



An Roinn Tithíochta,
Rialtais Áitiúil agus Oidhreachta
Department of Housing,
Local Government and Heritage

Your Questions Answered

Defective Concrete Blocks Grant Scheme

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First Steps

1. Who will the grant scheme apply to?

The grant scheme will apply to the owners of dwellings located in Donegal or Mayo, which are damaged due to the use of defective concrete blocks containing excessive amounts of mica/pyrite.

The dwelling must be:

- (a) the individual's principal private residence, that is, a house or apartment which an individual owns (or co-owns) and occupies as his or her only or main residence
- (b) a rented dwelling with a Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) registered tenancy on November 1st 2021 subject to a maximum of one rental property per household and the introduction of a clawback mechanism upon re-sale within a set time period depending on the remediation option used.

2. Will other counties be eligible for the scheme?

The Minister for Housing, Local Government and Heritage may, with Government approval, extend the Scheme, beyond Donegal and Mayo, to additional counties as appropriate and required.

3. How do I establish if my dwelling is damaged due to defective concrete blocks?

Where it is suspected that a dwelling has been damaged due to the use of defective concrete blocks in its construction, the homeowner should engage a suitably qualified chartered engineer to carry out an inspection of your home. Should they be of the view that the dwelling is damaged due to the use of defective blocks a 'Building Condition Assessment' in accordance with Irish Standard I.S. 465:2018 can be prepared, on your instruction.

This Building Condition Assessment will be needed should you decide to submit an application to the local authority.

Engineers Ireland <http://www.engineersireland.ie> keep a register of chartered engineers who have undertaken training in I.S. 465 and are considered to have the necessary competence in relation assessing properties damaged by defective blockwork. Homes seeking admission to the scheme will be required to meet a 'damage threshold'. The 'damage threshold' is necessary to ensure that the worst affected homes are prioritised for remediation.

4. What costs are covered by this grant scheme?

The grant scheme covers up to 100% of the costs associated with the qualifying works deemed necessary for the remediation of the relevant dwelling (subject to cost per square foot and maximum expenditure limits), and includes the costs associated with the:

- Professional and project management fees
- Alternative accommodation Costs
- Removal and Storage for future use of house components
- Cost of disconnection and reconnection of services and utilities
- Engineer's report (I.S. 465 Final Report including testing and sampling) and recommended

5. What role is the Housing Agency to play in the enhanced scheme?

The Housing Agency will act as agents on behalf of the local authorities under the enhanced scheme. Applications received by a local authority will be referred to the Housing Agency to review the 'Building Condition Assessment Report' and determine if the home has met the 'damage threshold' for entry to the scheme. Once a home has met the damage threshold for entry to the scheme, the Housing Agency will arrange the assessment, testing and categorisation process as required and recommend the appropriate remediation option and grant amount.

The Dwelling

6. What type of dwelling qualifies for the grant scheme?

It is a matter for the relevant local authority to determine whether a dwelling is a relevant dwelling for the purposes of this grant scheme and will require such evidence as deemed necessary in making such a determination.

The relevant dwelling must be a house, apartment, maisonette or duplex dwelling that:

- is located in the administrative area of a relevant local authority i.e. currently Donegal County Council or Mayo County Council only, however, this may be extended;
- the construction of which was completed prior to 31/01/2020;
- was constructed using defective concrete blocks; and is damaged due to the use of the defective concrete blocks
- and is either an owner occupied principal residence or a property registered with the RTB on the 1st November, 2021

The dwelling must be:

- (a) the individual's principal private residence, that is, a house or apartment which an individual owns (or co-owns) and occupies as his or her only or main residence
- (b) a rented dwelling with a Residential Tenancies Board (RTB) registered tenancy on November 1st 2021.

In respect of rental properties a charge will be held on the property for a set period based on the remediation option approved and the grant funding provided.

A maximum of one rental property per household is eligible for funding under the scheme.

Vacant homes are not eligible to apply under the DCB Scheme but they are eligible to apply under the Repair & Leasing Scheme run by DHLGH on the same terms as all other homeowners.

7. What type of dwelling does not qualify for this grant scheme?

The following are excluded from the definition of a relevant dwelling and do not qualify for this grant scheme:

- Holiday home properties
- Vacant residential properties
- a building or part of a building or out office that is not attached to a dwelling;
- a yard, garden or other land appurtenant to a dwelling;
- a building, other than a building comprising apartments, duplexes or maisonettes (or any combination of such dwellings), that provides multi-occupancy accommodation under specific conditions, including, but not limited to, a nursing home, a boarding school, a hotel or a hostel;
- dwellings owned by a Public Body
- commercial/retail premises.

