

Construction Standards to Comply with AS3959:2018 (Construction of building in bushfire-prone areas) for Bushfire Attack Level (BAL) - 12.5 (Low)

This document has been prepared to assist in the preparation of plans and specifications in respect to BAL – 12.5, including the variations imposed by clause 7.5.2 of Planning for Bushfire Protection 2019 (NSW Variations under G5.2(a)(i) and 3.10.5.0(c)(i) of the NCC).

BAL—12.5 is primarily concerned with protection of your building from ember attack and radiant heat up to and including 12.5 kW/m².

To comply with the Building Code of Australia, your construction or complying development certificate plans must include details of the building construction relevant to the level of bushfire.

Those parts of this document that relate to your development must be included on the construction certificate plans or in the construction specification.

The construction requirements for the next lower BAL may be used for an elevation of a dwelling that is not exposed to the source of a bushfire. However, it shall not reduce to below BAL 12.5, and does not apply to the subfloor or roof.

An elevation is not exposed if the entire elevation is completely screened from the source of a bushfire by another part of the building.

Any element of construction or system that satisfies the test criteria of AS 1530.8.1 may be used in lieu of the applicable requirements below (see Clause 3.8 of the Standard).

SARKING

Sarking, where used for bushfire protection shall be:

- a. Non-combustible; or
- b. Breather-type sarking complying with AS/NZS4200.1 and with a flammability index of not more than 5 and sarked on the outside of the frame; or
- c. An insulation material conforming to the appropriate Australian Standard for that material.

SUBFLOOR SUPPORTS

This Standard does not provide construction requirements for subfloor supports where the subfloor space is enclosed with—

- 1) a wall that complies with the requirements for an external wall below; or
- 2) a mesh or perforated sheet with a maximum aperture of 2 mm, made of corrosion resistant steel, bronze or aluminium; or
- 3) a combination of Items (a) and (b) above.

Where the subfloor space is unenclosed, the support posts, columns, stumps, piers and poles shall be—

- (1) of non-combustible material; or
- (2) of bushfire-resisting timber (refer to the table at the end of this document); or
- (3) a combination of Items (i) and (ii) above.

NOTE: This requirement applies to the principal building only. See requirements below for verandas, decks, steps, ramps and landings.

FLOORS

1) Elevated floors

a) Enclosed subfloor space

The Standard does not provide construction requirements for elevated floors, including bearers, joists and flooring, where the subfloor space is enclosed with—

- i) a wall that complies with the standards for an external wall below; or
- ii) a mesh or perforated sheet with a maximum aperture of 2 mm, made of corrosion resistant steel, bronze or aluminium; or
- iii) a combination of Items (a) and (b) above.

b) Unenclosed subfloor space

Where the subfloor space is unenclosed, the bearers, joists and flooring, less than 400 mm above finished ground level, shall be one of the following:

i) materials that comply with the following:

(a) bearers and joists shall be—

- i) non-combustible; or
- ii) bushfire-resisting timber (refer to the table at the end of this document); or
- iii) a combination of Items (i) and (ii) above.

(b) Flooring shall be—

- i) non-combustible; or
- ii) bushfire-resisting timber (refer to the table at the end of this document); or
- iii) timber (other than bushfire-resisting timber), particleboard or plywood flooring where the underside is lined with sarking-type material or mineral wool insulation; or

d) a combination of any of Items (i), (ii) or (iii) above; or

ii) a system complying with AS 1530.8.1

This Standard does not provide construction requirements for elements of elevated floors, including bearers, joists and flooring, if the underside of the element is 400 mm or more above finished ground level.

