

VANCOUVER CONSTRUCTION NETWORK

Materials & Products

Questions about building materials, products,
brands, and selection

8 Expert Answers from Construction Brain

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What type of drywall should I use in a high-moisture bathroom in the Lower Mainland?

For high-moisture bathrooms in the Lower Mainland, you should use moisture-resistant drywall (often called "green board") or cement board, depending on the specific application and your budget.

In Vancouver's wet climate, bathroom moisture management is critical year-round. **Moisture-resistant drywall** is your standard choice for most bathroom walls and ceilings. This drywall has a water-resistant core and green paper facing that can handle typical bathroom humidity better than regular drywall. It's suitable for areas that don't receive direct water contact, like walls behind toilets, vanities, and general bathroom areas.

For **shower and tub surrounds** where direct water contact occurs, you'll want to step up to **cement board (like HardieBacker or Durock) or fiber cement board**. These products are completely waterproof and provide the ideal substrate for tile installation. They won't deteriorate if water gets behind your tile, which is especially important in Vancouver's high-humidity environment. The BC Building Code requires proper waterproofing in shower areas, and cement board is the gold standard for meeting these requirements.

Vancouver-specific considerations make moisture resistance even more important here. Our 1200mm+ annual rainfall and high humidity levels mean bathrooms stay damp longer than in drier climates. Proper ventilation is mandatory under the BCBC 2024 — you'll need an exhaust fan rated for your bathroom size (typically 50+ CFM for standard bathrooms) that vents directly outside, not into the attic. Many older Vancouver homes, especially Vancouver Specials and character homes, have inadequate bathroom ventilation that needs upgrading.

Professional installation is recommended for cement board applications, especially around shower valves and corners where proper sealing is critical. A licensed contractor will ensure proper vapor barriers, appropriate fastening, and code-compliant installation. For simple moisture-resistant drywall replacement, experienced DIYers can handle this, but any electrical work (like fan installation) requires a licensed electrician and Technical Safety BC inspection.

Next steps: Measure your bathroom areas, determine which zones need moisture-resistant vs. cement board treatment, and get quotes from contractors if you're doing a full renovation. Budget roughly \$2-4 per square foot for moisture-resistant drywall installation, or \$4-8 per square foot for cement board in shower areas. Remember that proper waterproofing behind your finish materials is just as important as choosing the right substrate.

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Q2

Should I choose granite or quartz countertops for my Vancouver kitchen?

Quartz countertops are generally the better choice for Vancouver kitchens due to their superior moisture resistance and lower maintenance requirements in our rainy climate. However, both materials have distinct advantages depending on your priorities and budget.

Quartz offers significant practical benefits for Metro Vancouver homes. Since it's engineered and non-porous, quartz doesn't require sealing and handles our high humidity levels exceptionally well. This is particularly important in Vancouver's climate where moisture management is crucial. Quartz provides consistent patterns and colors, resists stains from coffee and wine, and requires minimal maintenance beyond regular cleaning. The material performs excellently in our temperature fluctuations and won't crack from thermal shock like some natural stones might.

Granite brings natural beauty and value but requires more consideration in our local climate. Each slab is unique with natural veining and patterns that many homeowners love. Granite typically costs less upfront than premium quartz, and it handles heat extremely well - you can place hot pots directly on the surface. However, granite requires annual sealing to prevent moisture absorption and staining, which is especially important given Vancouver's humidity levels. The natural stone can also be more prone to chipping and requires more careful maintenance.

Cost considerations for Metro Vancouver show quartz ranging from \$80-150 per square foot installed, while granite typically runs \$70-120 per square foot. These prices reflect Vancouver's higher construction costs - roughly 15-25% above national averages. Factor in that granite's ongoing sealing costs (\$200-400 annually) can add up over time, while quartz remains maintenance-free.

For most Vancouver homeowners, quartz is the practical winner, especially in busy family kitchens or if you prefer low-maintenance surfaces. Choose granite if you love natural stone's unique character and don't mind the extra care required. Both materials work well with Vancouver's popular design trends toward clean, contemporary

kitchens.

Your next step is to visit local stone yards in Burnaby, Richmond, or Surrey to see slabs in person. Get quotes from at least three fabricators, and ensure they're experienced with Vancouver's building requirements and have WorkSafeBC coverage for the installation.

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Q3

Should I use spray foam or batt insulation in my Vancouver crawl space?

