Building better together

Product Substitution: What you need to know

In a price-driven market, builders may look for lower-cost alternatives to specified engineered timber products. While substitution can appear straightforward, it can introduce compliance and performance risks which may lead to delays, rework, or additional costs later in the project. Substitution can be legitimate when managed properly through the consent process — the key is knowing when a design is product-specific.

What is product substitution?

Product substitution is when a specified building product is swapped for a different one during quoting, ordering or construction.

Why product substitution needs care

Engineered timber products are often:

- Specified by the architect or engineer to achieve structural and aesthetic goals
- Approved as part of the building consent
- Referenced in supporting documentation (e.g.
- Producer Statements (PS1s) specific to the product used).

Substituting them may:

- Trigger the need for re-design or engineering
- Impact a building's structural performance
- Not align with the design intent or look an architect or client wanted
- Lead to delays, re-work, and add extra costs for the builder and client.

Even if two products seem similar, the substitute may not match the design assumptions used in engineering or PS1 documents.

Project & commercial risk

Product substitution may increase risk exposure for builders, including:

- Compliance issues
- Warranty or remediation requirements within the 10-year liability period under the Building Act. (Structural elements must also meet the Building Code's 50-year durability requirement.)

Merchants may also face reputational and commercial risk if supplied products do not meet consented specifications or performance expectations.

IMPORTANT:

Substituting a product on consented building work requires Building Consent Authority (BCA) approval — either as a minor variation or a formal amendment to the building consent, depending on the nature of the change (Building (Minor Variations) Regulations, updated 2024).

If a product is substituted without appropriate approval, you may encounter a problem when the BCA goes to issue the code compliance certificate (CCC), as the building work will not match what is on the consent.

For further guidance, refer to:
MBIE - Product Substitution guidance and Minor Variations Guidance (2024)

Why Prolam products get specified

- Proven and tested structural performance
- Documented compliance for consent and signoff — Prolam span tables and the Prolam Specifier tool make it easy, with associated PS1
- Easier to install - cutting build timeframes and costs
- Backed by Environmental Product Declarations
- Wide range of fixing details available
- NZ made quality — manufactured in NZ from NZ-grown timber

Quick Guide

What's in the spec? GL or PL?

GL (standard glulam)
Standard properties of glulam have been used for specification.
→ **Prolam can be specified/supplied**

PL (Prolam glulam)
Prolam-specific design tools and properties have been used.
→ **Prolam must be supplied as specified**
If a different product is supplied, the PS1 no longer covers the work as built, and the Prolam warranty does not apply.

EXAMPLE: Prolam PL8 & PL12 H5 Posts

Structural H5 posts are a good example of where substitution carries high risk.

Prolam H5 Posts	Other Posts
CodeMark certified for in-ground use	No other CodeMark-certified H5 posts available at the time of publication
NZ code compliant	Compliance pathway must be independently demonstrated
MCA treated to NZ structural standards	Treatment type may vary
Clear installation guides	Installation guidance varies by supplier
Specification peace-of-mind: Using Prolam Specifier and calculations	Bracing values, fixings, and load ratings may not match — possible need for different brackets, extra fixings, or specific engineering sign-off (cost and time the builder wears)

CodeMark certification means Prolam H5 posts are pre-approved for in-ground use — no extra engineering sign-off needed for the BCA to process consent. A non-CodeMark substitute isn't necessarily non-compliant, but it does mean sourcing specific engineering design before the BCA will sign off, adding time to the build.

Bottom line:

! There is typically no direct like-for-like substitute for Prolam H5 posts without proper engineering review and approval. Even where a substitute post looks similar on paper, differences in bracing, fixings, or certification pathway can mean extra engineering, extra cost, and a longer wait for sign-off — without proper review up front.

ASK PROLAM

If you or your customers are considering substituting a Prolam product, talk to us first:

A quick check early can help avoid problems later.

03 526 7436 **info@prolamnz.com** **prolamnz.com**

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