EXTERNAL WALLS

1) Walls

The exposed components of an external wall that are less than 400 mm from the ground or less than 400 mm above decks, carport roofs, awnings and similar elements or fittings having an angle less than 18 degrees to the horizontal and extending more than 110 mm in width from the wall shall be:

(a) Non-combustible material such as cavity brick, masonry veneer walls with an outer leaf of clay, concrete, calcium silicate or natural stone, precast or in situ walls of concrete or aerated concrete or earth walling including mud brick; or

(b) Timber logs of a species with a density of 680 kg/m³ or greater at a 12 percent moisture content; of a minimum nominal overall thickness of 90 mm and a minimum thickness of 70 mm (see Clause 3.11 of Standard); and gauge planed; or

(c) Cladding that is fixed externally to a timber-framed or a steel-framed wall and is—

(i) Non-combustible material; or

(ii) Fibre-cement a minimum of 6 mm in thickness; or

(iii) Bushfire-resisting timber (refer to the table at the end of this document); or

(iv) A timber species as specified in Appendix E of the Standard; or

(v) a combination of any of Items (i), (ii), (iii) or (iv) above; or

(d) A combination of any of Items (a), (b) or (c) above.

2) Joints

All joints in the external surface material of walls shall be covered, sealed, overlapped, backed or butt-jointed to prevent gaps greater than 3 mm.

3) Vents and weepholes

Vents and weepholes in external walls shall be screened with a mesh with a maximum aperture of 2 mm, made of corrosion-resistant steel, bronze or aluminium, except where the vents and weepholes have an aperture less than 3 mm.

EXTERNAL WINDOWS and DOORS

1) Windows

Window assemblies shall comply with one of the following:

- (a) They shall be completely protected by a bushfire shutter that complies with Note 1 below; or
- (b) They shall be completely protected externally by screens that comply with Note 2; or
- (c) They shall comply with the following:
 - (i) For window assemblies less than 400 mm from the ground or less than 400 mm above decks, carport roofs, awnings and similar elements or fittings having an angle less than 18 degrees to the horizontal and extending more than 110 mm in width from the window frame, window frames and window joinery shall be made from:
 - (A) Bushfire-resisting timber (refer to the table at the end of this document); or
 - (B) A timber species as specified in Appendix E of the Standard; or
 - (C) Metal; or
 - (D) Metal-reinforced PVC-U. The reinforcing members shall be made from aluminium, stainless steel, or corrosion-resistant steel and the frame and sash shall satisfy the design load, performance and structural strength of the member.
 - (ii) Externally fitted hardware that supports the sash in its functions of opening and closing shall be metal.
 - (iii) Where glazing is less than 400 mm from the ground or less than 400 mm above decks, carport roofs, awnings and similar elements or fittings having an angle less than 18 degrees to the horizontal and extending more than 110 mm in width from the window frame, the glazing shall be Grade A safety glass minimum 4 mm thickness, or glass blocks with no restriction on glazing methods.
 - (iv) Where glazing is other than that specified in Item (iii) above, annealed glass may be used.
 - (v) The openable portions of windows shall be screened internally or externally with screens that comply with Note 2 below.

2) Screens

Screening of the openable portions of all windows is required in all BALs to prevent the entry of embers to the building when the window is open. Screening of the openable and fixed portions of some windows is required in some BALs to reduce the effects of radiant heat on some types of glass.

If the screening is required to reduce the effects of radiant heat on the glass, the screening has to be external so that the glass in the openable portion of the window will be 'protected' when it is shut.

If the screening is required only to prevent the entry of embers, the screening may be fitted externally or internally.

3) Doors—Side-hung external doors (including French doors, panel fold and bi-fold doors)

Side-hung external doors, including French doors, panel fold and bi-fold doors, shall comply with one of the following:

(a) Doors and door frames shall be protected by bushfire shutters that comply with Note 1; or

(b) Doors and door frames shall be protected externally by screens that comply with Note 2; or

(c) Doors and door frames shall comply with the following:

(i) Doors shall be—

(A) non-combustible; or

(B) a solid timber, laminated timber or reconstituted timber door, having a minimum thickness of 35 mm for the first 400 mm above the threshold; or

(C) a door, including a hollow core door, with a non-combustible kick plate on the outside for the first 400 mm above the threshold; or

(D) a door, including a hollow core door, protected externally by a screen that complies with Clause Note 2 below; or

(E) a fully framed glazed door, where the framing is made from materials specified for bushfire shutters (See Note 2 below), or from a timber species as specified at the end of this document.

(ii) Where doors incorporate glazing, the glazing shall comply with the glazing requirements for windows.

(iii) Doors shall be tight-fitting to the door frame and to an abutting door, if applicable.