For Vancouver crawl spaces, batt insulation is typically the better choice due to our wet climate and the need for moisture management. Spray foam can trap moisture in wood framing, leading to rot and mold issues that are particularly problematic in our rainy Lower Mainland environment.

Batt insulation (fiberglass or mineral wool) allows the crawl space to "breathe" and lets any moisture that does penetrate dry out naturally. This is crucial in Vancouver where we receive over 1200mm of annual rainfall. Install R-20 to R-24 batts between floor joists with the vapor barrier facing up toward the heated space. Ensure proper ventilation with foundation vents that remain open year-round — despite what you might read online about closing them in winter, BC's mild climate and high humidity make continuous ventilation essential.

Spray foam creates an airtight seal that can be problematic if any moisture gets into the wall or floor assembly. While it provides excellent insulation value and air sealing, it can trap water vapor against wood framing members, potentially causing structural damage over time. If you do choose spray foam, it must be applied by certified professionals and requires careful moisture management strategies.

Vancouver-specific considerations include our freeze-thaw cycles and the fact that many homes built before 1980 lack proper vapor barriers. The BC Building Code 2024 requires R-20 minimum for crawl space insulation, but

R-24 is recommended for better energy performance under the BC Energy Step Code. Most Vancouver crawl spaces also need attention to drainage, foundation waterproofing, and proper grading to direct water away from the foundation.

Professional guidance is recommended for crawl space insulation, especially if you're dealing with moisture issues, inadequate ventilation, or structural concerns. A building envelope specialist can assess your specific situation and recommend the best approach. Never attempt to seal or insulate a crawl space that has active moisture problems — address drainage and waterproofing first.

Next steps: Have a qualified insulation contractor assess your crawl space for moisture issues, ventilation adequacy, and current insulation condition. Budget \$3-6 per square foot for professional batt installation, or \$8-12 per square foot for spray foam if that's determined to be appropriate for your specific situation.

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What roofing material lasts the longest in Vancouver's wet weather?

Metal roofing is the longest-lasting option for Vancouver's wet climate, with quality steel or aluminum systems lasting 40-70+ years compared to 15-25 years for asphalt shingles.

Vancouver's 1200mm+ annual rainfall and frequent freeze-thaw cycles during winter make durability a critical factor in roofing decisions. Metal roofing excels in these conditions because it sheds water immediately, resists moss and algae growth, and handles thermal expansion without cracking. Standing seam metal systems are particularly effective, as they have fewer penetrations and create a continuous barrier against moisture infiltration.

Clay and concrete tiles also perform exceptionally well in wet climates, lasting 50-100+ years when properly installed. However, they require structural reinforcement due to their weight (8-12 lbs per square foot vs 1-2 lbs for metal), which adds \$3,000-\$8,000 to most Vancouver projects. The bigger concern is seismic performance — Vancouver's high seismic zone means heavy tile roofs need engineered attachment systems to meet **BCBC 2024** requirements.

Slate roofing offers the ultimate longevity at 75-150+ years, but comes with a premium price tag of \$15-25 per square foot installed. Like tile, it requires structural upgrades and careful installation to handle seismic loads. Welsh slate performs better than some domestic options in Vancouver's wet-dry cycles.

For Vancouver's climate specifically, avoid wood shingles and shakes despite their traditional appeal. The constant moisture promotes rot, moss growth, and insect infestation. Many Vancouver municipalities now restrict cedar roofing due to fire risk, and insurance companies often charge higher premiums or exclude coverage entirely.

Asphalt shingles remain the most common choice due to lower upfront costs (\$8,000-\$15,000 for an average Vancouver home vs \$18,000-\$35,000 for metal). However, Vancouver's wet conditions accelerate granule loss and algae growth, reducing their 20-year rated life to 15-18 years in practice. Architectural shingles with algae-resistant granules perform better than basic 3-tab versions.

The key to longevity in any Vancouver roofing system is proper installation of the rain screen assembly. This includes ice and water shield, proper ventilation, and ensuring the roof can handle Vancouver's occasional snow loads (typically 2.4 kPa ground snow load). All roofing work requires building permits in Metro Vancouver municipalities, and contractors should be familiar with BCBC 2024 requirements for wind and seismic resistance.

Professional installation is non-negotiable for longevity — improper flashing around chimneys, skylights, and valleys causes 90% of Vancouver roof leaks. The investment in quality materials and installation pays off significantly in Vancouver's challenging climate.

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Q5

What is the best siding material for Vancouver's rainy climate?

