

WHAT IS A FLOOR DRAIN — AND WHY IS IT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE BATHROOM?

What is a floor drain, and why is it essential in modular bathrooms and laundries? Discover its role, compliance standards in NSW, and how it protects your investment in modular builds

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What Is a Floor Drain — and Why Is It in the Middle of the Bathroom?

If you've ever looked down in the middle of a bathroom or laundry floor and noticed a round, grated opening that doesn't seem to be connected to a fixture, you've seen a floor drain — technically called a floor waste.

It's a quiet little feature, but it plays a big role in keeping wet areas safe, compliant, and functional.

For anyone working with modular buildings in New South Wales — whether you're a property developer, facility manager, rural site operator or someone managing modular housing for workforce or accommodation purposes — understanding the purpose and standards around floor wastes can help you make informed decisions and avoid common pitfalls.

So, What Is a Floor Waste?

A floor waste is a grated opening in the floor of a wet area, usually found in bathrooms, laundries, or sometimes commercial kitchens. Unlike drains in showers, toilets or vanities, which are connected directly to fixtures, floor wastes are positioned in the floor itself, typically in the centre or the lowest point of the room.

Their job is simple but important: to act as an overflow outlet.

If a washing machine hose pops off, if a sink or tub overflows, or if a tap is left running, the floor waste is there to give the excess water somewhere to go — and help prevent flooding damage to the rest of the building.

In short: it's not there for everyday water flow — it's there as a backup.

Why Do Floor Wastes Matter?

When you're delivering modular buildings across NSW — whether for essential worker housing, agricultural accommodation, or commercial use — compliance and risk reduction are paramount.

Floor wastes aren't optional. In many wet areas, they're a regulatory requirement, as set out in the National Construction Code (NCC).

In NSW, these drains are part of what's called a sanitary drainage system — and they're governed by the NCC (Vol 2, Housing Provisions) and Australian Standard AS/NZS 3500.2:2021 (Sanitary plumbing and drainage).

These standards specify:

- Where floor wastes are required — usually in bathrooms, laundries, and rooms containing more than one sanitary fixture without a floor-level shower.
- The required gradient (or 'fall') of the floor — usually between 1:80 and 1:50 to ensure water flows towards the waste.
- Connection requirements — floor wastes must be connected to an approved drainage system with proper trap seals to prevent odours.



What Happens If You Skip It?

Skipping a floor waste (or installing it incorrectly) is more than just poor design — it can mean non-compliance, costly rework, or water damage down the track.

In modular buildings, where rooms are pre-fabricated and delivered to site, it's essential to get this detail right from the start.

A poorly placed or missing floor waste in a modular laundry or bathroom could mean:

- Internal flooding if a pipe fails or an appliance leaks
- Water damage to floors, walls, or adjoining rooms
- Non-compliance with NCC or AS/NZS standards
- Delays in certification or handover
- Tenant safety risks

Smart developers, operators and asset managers understand this. It's not just about ticking a box — it's about protecting the investment.

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Real-World Examples

- Mining accommodation: On FIFO (fly-in fly-out) sites, modular ensembles are common. Including floor wastes ensures any splashover or cleaning runoff drains away safely.
- Farm worker quarters: In rural NSW, laundries shared by multiple workers need robust drainage. Overflow from a sink or machine without a floor waste can cause damage quickly

- Facilities for essential services: In government or community housing, ensuring every bathroom or laundry includes a compliant floor waste reduces maintenance costs over the long term — and supports consistent service delivery.

The Modular Building Advantage

In modular construction, wet areas are typically manufactured offsite in controlled environments — making it easier to achieve the correct floor falls, sealing, and integration with the drainage system.

A well-executed floor waste in a modular unit is:

- Pre-tested for fall and waterproofing
- Correctly positioned for flow direction
- Factory-built to tight tolerances, reducing onsite issues

This is where working with experienced modular providers makes a difference. Our process keeps it simple, so you're sorted from start to finish.

In Summary

A floor waste might seem like a small detail, but it's one that protects your asset, your occupants, and your bottom line. It's a mandatory feature in many wet areas for good reason — and in modular buildings, getting it right from the start just makes sense.

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