this. If you are facing any issues with your BWOF agent we give a suggestion of a BWOF agent that we use at the end of this letter.

What documentation will I need for the audit?

The auditor will want to review the BWOF, compliance schedule, all inspection, maintenance, and reporting (IMR) records, which must be retained for the previous two years. Your IQP can assist with this (check what they charge first). These should be contained in one logbook with all IQPs signing the same book. Please check this is being completed. If not, you can ring all your contractors and get them to send you their records over the last 24 months. These need to be printed and inserted into the logbook.

What is a Compliance Schedule

A Compliance Schedule is a legal document that lists all the specified building systems in your building (i.e. fire alarms, emergency exits etc). It explains what each system is, the standards it must meet, and how often it needs to be checked, maintained, and reported on, according to the Building Act.

In recent years, Auckland Council has updated its policy to require Compliance Schedules to be more detailed in order to comply with the Building Amendment Act 2012. This means your schedule must clearly describe each system, its performance standards, and the inspection and maintenance procedures.

The Council are sending notices regarding outdated schedules requesting these to be updated. If you get a notice, it's best that you engage with an IQP to help with the update. Please note, there will be a fee for this service. If you already have an IQP, the Council may notify them first and the IQP may get in touch with you to arrange the update

What parts of the building will the auditor look at?

The auditor will want to look at all areas of the building, so make sure you have all the keys/codes to access the different areas.

Some observations/lessons from an audit I attended

I attended an audit recently and while you don't have to be an expert, I noted the following:

1. Make sure your BWOF is current and that it is displayed (your IQP should be managing this for you)
2. Confirm with the auditor regarding the meeting and reschedule early if you can't make it
3. Turn up early for the confirmed meeting, in case they do!

4. Have keys/codes to all areas ready
5. Be familiar with where the fire systems are and know where your BWOF is displayed
6. Have all the documentation at hand including the logbook (your IQP can help with preparing this), if your documents are stored digitally, please ensure you provide a working link for the auditor on the day of the audit
7. Take your own notes as you go around of any observations or areas of concern
8. Ask the auditor questions, they are experts on BWOF compliance, and from my experience were willing to share
9. Timing will vary depending on the size and complexity of the building/s, but you would want to allow at least one hour
10. Don't be anxious, so long as you have a current BWOF, and come prepared, the auditors were very friendly and happy to share their observations.

Cost of the Audit and who pays?

After the audit, you will receive a written report and an invoice payable by the Parish. The invoice covers the auditor's time and travel. If no one from the Parish meets the auditor, you will be charged. And you will be charged again for rescheduled visit, and they may charge you if the documentation is not available during the audit.

Key points regarding Auckland Council Audits:

- Attendance at the audit is compulsory.
- The auditor will need someone onsite who can provide access to the building and direct them to the BWOF and have the documentation.
- The auditor will need to verify that the current BWOF (Form 12) is displayed in a location visible to building users and visitors.
- The auditor will walk the egress routes and inspect the specified systems to ensure each is compliant.
- You will receive a written report and an invoice to pay. Lack of attendance or documentation will result in additional charges.

What is a BWOF and why is it important?

If your Vestry is unfamiliar with BWOF, or you don't have dedicated property people on your Vestry, below is some information that may be helpful:

Not all churches and hall require a BWOF, but if they do a Building Warrant of Fitness (BWOF) is the legal document that confirms the specified systems in your building such as fire alarms, emergency lighting, and means of escape have been maintained and inspected in line with the Compliance Schedule for your property. A current and properly displayed BWOF is not only a legal requirement but also a key measure to ensure the ongoing safety of everyone using and visiting your facilities. BWOFs must be renewed annually to remain valid.

It's important to display a valid BWOF as failure to do so could result in a fine of up to $20,000, and if the BWOF has expired you may face prosecution.

Need a BWOF Agent or looking to change?

To undertake the BWOF compliance you should engage an expert (IQP or BWOF agent) to maintain your systems. Your BWOF company may subcontract different companies to fulfil particular tasks associated with BWOF compliance (e.g. fire alarm systems). These inspections/maintenance services would be an additional cost. You may need to arrange these separately if your BWOF provider is unable to do this for you.

You may have a reliable IQP you work with and that's great, but if you are looking to engage one or to change, we can suggest Building Compliance Group Ltd (BC Group) or Fire Security Services, The latter organisation is nationwide and can provide all your fire safety requirements e.g. BWOF, fire equipment and alarm checks if you wanted to streamline your services.

If remedial work is required, the BWOF provider may be able to recommend contractors who can assist.

For more information about BWOFs, please refer to the Auckland Council website and Frequently Asked Questions