Fiber cement siding is the top choice for Vancouver's wet climate, offering superior moisture resistance, durability, and low maintenance while handling our 1200mm+ annual rainfall exceptionally well.

Fiber cement (brands like Hardie Board) leads the pack because it's engineered specifically for wet climates. It won't rot, warp, or attract insects like wood, and it handles Vancouver's freeze-thaw cycles without cracking. The material breathes naturally, preventing moisture buildup behind the siding, and typically comes with 30-50 year warranties. Installation costs run \$8-15 per square foot including labor, making it a solid mid-range investment that pays off long-term.

Vinyl siding offers excellent value at \$6-12 per square foot and performs well in our rainy conditions. Modern vinyl won't fade as quickly as older versions, requires virtually no maintenance, and handles moisture beautifully. However, it can become brittle in extreme cold and may not suit Vancouver's character neighborhoods where design guidelines favor more premium materials.

Engineered wood siding (like LP SmartSide) provides the natural wood look many Vancouver homeowners want while offering better moisture resistance than traditional cedar. It's treated with zinc borate for pest and moisture protection, costs \$7-13 per square foot, and works particularly well on Vancouver Specials and newer construction where you want wood aesthetics without the maintenance headaches.

Vancouver-Specific Considerations

Our coastal climate demands proper rain screen installation behind any siding material - this isn't optional in BC. The rain screen creates an air gap that allows moisture to drain and dry, preventing the building envelope problems

that plagued some 1990s Vancouver condos. **BCBC 2024** requires rain screen assemblies for most wall systems, and any reputable contractor will install this as standard practice.

Cedar siding remains popular for character homes in Kitsilano and Mount Pleasant, but requires significant maintenance in our wet climate. Budget for re-staining every 3-4 years (\$3,000-8,000 for an average home) and expect some boards to need replacement every 10-15 years. If you choose cedar, ensure proper installation with adequate ventilation and drainage.

Professional installation is crucial regardless of material choice. Improper flashing, inadequate drainage, or poor rain screen installation can lead to expensive building envelope problems. **Technical Safety BC** doesn't regulate siding installation, but **WorkSafeBC** coverage is mandatory for all contractors, and you'll want someone experienced with Vancouver's specific moisture management requirements.

For heritage-designated properties or character homes, check with the city's heritage department before choosing materials - some neighborhoods have design guidelines that may influence your options. Browse verified siding contractors in our Vancouver directory who understand local climate requirements and permit processes.

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Q6

Is engineered hardwood better than solid hardwood for Vancouver homes?

For Vancouver homes, engineered hardwood is generally the better choice due to our high humidity and moisture levels, though both options work well when properly installed.

Engineered hardwood's multi-layer construction makes it significantly more stable in Vancouver's wet climate. The cross-grain layers resist expansion and contraction that can cause solid hardwood to cup, crown, or gap during our rainy season (October through March). This stability is particularly important in Vancouver homes where humidity

can swing from 30% in winter (with heating) to 70%+ during our wet months.

Moisture Performance is where engineered really shines in Metro Vancouver. While solid hardwood can only be installed over dry subfloors and requires careful moisture barriers, engineered can handle slightly higher moisture levels. This makes it suitable for basement installations (common in Vancouver Specials and older homes), over concrete slabs, and in areas where minor moisture fluctuations are expected. However, neither should be installed in truly wet areas like bathrooms or unfinished basements.

Installation versatility gives engineered another advantage in Vancouver's housing stock. It can be glued, nailed, or floated, making it ideal for concrete subfloors common in condos and newer construction. Solid hardwood requires nailing to wood subfloors, which limits options in many Metro Vancouver homes. For strata properties, the floating installation of engineered can also provide better sound dampening between units.

Cost considerations in the Vancouver market show engineered typically running \$8-15 per square foot installed, while solid hardwood ranges \$12-25+ per square foot. Both prices reflect Vancouver's premium construction costs, roughly 20% above national averages. The installation savings with engineered can be substantial, especially in condos where concrete prep for solid hardwood gets expensive.

Longevity and refinishing is where solid hardwood traditionally wins. Quality solid hardwood can be sanded and refinished 6-8 times over decades, while engineered typically allows 1-3 refinishing cycles depending on the wear layer thickness. However, modern engineered floors with 4-6mm wear layers can last 20-30 years in residential settings, making this less of a concern for most Vancouver homeowners.