(iv) Where any part of the door frame is less than 400 mm from the ground or less than 400 mm above decks, carport roofs, awnings and similar elements or fittings having an angle less than 18 degrees to the horizontal and extending more than 110 mm in width from the door, that part of the door frame shall be made from:

(A) Bushfire-resisting timber (refer to the table at the end of this document); or

(B) A timber species as specified in Appendix E of the Standard;
or
(C) Metal; or

(D) Metal-reinforced PVC-U. The reinforcing members shall be made from aluminium, stainless steel, or corrosion-resistant steel and the door assembly shall satisfy the design load, performance and structural strength of the member.

(v) Weather strips, draught excluders or draught seals shall be installed at the base of side-hung external doors.

(d) Sliding doors

Sliding doors shall comply with one of the following:

(a) They shall be completely protected by a bushfire shutter that complies with Note 1; or

(b) They shall be completely protected externally by screens that comply with Note 2; or

(c) They shall comply with the following:

(i) Any glazing incorporated in sliding doors shall be Grade A safety glass complying with AS 1288.

(ii) Both the door frame supporting the sliding door and the framing surrounding any glazing shall be made from:

(A) Bushfire-resisting timber (refer to the table at the end of this document); or

(B) A timber species as specified in Appendix E of the Standard; or

(C) Metal; or

(D) Metal-reinforced PVC-U. The reinforcing members shall be made from aluminium, stainless steel, or corrosion-resistant steel and the frame and the sash shall satisfy the design load, performance and structural strength of the member.

(iii) There is no requirement to screen the openable part of the sliding door. However, if screened, the screens shall comply with Note 2.

NOTE: The construction of manufactured sliding doors should prevent the entry of embers when the door is closed. There is no requirement to provide screens to the openable part of these doors as it is assumed that a sliding door will be closed if occupants are not present during a bushfire event. Screens of materials other than those specified may not resist ember attack.

(iv) Sliding doors shall be tight-fitting in the frames.

(e) Garage Doors

The following apply to vehicle access doors:

(a) The lower portion of a vehicle access door that is within 400 mm of the ground when the door is closed shall be made from—

(i) Non-combustible material; or

(ii) Bushfire-resisting timber (refer to the table at the end of this document); or

(iii) A timber species as specified in Appendix E of the Standard; or

(iv) Fibre cement sheet, a minimum of 6 mm in thickness; or

(v) A combination of any of Items (i), (ii), (iii) or (iv) above.

(b) Panel lift, tilt doors or side-hung doors shall be fitted with suitable weather strips, draught excluders, draught seals or guide tracks, as appropriate to the door type, with a maximum gap no greater than 3 mm.

(c) Roller doors shall have guide tracks with a maximum gap no greater than 3 mm and shall be fitted with a nylon brush that is in contact with the door.

(d) Vehicle access doors shall not include ventilation slots.

Note 1: Where fitted, bushfire shutters shall be made from

a) non-combustible material, or

b) a timber species as specified in Appendix E of the Standard, or

c) bushfire-resisting timber (refer to the table at the end of this document), or

d) a combination of any of Items (a), (b), or (c) above; and

(i) be fixed to the building and be non-removable;

(ii) when in the closed position, have no gap greater than 3 mm between the shutter and the wall, the sill or the head;

(iii) be readily manually operable from either inside or outside;

(iv) protect the entire window assembly or door assembly;

(v) where perforated, have—

(A) uniformly distributed perforations with a maximum aperture of 3 mm when the shutter is providing radiant heat protection or 2 mm when the shutter is also providing ember protection (such as where the openable portion of the window is not screened in accordance with the requirements of the respective BAL); and

(B) a perforated area no greater than 20% of the shutter. If bushfire shutters are fitted to all external doors then at least one of those shutters shall be operable from the inside to facilitate safe egress from the building.

Note 2: Where fitted, screens for windows and doors shall have a mesh or perforated sheet with a maximum aperture of 2 mm, made of corrosion-resistant steel, bronze or aluminium. Gaps between the perimeter of the screen assembly and the building element to which it is fitted shall not exceed 3 mm.

