Glossary

Accident book
— this is required by law under the Social Security (Claims and Payments) Regulations 1979. Even minor accidents need to be recorded by the employer. For the purposes of RIDDOR, hard copy accident books or online records of incidents are equally acceptable.

Admixtures
— aim to change the properties of mortar. There are three types. Active ones react with a component of the mortar, e.g. a plasticiser. A surface active one affects the reaction with either the air, water or a solid, e.g. an accelerator. A passive one, which has no impact on the mortar, only changes its colour.

Aerated blocks
— these are lightweight, concrete blocks.

Agenda
— a brief list of topics to be discussed at a meeting, outlining any decisions that need to be made.

Assembly point
— an agreed place outside the building to go to if there is an emergency.

Biodegradable
— the material will more easily break down when it is no longer needed. This breaking down process is done by micro-organisms.

Biodiversity
— wherever there is construction there is a danger that the wildlife and plants could be disturbed or destroyed. Protecting biodiversity ensures that at risk species are conserved.

Carbon footprint
— this is the amount of carbon dioxide produced by a project. This not only includes burning carbon-based fuels such as petrol, gas, oil or coal, but includes the carbon that is generated in the production of materials and equipment.

Competent
— to be competent an organisation or individual must have:
  • sufficient knowledge of the tasks to be undertaken and the risks involved
  • the experience and ability to carry out their duties in relation to the project, to recognise their limitations and take appropriate action to prevent harm to those carrying out construction work, or those affected by the work.

Computer-aided design software
— this is also known as CAD or computer-aided drafting. This software allows the user to create a technical drawing.

Contamination
— this is when the water has been polluted by some harmful substance or chemical.

COSHH
— the Control of Substances Hazardous to Health Regulations are concerned with controlling exposure to hazardous materials.

Covering letter
— this is a very brief letter, often just one paragraph long, which states the purpose of the communication and lists any other documents that have been included.

Damp-proof barriers
— consists of a layer of damp resistant material, designed to protect the building against damp.

Dermatitis
— this is an inflammation of the skin. The skin will become red and sore, particularly if you scratch the area. A GP should be consulted.

Dry bonding
— laying bricks without applying a bed or cross joint in order to establish the bond and size of cross joints required for a given dimension.

English bond
— a one brick thick wall, laid to quarter lap, where the courses are alternate stretchers and headers.

Footprint
— this is the area covered by the structure at ground level.

Formwork
— this can also be known as shuttering. It is a temporary structure that supports and shapes wet concrete until it cures and is able to be self-supporting.

Gauge
— this means making sure that the blockwork is at the correct course height.

Geothermal
— relating to the internal heat energy of the earth.
Ground work
– this is preparation work, such as clearing vegetation from the site, installing drainage and foundations. These are activities that must be undertaken before the rest of the construction can take place.

HASAWA
– the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act outlines your and your employer’s health and safety responsibilities.

Hazard
– a potential source of harm, injury or ill-health.

Head
– this is the upper part of the frame.

Heat sink
– this is a heat exchanger that transfers heat from one source into a fluid, such as in refrigeration, air-conditioning or the radiator in a car.

Horizontal
– this allows you to set out the work from a drawing

Horizontal level
– this allows you to set out the work on the ground from a drawing

HSE
– The Health and Safety Executive, which ensures that health and safety laws are followed.

HVAC
– this is an abbreviation for Heating, Ventilation and Air-conditioning. This has been a service provided to many industrial buildings for a number of years, but it is now becoming more common in domestic dwellings, particularly new developments.

Improvement notice
– this is issued by the HSE if a health or safety issue is found and gives the employer a time limit to make changes to improve health and safety.

Infrastructure
– these are basic facilities, such as a power supply, a road network and a communication link.

Invert levels
– this is the lowest part of any pipe, trench or tunnel that will carry liquids.

Landfill
– 170 million tons of waste from homes and businesses are generated in England and Wales each year. Much of this has to be taken to a site to be buried.

Leptospirosis
– this is also known as Weil’s disease. It is spread by touching soil or water contaminated with the urine of wild animals infected with the leptospira bacteria. Symptoms are usually flu-like but in extreme cases it can cause organ failure.

Major injury
– any fractures, amputations, dislocations, loss of sight or other severe injury.

Mark-up
– a builder or building business, just like any other business, needs to make a profit. Mark-up is the difference between the total cost of the job and the price that the customer is asked to pay for the work.

Near miss
– any incident, accident or emergency that did not result in an injury but could have done so.

Organic
– this is a natural substance, usually extracted from plants.

Over 7-day injury
– an injury that has kept someone off work for more than seven days.

Oversite concrete
– this is a layer of concrete, usually installed below a slab or other floor finish.

PAT
– Portable Appliance Testing – regular testing is a health and safety requirement under the Electricity at Work Regulations (1989).

Perpendicular
– this means at right angles or 90°. In regard to roofing, this part of the roof is at right angles to the top of the building and the roof looks like a right-angled triangle.

PPE
– personal protective equipment can include gloves, goggles and hard hats.

Prohibition notice
– this is issued by the HSE if a health or safety issue involving the risk of serious personal injury is found and stops all work until the improvements to health and safety have been made.

Reveals
– these are the sides of windows and door openings.
Reverse bond
– this is when the direction of one of the blocks has been changed in order to keep up the sequence of the bond and improve its appearance. It avoids having to cut bricks in the centre of a wall.

Risk
– the likelihood that a person may be harmed if they are exposed to a hazard.

Service provider
– these are companies or organisations that provide utilities, such as gas, water, communications or electricity.

Shear failure
– when the load from the superstructure of the building bears down on the foundation. Underneath the foundation the soil will settle and there could be a failure of the soil to support the foundation. This will cause it to crack and part of the building will sink with it.

Sill
– this is the lower part of the frame.

Sub-contractor
– an individual or group of workers who are directly employed by the contractor.

Tanking
– this is the process that involves waterproofing horizontally and vertically. It is common to tank basements where waterproofing is essential to protect the dwelling.

VAT
– Value Added Tax is charged on most goods and services. It is charged by businesses or individuals that have raised invoices in excess of £73,000 per year and is currently 20 per cent of the bill.

Vertical
– this is known as levelling and allows you to find the differences in elevation.

Vertical level
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