Detecting coatings on single and double-glazed units

When assessing window film options with a property owner or glazier, it's not uncommon to encounter uncertainty about a window's composition. If you don't have a coating detection meter, there are practical ways to identify coatings and determine their placement on the glass.

Double-glazed units (DGUs)

Using a smartphone torch or laser

After the sticker has been removed, shine your phone's torch or a laser on the glass. You'll see four dot reflections from the layers of glass.

If one dot appears a different colour (usually purple), this indicates the presence of a Low-E coating. The differently coloured reflection identifies the coated surface, usually on the inside of the DGU.

If all reflections are identical, the glass lacks a Low-E coating.

Edge deletion clues

On a soft-coat inside a DGU, you might notice a purple line at the edge where the coating has been removed. However, the appearance may vary depending on the manufacturer.

Edge inspection

Examining the edge of the glass may also reveal subtle differences if a coating is present.

Single-glazed glass

Run your finger across the glass. On the coated side, the surface will feel slightly "sticky" or resistant compared to the smooth, uncoated side. Ensure your finger is clean for accurate results.

Investing in a Coating Detector

For consistent and accurate results, a coating detector – at around $100 – is a worthwhile investment. These devices quickly identify coatings by lighting up when a coating is detected, saving time and ensuring accuracy in your assessments.