The frame supporting the mesh or perforated sheet shall be made from metal, bushfire-resisting timber (at the end of this document); or a timber species as specified in Appendix E of the Standard.

Note 3: Where double glazed units are used the above requirements apply to the external face of the window assembly only.

ROOFS (INCLUDING VERANDA AND ATTACHED CARPORT ROOFS, PENETRATIONS, EAVES, FASCIAS, GABLES, GUTTERS AND DOWNPIPES)

1. General

The following apply to all types of roofs and roofing systems:

- (a) roof tiles, roof sheets and roof-covering accessories are to be non-combustible.
- b) the roof/wall junction is to be sealed to prevent openings greater than 3 mm, either by the use of fascia and eaves linings or by sealing between the top of the wall and the underside of the roof and between the rafters at the line of the wall.
- (c) roof ventilation openings, such as gable and roof vents, are to be fitted with ember guards made of non-combustible material or a mesh or perforated sheet with a maximum aperture of 2 mm, made of corrosion-resistant steel, bronze or aluminium.

2. Tiled roofs.

Tiled roofs shall be fully sarked. The sarking shall—

- (a) be located on top of the roof framing, except that the roof battens may be fixed above the sarking;
- (b) cover the entire roof area including ridges and hips; and
- (c) extend into gutters and valleys.

3. Sheet roofs

Sheet roofs shall—

- (a) be fully sarked, except that foil-backed insulation blankets may be installed over the battens; or
- (b) have any gaps greater than 3 mm (such as under corrugations or ribs of sheet roofing and between roof components) sealed at the fascia or wall line and at valleys, hips and ridges by—
 - (i) a mesh or perforated sheet with a maximum aperture of 2 mm, made of corrosion-resistant steel, bronze or aluminium; or
 - (ii) mineral wool; or
 - (iii) other non-combustible material; or
 - (iv) a combination of any of Items (i), (ii) or (iii) above.

Note: Sarking is used as a secondary form of ember protection for the roof space to account for minor gaps that may develop in sheet roofing.

4. Verandah, carport and awning roofs

The following apply to veranda, carport and awning roofs:

- (a) A veranda, carport or awning roof forming part of the main roof space shall meet all the requirements for the main roof.
- (b) A veranda, carport or awning roof separated from the main roof space by an external wall shall have a non-combustible roof covering.

NOTE: There is no requirement to line the underside of a veranda, carport or awning roof that is separated from the main roof space.

5. Roof penetrations

The following apply to roof penetrations:

(a) Roof penetrations, including roof lights, roof ventilators, roof-mounted evaporative cooling units, aerials, vent pipes and supports for solar collectors, shall be adequately sealed at the roof to prevent gaps greater than 3 mm. The material used to seal the penetration shall be non-combustible.

(b) Openings in vented roof lights, roof ventilators or vent pipes shall be fitted with ember guards made from a mesh or perforated sheet with a maximum aperture of 2 mm, made of corrosion-resistant steel, bronze or aluminium.

This requirement does not apply to the exhaust flues of heating or cooking devices with closed combustion chambers. In the case of gas appliance flues, ember guards shall not be fitted.

NOTE: Gasfitters are required to provide a metal flue pipe above the roof and terminate with a certified gas flue cowl complying with AS 4566. Advice may be obtained from State gas technical regulators.

(c) All overhead glazing shall be Grade A safety glass complying with AS 1288.

(d) Glazed elements in roof lights and skylights may be of polymer provided a Grade A safety glass diffuser, complying with AS 1288, is installed under the glazing. Where glazing is an insulating glazing unit (IGU), Grade A toughened safety glass minimum 4 mm thickness, shall be used in the outer pane of the IGU.

(e) Flashing elements of tubular skylights may be of a fire-retardant material, provided the roof integrity is maintained by an under-flashing of a material having a flammability index no greater than 5.

(f) Evaporative cooling units shall be fitted with non-combustible butterfly closers as close as practicable to the roof level or the unit shall be fitted with non-combustible covers with a mesh or perforated sheet with a maximum aperture of 2 mm, made of corrosion-resistant steel, bronze or aluminium.

(g) Vent pipes made from PVC are permitted.