For Vancouver's character homes (Craftsman bungalows, heritage properties), solid hardwood maintains authenticity and may be required for heritage designations. For condos, newer homes, and practical renovations, engineered hardwood offers superior performance in our coastal climate while delivering the same visual appeal at a lower cost.

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What is a reasonable price for hardwood flooring installation in Coquitlam?

Hardwood flooring installation in Coquitlam typically ranges from \$8-15 per square foot for materials and labor combined, with most homeowners paying \$10-12 per square foot for quality engineered hardwood with professional installation.

The total cost depends heavily on your material choice and project specifics. Engineered hardwood (the most popular choice in Metro Vancouver) runs \$4-8 per square foot for materials, while solid hardwood ranges \$6-12 per square foot. Professional installation adds another \$4-7 per square foot, depending on the complexity of your layout, subfloor condition, and any prep work needed.

For a typical 1,000 square foot main floor in Coquitlam, you're looking at \$10,000-15,000 total for a quality job with engineered hardwood. This includes materials, professional installation, baseboards, transitions, and basic subfloor prep. Higher-end solid hardwood or exotic species can push costs to \$15,000-20,000 for the same area.

Factors that affect pricing in Coquitlam specifically include the age and condition of your home's subfloor, access for material delivery (especially in hillside areas), and whether you need moisture barriers for basement installations. Many Coquitlam homes built in the 1970s-80s may need additional subfloor leveling, adding \$2-4 per square foot. If you're in a strata property, factor in potential elevator booking fees and noise restrictions that could extend the timeline.

What's typically included: Professional installation, basic underlayment, quarter-round or shoe molding, and cleanup. **What costs extra:** Subfloor repairs, moisture barriers, custom transitions, removal of existing flooring (add \$2-3 per square foot), and premium finishes or wide-plank options.

Professional installation is strongly recommended for hardwood flooring. Proper acclimation, moisture testing, and installation techniques are crucial in our wet climate. A poorly installed floor can cup, gap, or fail prematurely. Licensed flooring contractors carry **WorkSafeBC** coverage and typically warranty their installation work for 1-2 years.

Next steps: Get quotes from at least three licensed flooring contractors, ensuring they include material specifications, prep work, and timeline. Visit showrooms to see samples in different lighting, and ask about moisture barriers if installing over concrete or in below-grade areas. The City of Coquitlam doesn't require permits for flooring replacement, but strata properties need council approval before starting work.

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Q8

Should I choose vinyl or fiber cement siding in the Lower Mainland?

For the Lower Mainland's wet climate, fiber cement siding is generally the superior long-term choice over vinyl, offering better durability against moisture, wind, and temperature fluctuations that are common in Metro Vancouver.

Fiber Cement Advantages in Vancouver's Climate

Fiber cement siding excels in the Lower Mainland's challenging conditions. With over 1,200mm of annual rainfall and frequent temperature swings between freezing and mild, fiber cement's dimensional stability prevents the expansion and contraction issues that plague vinyl in our climate. It won't warp, crack, or fade like vinyl can after years of exposure to Vancouver's UV rays during summer months and constant moisture during our long rainy season from October through March.

The material also performs exceptionally well in our seismic zone. Unlike vinyl, fiber cement maintains structural integrity during ground movement and won't crack at connection points. This is particularly important given the updated seismic requirements in **BCBC 2024** that took effect March 10, 2025.

Cost Considerations for Metro Vancouver

Expect to pay \$8-12 per square foot installed for quality vinyl siding versus \$12-18 per square foot for fiber cement in the Vancouver market. While fiber cement costs 30-50% more upfront, it typically lasts 30-50 years compared to vinyl's 15-25 year lifespan in our climate. Factor in Vancouver's high labor costs (among Canada's highest) and the long-term value becomes clear.

Vinyl's Limited Advantages

Vinyl does offer lower initial costs and easier installation, which can matter for budget-conscious renovations. It's also available in more color options, though these tend to fade over time in our climate. For investment properties or short-term ownership, vinyl might make financial sense.

Professional Installation Requirements

Both materials require proper installation with rain screen assemblies - non-negotiable in Vancouver's wet climate. Your contractor must understand moisture management, proper flashing details, and ventilation requirements. Most municipalities in Metro Vancouver require building permits for full siding replacement, with inspections to ensure compliance with BCBC 2024 requirements.

Get quotes from multiple siding contractors who specialize in fiber cement installation and understand Vancouver's climate challenges.

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