8. I live in an apartment block. Can I apply?

Yes, if the conditions set out in 7 above are fulfilled

9. I live in a semi-detached house. Can I apply?

Yes, if the conditions set out in 7 above are fulfilled

10. My dwelling is semi-detached and the adjoining house is also affected. Can we apply together?

No, each relevant owner of a relevant dwelling must apply separately.

11. What happens if I inherit a house after 31 January 2020?

If you inherited the dwelling after the 31st January 2020, you are eligible to apply for the grant. The dwelling must be the individual's principal private residence, and the individual must intend in good faith to reside in the dwelling as his or her principal private residence on completion of the qualifying works to the dwelling.

12. What happens if I buy a house after 31 January 2020?

Individuals who purchase a dwelling on or after 31 January 2020 will generally not be eligible for a grant. However, in certain limited circumstances, as an exception to the general rule, a relevant local authority may consider an application from an individual applying in good faith, on the honest belief that they either did not know, or could not have known that defective concrete blocks were used in the construction of the dwelling.

It is a matter for the relevant local authority (which is independent in the exercise of its functions), to determine based on facts and evidence in each individual case whether an applicant is, or is not entitled to apply for inclusion into the scheme.

13. What proof will I have that the remedial work has been satisfactorily completed?

As a pre-condition to a final payment, a Certificate of Remediation will be required following completion of the remedial works, signed by your contractor and competent engineer, certifying that the qualifying works to the dwelling which were carried out and supervised by the contractor, and designed and inspected by the competent engineer are compliant with the requirements of the Building Regulations.

Under proposed enhancements to the scheme the certification process for remediated homes will be strengthened and placed on a statutory footing. A second grant option for options 2-5 will be available where blockwork left in home after the first remediation subsequently proves defective in accordance with the IS:465 protocol. The second grant option would remain with the home and should help with future conveyancing.

14. What if I moved out of my principal private residence due to damage caused by defective concrete blocks?

A dwelling may be deemed the individual's principal private residence where the dwelling previously had been, but ceased to be such by virtue of the damage to the dwelling arising out of, or in connection with, the use of defective concrete blocks in its construction.

The Qualifying Works

15. What remedial options are available under this grant scheme?

There are five remedial options available under this grant scheme.

The maximum grant payable for each remedial option is 100% of the maximum approved cost, or 100% of the actual cost of the qualifying works carried out, whichever is the lesser (see Table 1 below). As the remedial works progress, the homeowner will be eligible to apply for grant payments in stages.

Table 1: Grant Amount Payable per Remedial Option		
Remedial Option	Remedial Option Description	Maximum Grant Payable^{1,2}
Option 1	Demolish entire dwelling to foundation level and rebuild.	€420,000
Option 2	Demolish and rebuild external walls (both outer and inner leafs) down to foundation on a phased basis and re-render.	Currently €220,000 but will rise after DHGH/SCSI Review
Option 3	Demolish and rebuild external walls (both outer and internal leafs) down to top of rising wall on a phased basis and re-render.	Currently €210,000 but will rise after DHGH/SCSI Review
Option 4	Demolish and rebuild external walls (outer leaf only) down to top of rising wall on a phased basis and re-render.	Currently €75,000 but will rise after DHGH/SCSI Review
Option 5	Demolish and rebuild outer leaf of affected walls only and re-render.	Currently €55,000 but will rise after DHGH/SCSI Review
NOTE:		
1. All costs are inclusive of VAT.		

16. How will the cost per square foot be calculated?

For Option 1 (demolition and re-build) the Department has set a fair and reasonable cost per sq.ft. in addition to a specific allowance for alternative accommodation and storage costs. This has been informed by SCSi rates and methodology. Following further engagement with SCSi an appropriate blockwork replacement (options 2-5) will be agreed and the current caps under options 2-5 will rise as necessary.

The cost psf set by the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage allows for €20,000 for alternative accommodation and storage costs as well as €145psf for the first 1,000 sq. ft., €110psf for the next 1,000 sq.ft. and €100 psf thereafter, based on the size of the existing home. The sliding scale effect in the table below reflects the economies of scale associated with home construction. The costs set also reflect the fact that under option1 homes are being rebuilt on existing foundations with all services in situ and paid for and gardens, driveways and boundary treatments in place.

The salvage of existing house components will be a matter for individual homeowners but should be encouraged in order to promote the circular economy.

Examples of how this would work for various home sizes being remediated under option 1 are set out in the table below:

House Size in Sq. Ft	Accommodation & Storage Costs	Average Construction Cost PSF	Max Construction Grant	Total Grant
800	20,000	€145	€116,000	€136,000
1,200	20,000	€140	167,000	€187,000
1,600	20,000	€132	211,000	€231,000
2,000	20,000	€128	255,000	€275,000
2,500	20,000	€122	305,000	€325,000
3,000	20,000	€118	355,000	€375,000

The Department will monitor movement in the annual SCSi re-build guide and tender rates and adjust the cost psf as required to account for changes in construction costs. The economies of scale associated with construction work and housebuilding are significant and this will remain an important consideration in any future adjustments to the cost psf for all remediation options.

