

The Cape Town Plumbing Certificate, what is involved and what is NOT included?

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Certain certificates have been a requirement for many years already in Cape Town, with others being a more recent addition.

It doesn't seem to matter how long a particular certificate has been a requirement for, we still find that many sellers and buyers understandably have very little knowledge of what is actually required for each certificate.

Obtaining certificates is something that most people will probably only have to do once or twice in their lives so this "lack of knowledge" is completely understandable, but can sometimes lead to unnecessary heartache where the seller thinks we are doing too much and ripping them off while the new owner thinks we haven't done enough and you as the Agent or Attorney very often get caught in the middle of these sometimes unpleasant misunderstandings.

The Rand is at its weakest levels ever. Interest Rates seem set to start rising again, yet the property market appears to be incredibly buoyant, for now, but that's a topic for another day. We'll keep an eye on the macro economic conditions as the year progresses.

The Plumbing Certificate is one of the more recent additions, and unique to Cape Town so we thought we would start with a further explanation of what is, and what is NOT, required in order for us to issue the Plumbing Certificate.

Firstly let us assure you that the purpose of this newsletter is for your educational purposes only, we are by no means trying to pass the buck or shirk our responsibilities in any way, if you do find yourself in a position where you have an unhappy client, either seller or buyer then please feel free to pick up the phone or drop us an email letting us know of the situation. If we have made a genuine mistake, we will tuck our tail between our legs, hang our heads in shame, apologise and promptly remedy the situation.

What is checked during the Plumbing Inspection

There are only seven checks that are currently performed during the "Plumbing" inspection and as long as the plumbing installation complies with these seven points we are obliged to issue a "Plumbing Certificate" we cannot compel the seller to rectify plumbing issues over and above the below seven checks.

1: The Hot Water Cylinder is plumbed correctly, PRV of the correct value, vacuum breakers correctly installed, emergency overflow installed with a metallic pipe, all overflows to be plumbed to the outside and discharge to atmosphere.

2: The water meter registers when a tap is open and stops completely when all taps are closed. If there is movement on the meter with all taps closed, this points to a leak somewhere on the property.

3: None of the terminal water fittings leak, when they are in the OFF position, and they are correctly fixed in position.

4: No storm water is discharged into the sewerage system.

5: There is no cross connection between the potable supply and any grey water system which may be installed.

6: The private isolating valve is in place and functioning.

7: The water pipes in the plumbing installation are properly saddled.

Water usage versus wastage.

One of the primary purposes of the Water Installation Certificate is the prevention of water wastage, i.e. leaks or dripping taps in the supply pipes or system resulting in un-intended un-controlled usage.

Opening the tap is seen as intended usage. The purpose for which the water is used and the subsequent disposal of the used water falls outside the scope of the Water Installation Certificate.

Any fittings, fixtures or appliances connected to or placed under the tap or supply source are excluded from the certificate.

If we look at the above diagram the Certificate covers the thin blue supply pipes, the stop tap in the wall and the main tap above the sink, as long as there are no leaks in this system and all the items are properly and securely installed a Certificate can be issued.

The Certificate does not include the sink itself or any of the disposal pipes leading to the outside, these items could be blocked, broken and leaking, or even missing, and it will have no effect on the Certificate.

The "Plumbing Certificate".

The property industry has adopted the name "Plumbing Certificate" this is very misleading as it has very little to do with the overall state of the plumbing installation. The accurate name is the CERTIFICATE OF COMPLIANCE OF WATER INSTALLATION in accordance with the City of Cape Town bylaws.

The purpose of the Cape Town water certificate by-laws are to:

Prevent water wastage, there should be no leaks in the system from the incoming supply on your property up to and including the taps/outlets when in the OFF position.

Reduce unnecessary load on our sewerage system. No rain water may be disposed of in the sewerage system.

Prevent grey water from mixing with the potable supply. Naturally we wish to keep our fresh drinking water safe to drink.

Ensure the correct and safe installation of the geyser. High pressure geysers pose a possible explosion risk if faulty or incorrectly installed.

Ensure the water meter works correctly.

What is NOT included in the "Plumbing Certificate".

We do have the occasional seller taking umbrage to certain issues that require rectification or the cost thereof, but we generally find that we receive more “complaints” with regards to the “Plumbing Certificate” from the new property owners who believe we should have done more.

The new property owner believes that a “Plumbing Certificate” implies that absolutely everything to do with the plumbing installation will be 100%, unfortunately as you can see by the limited seven checks above this is simply NOT the case.

There are numerous plumbing issues that the certificate does not cover.

Some of the more obvious non certificate plumbing issues that we receive complaints about include, but not exclusive to:

Blocked drains, the City of Cape Town is not concerned in any way with blocked drains on your property, this is considered a normal maintenance issue NOT a certificate issue.

Leaks in the secondary, disposal, system. Leaks in the secondary or disposal system are not considered water wastage by the City of Cape Town as the water has already been used for it's intended purpose and is now being disposed of.

We only check for leaks in the primary supply system, i.e. from the water meter to the tap itself and only when the tap is in the OFF position. We do NOT check the pipes from your shower, bath, kitchen or bathroom sinks to the outside drain, if these pipes leak it is considered normal maintenance and NOT a certificate issue, even if it is causing damage by leaking into a kitchen or bathroom cupboard or under the floor.

Low water pressure supply. Check this with your supply authority

Discolouration or Odour in water, water quality. Could be rust in pipes or geyser, or as a result of an external leak outside of your property.

Fittings in poor condition. Chips, cracks or discolouration of baths, sinks, showers, toilets etc is not a concern of the City of Cape Town.

Fittings or connections to appliances that leak in the ON position. The connection to washing machines, dishwashers etc is NOT covered by the Plumbing Certificate as long as the tap is not leaking in the off position.

Irrigation systems or swimming pool installations. Generally appliances and the connection thereof are not included in the Plumbing Certificate. So if your swimming pool or irrigation system leaks when in use it's a maintenance issue.

Taps or fittings that are not connected to the installation. Occasionally we find a tap or some other fitting that is not connected to the water supply, we cannot compel the seller to upgrade the plumbing installation.

No hot or cold water supply to rooms where you would normally expect both. It is not the purpose of the plumbing certificate to upgrade the plumbing installation. We do occasionally come across a house that has only cold or hot water supply to a kitchen or bathroom. As long as what exists is compliant we can not compel the seller to upgrade the installation.

Air blocks in pipes. This can occur when the water supply has been switched off for a while, just open the taps in the house and let them run until the air has worked it's way out of the system.