

Is this wall structural? A code proposal for labeling structural walls.

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At one time or another every renovator, professional or weekend warrior, has tried to determine what might happen if they remove or make a big hole in a wall – is it holding something up? This is not always easy to determine but you can get some help from this article.

Getting this right is important as there are many reports, even YouTube videos, showing the disastrous consequences of cutting into support walls and not dealing with the charge from above properly. During the east coast ice storm of 1998 the only residential buildings that had roof problems were found to be ones that had removed bearing walls without installing proper beams to carry the load of the ice on the roof. All undisturbed code built support walls and beams stood solid and held the roof and the exceptional ice load safely.

An Ontario home builder has a plan for eliminating the guess work when it comes to structural walls. He has patented a permanent sign to be nailed to every other stud on inside structural walls. When someone opens a wall for renovations, they can't miss the sign. I love the idea as it would be a wake-up call to an inexperienced renovator or even something that a homeowner can see to force a renovator (or brother-in-law) to stop and get professional guidance. So why doesn't this great idea catch on?

The catch is that the contractor building that structural wall in the first place is not the person that benefits from the signs being there 15 years later. So the cost is up-front and the benefit is to someone else way down the line. The only logical way to bridge that gap is through municipal by-laws or provincial building codes. But code bodies are always rightly hesitant to add things to the rules of building that will tack a few more dollars on the cost of construction.

Dennis St. Denis, the inventor, is trying to muster public support for a code change. You can get a lot more information, share stories and find a link to his Change.org petition for public support by going to LoadBearingSupportSigns.com .

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