17. What works do not qualify under this grant scheme?

The following outlines a non-exhaustive list of items of non-qualifying works, which are outside the scope of this grant scheme:

- costs associated with works undertaken prior to Confirmation of Grant Approval from a relevant local authority;
- costs associated with works outside of the grant scheme;
- costs associated with any works that are not required for or ancillary to the remediation of damage to the dwelling arising out of, or in connection with, the use of defective concrete blocks in its construction e.g. energy upgrades beyond the requirements of the Building Regulations for existing dwelling;
- remedial works to foundations, and associated ground works;

18. The I.S. 465 Final Report has revealed that the presence of deleterious materials and resulting damage to my dwelling has only occurred in an extension to my dwelling. What happens in this case?

Under proposed enhancements to the scheme the Housing Agency will recommend a remedial option that represents the appropriate works to remediate the dwelling.

19. Are remedial works to my garage allowable under the grant scheme?

No. A building or part of a building or out office that is not attached to a dwelling is excluded from this grant scheme.

20. Can I apply for an SEAI grant for energy upgrades?

Yes there is grant assistance available from the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI) for DCB homeowners to cover the costs of energy upgrades which should reduce energy costs going forward and reduce the financial burden on families over time. Grants are available to DCB homeowners under the same criteria as all other homeowners who are not affected with DCB.

21. Does the grant scheme cover temporary accommodation and other costs (such as furniture storage) in the event that I have to move out when works are ongoing?

Alternative accommodation costs are an allowable cost, subject to a maximum of €15,000.

Removal of furniture/contents, temporary storage and reinstatement on completion are an allowable cost, subject to a maximum €5,000.

22. Can I recoup remedial works costs that I have already incurred prior to getting approval under the grant scheme?

Generally no, however any costs associated with essential immediate repair works related to the structural stability of any part of an affected home, which are recommended on foot of an engineer's recommendation as part of the 'Building Condition Assessment' process, will be an allowable cost, subject to a maximum expenditure cap of €5,000.

General

23. Will I have to vacate my house while the work is being done?

This is a matter for your contracted parties (contractor and competent engineer) and will depend on the nature of works required, as specified in the remedial works plan.

Further information is provided in the “Guide for Homeowners Getting Construction Work Done Safely” published by the Health and Safety Authority, available at the following link:

https://www.hsa.ie/eng/Publications_and_Forms/Publications/Construction/homeowners_guide.pdf.

24. Am I liable for property tax for the period my dwelling has been affected?

The Finance (Local Property Tax) (Amendment) Bill 2021 was signed into law in July 2021 and provides a temporary (6 year) exemption from Local Property Tax (LPT) for homes in counties that have been damaged due to the use of defective concrete blocks in their construction and are eligible for the Defective Concrete Blocks Grant Scheme subject to the home being remediated.

25. Can I appeal a decision?

Yes. A new and independent appeal process will be established to consider all appeals on the approved remediation or grant award from homeowners regardless of their location.

Planning Permission

26. Do I require Planning Permission?

In the case of option 1 (demolition and rebuild), subject to work which is underway to identify what legal requirements may be needed to make provision for it, exempt development status will be provided for homes which are planning compliant and are being replaced on a like for like basis.

Where a participant does not build back on a ‘like for like’ basis planning permission will be required.

Further Considerations

27. Will the maximum grant caps rise/fall in line with inflation?

The maximum expenditure caps will be set by DHLGH and reviewed as required by DHLGH in consultation with the SCSi.

28. Will holiday properties and other non-RTB registered rental properties be included?

No

29. What additional supports will be available for applicants?

Local authorities will be available to support people who need assistance in completing the application process.

30. Will those responsible for the manufacture of defective concrete blocks be legally pursued?

Options for the pursuit of potential liable wrongdoers will be explored.

31. What revenue raising options are being considered?

A levy on the construction industry will be put in place and introduced in the Finance Bill 2022.

32. What actions are being taken to ensure this never happens again?

The Government is establishing a new Independent Building Standards Regulator, a Building Industry Register and tasking the NSAI Masonry Committee with a special review of concrete blocks standards including making recommendations on what improvement, if any, are required to prevent future problems.

Standards

I.S. 465:2018 - Assessment, testing and categorisation of damaged buildings incorporating concrete blocks containing certain deleterious materials:

https://www.nsai.ie/images/uploads/standards/I.s_465-2018_Web_Download.pdf

gov.ie/housing

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