



Play it safe with marquees and tents

Nothing beats an outdoor event on a perfect day, but we can't always rely on the weather in Aotearoa New Zealand. For special occasions, it pays to have a back-up plan such as erecting a marquee or tent.

Whether it's a private function such as a small backyard wedding, a large community sports event in a local park or a public market in a car park, the safety of people and the temporary structure must always be addressed.

Often doesn't need a building consent

The Building Act 2004 Schedule 1 Part 1 *Exempted building work* clause 5 covers tents, marquees and similar lightweight structures.

This says that a building consent is not required for building work for tents, marquees and similar lightweight structures (for example, a stall, booth or compartment used at fairs, exhibitions or markets) provided it is:

- no more than 100 m² in floor area
- not left in place for more than 1 month.

This exemption applies whether the structure is used for private or public events or functions.

Secure the structure properly

Marquees and temporary structures can collapse if they have insufficient support to cope with uplift from wind gusts or drainage for heavy rainfall.

Regardless of whether a building consent is required or not, the health and safety risks – danger to life – need to be addressed.



A marquee at a wedding reception – later in the day, a deluge caused the supports to snap but fortunately no one was hurt.

Warning tale

There was a lucky escape at one recent outdoor wedding. Although the day started fine, water ponded unnoticed on the roof during heavy rain later in the day. A litre of water weighs 1 kg so 1,000 litres of water weighs 1,000 kg (1 tonne) and will place a significant load on a structure. If you do the maths, that is only a roof area of 20 m² multiplied by a water depth of 50 mm.

In this case, all the connections, fixings points and anchors to the ground remained in place, but the weight of the water caused the timber posts supporting the roof to snap. Fortunately, the failure happened after the event and no one was injured, but it could have been quite different. Lessons from this are to always:

- tension the tarpaulin to avoid water ponding

- regularly check the structure while it is up and assess it for damage, especially when the weather changes
- consider quick ways to disassemble the lightweight structure if issues arise.

Get the planning right

When planning what, where and how to erect a temporary structure, consider these things:

- Is there sufficient structural support for the expected conditions such as rainfall intensity, wind conditions and gusts from prevailing winds? Will nails be sufficient or should connections be bolted, nail plated or screwed?
- Are the ground conditions suitable for tie-downs and anchor points? Think about using larger commercial-sized tent pegs and heavy-duty tie-downs with anchors to either an existing building or mature trees.
- Is there suitable rainwater management to drain water from the roof and stop water ponding and overloading the structure? Start by tensioning your structure to avoid water ponding on the roof.
- Have you erected a structure of this nature before, considered health and safety aspects and the likelihood of failure, collapse or injury. Consider showing an engineer of sketch plan of your tent or marquee for advice on its supporting structure.

No building consent needed

No building consent is required for these examples where the tent or marquee will be removed within 1 month and the floor area is under 100 m²:

- A restaurant owner puts up a marquee with a floor area of 80 m² in the restaurant garden during a sports event. The marquee is dismantled the next day.
- Tents and marquees are erected on a sports ground for a 3-day wine and food festival.

Each has a floor area under 100 m².

- A tent is erected for displaying farm animals at an agricultural show. The tent has a floor area of 90 m².
- A property owner erects a tent for a birthday function in their backyard. It has a floor area of 90 m² and will only be erected for 4 days over a long weekend.
- A 75 m² stall is put up at a trade show for a week.
- A temporary ticket booth is installed in a car park for a week until a more permanent solution can be found. The floor area of the booth is 6 m².

Building consent needed

A building consent is required for the following where the tent or marquee will be up for more than 1 month or the floor area exceeds 100 m²:

- A marquee with a floor area of 125 m² is erected for one night for a function.
- A vineyard owner erects a marquee with a floor area of 75 m² for wine tasting over the 3 months of summer.
- Two 75 m² marquees are erected and then joined together by an enclosed awning.
- A café owner proposes to erect a permanent 90 m² marquee for patrons to use.

Pays to check with your council

Ask your local council for guidance on what is required for temporary structures over 100 m². Sometimes, a resource consent may also be required. In other cases, your structure may not be considered lightweight.

Generally, the information required by a council to obtain a building consent will include:

- application forms and details of the people applying for the consent
- landowner information such as a certificate of title

- site and location plans
- specifications of proposed materials and structure
- elevations and dimensions of proposed structure(s)
- engineer's report and design calculations with producer statements (PS1)
- a fire report and specifications typically indicating occupant numbers, escape routes, exit signage, product flammability, evacuation procedures and fire alarm warning devices.
- a certificate of public use could be applied for if you want the public to access your part of your site while building work is still in place, however Council will have requirements to be met around health, safety and fire.

Larger public events may also require information for health and safety management plans such as:

- traffic management
- fencing of proposed site
- facilities for toilets
- hygiene certificates for food stalls and liquor licence if selling liquor.

Health and Safety at Work Act

Organisers or employees should also check if the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015 applies and what responsibilities are required for the person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU).

A PCBU must ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that there aren't risks to the health and safety of people when entering, exiting or at a workplace. Section 22 of the Act sets out what 'reasonably practicable' means for a PCBU.

FOR MORE MBIE has more details on projects that are exempt from building consents – see www.building.govt.nz/projects-and-consents and follow the prompts. ◀