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Residential construction industry comes under scrutiny

Complaints about new homes, condos spark province's decision

By MICHELLE MACLEOD

An increase in the number of building complaints by new-home and condominium owners since July has prompted the province to investigate the residential construction industry.

Service Nova Scotia Minister John Muir announced Thursday that a consultant will be hired to examine concerns, research building practices and hold public consultations to find a solution.

"I am aware of various concerns from those involved in the construction industry, as well as purchasers relating to the construction of new homes, including condos," Mr. Muir said in a news release. "I believe that these concerns warrant more investigation by government."

The biggest complaint is of poor workmanship, such as leaky pipes and water penetration from outdoors, said Donna Chislett of Service Nova Scotia.

But there could be unknown problems out there, she said.

Paul Pettipas, CEO of the Nova Scotia Home Builders Association said he supports the government's inquiry. But he says he has heard the greatest number of complaints from condominium owners.

"There have been some condominiums that have caused a lot of financial problems to some of the people in them," he said. "And I think the government has wrapped it all up to residential and housing."

Mr. Pettipas is unsure whether the association will be contacted during the consultation process, but he said the solution to the problem is simple: occupational licensing.

"Right now you don't have to be licensed to build houses in the province. Unless you have licensed people and some level of professionalism, you're going to have these problems.

The association trains its members and works with them, but not every contractor in Nova Scotia is a member.

"Basically all you need to build houses is a truck, some tools and to know how to build to the national building code," Mr. Pettipas said, but the national building code is a minimum standard.

Ms. Chislett said there is no process to protect buyers from substandard builders.

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