6. Eaves linings, fascias and gables

The following apply to eaves linings, fascias and gables:

- (a) Gables shall comply with the requirements for external walls above.
 - (b) Eaves penetrations shall be protected the same as for roof penetrations, as specified for roof penetrations.
 - (c) Eaves ventilation openings greater than 3 mm shall be fitted with ember guards made of non-combustible material or a mesh or perforated sheet with a maximum aperture of 2 mm, made of corrosion-resistant steel, bronze or aluminium.
- Joints in eaves linings, fascias and gables may be sealed with plastic joining strips or timber storm moulds.

NOTE: The Standard does not provide construction requirements for fascias, bargeboards and eaves linings.

7. Gutters and downpipes

The Standard does not provide material requirements for—

- (a) gutters, with the exception of box gutters; and
- (b) downpipes.

If installed, gutter and valley leaf guards shall be non-combustible. Box gutters shall be non-combustible and flashed at the junction with the roof with non-combustible material.

VERANDAHS, DECKS, STEPS, RAMPS AND LANDINGS

1) General

Decking may be spaced.

There is no requirement to enclose the subfloor spaces of verandas, decks, steps, ramps or landings.

2) Enclosed subfloor spaces of verandas, decks, steps, ramps and landings

a) Materials to enclose a subfloor space

The subfloor spaces of verandas, decks, steps, ramps and landings are considered to be 'enclosed' when —

- i) the material used to enclose the subfloor space complies with the standards for external walls above; and
- ii) all openings greater than 3 mm are screened with a mesh or perforated sheet with a maximum aperture of 2 mm, made of corrosion-resistant steel, bronze or aluminium.

b) Supports

The Standard does not provide construction requirements for support posts, columns, stumps, stringers, piers and poles.

c) Framing

The Standard does not provide construction requirements for the framing of verandas, decks, ramps or landings (i.e., bearers and joists).

d) Decking, stair treads and the trafficable surfaces of ramps and landings

Decking, stair treads and the trafficable surfaces of ramps and landings shall be—

- i) of non-combustible material; or
- ii) of bushfire-resisting timber (refer to the table at the end of this document); or
- iii) a combination of Items (i) and (ii) above.

3) Unenclosed subfloor spaces of verandas, decks, steps, ramps and landings

a) Supports

Support posts, columns, stumps, stringers, piers and poles shall be—

- i) of non-combustible material; or
- ii) of bushfire-resisting timber (refer to the table at the end of this document); or
- iii) a combination of Items (i) and (ii) above.

b) Framing

Framing of verandas, decks, ramps or landings (i.e., bearers and joists) shall be—

- i) of non-combustible material; or
- ii) of bushfire-resisting timber (refer to the table at the end of this document); or
- iii) a combination of Items (i) and (ii) above.

c) Decking, stair treads and the trafficable surfaces of ramps and landings

Decking, stair treads and the trafficable surfaces of ramps and landings shall be—

- i) of non-combustible material; or
- ii) of bushfire-resisting timber (refer to the table at the end of this document); or
- iii) a combination of Items (i) and (ii) above.

4) Balustrades, handrails or other barriers

Those parts of the handrails and balustrades less than 125 mm from any glazing or any combustible wall shall be—

- i) of non-combustible material; or
- ii) of bushfire-resisting timber (refer to the table at the end of this document); or
- iii) a combination of Items (i) and (ii) above.

Those parts of the handrails and balustrades that are 125 mm or more from the building have no requirements.

WATER AND GAS SUPPLY PIPES

Above-ground, exposed water and gas supply pipes are to be metal.

BUSH FIRE RESISTING SPECIES

The following species have been tested and meet the requirements for a bush fire resisting timber species:

Standard trade name	Botanical name
Ash silvertop	Eucalyptus sieberi
Blackbutt	Eucalyptus pilularis
Gum, red, river	Eucalyptus camaldulensis
Gum, spotted	Corymbia maculata
	Corymbia henryi
	Corymbia citriodora
Ironbark, red	Eucalyptus sideroxylon
Kwila (Merbau)	Intsia bijuga
Turpentine	Syncarpia glomulifera