

M E D I A S T A T E M E N T

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Revised Bushfire Standard reaches final stage

Standards Australia's revised Standard for the construction of buildings in bushfire-prone areas (AS 3959) has now reached the final approval stage.

The Standard specifies measures to improve construction and better equip buildings to withstand the effects of bushfires, providing occupants with an improved level of protection.

Committee Members have until early next week to vote on the final Standard, with an approved document expected to be ready for consideration by the Australian Building Codes Board (ABCB) on 5 March 2009 for adoption in the Building Code of Australia.

Standards Australia's expert Committee held a special meeting on Wednesday 25 February 2009 to approve recommendations and resolutions to the Standard resulting from the recent outcomes of the ABCB's Regulatory Impact Statement.

"The revised Standard is a significant improvement on current requirements. It covers assessment of the risk of bushfire attack and outlines construction requirements for buildings in designated bushfire-prone areas," said John Tucker, CEO of Standards Australia.

Improvements on the existing Standard include:

- the inclusion of requirements for six construction levels (up from three) ranging from low to extreme;
- two options for determining the level of bushfire attack in a particular area;
- refinement of test methods for construction materials used in bushfire-prone areas, based on AS 1503.8;
- improved ember protection measures such as optional window shutters for designated areas; and
- provisions for non-exposed facades and attached structures such as garages.

The Committee also resolved to include three flame temperature tables (910K, 1000K, 1090K) in the Appendix to enable State and Territory Governments to select the temperature applicable to the various jurisdictions.

"While the Standard sets out the technical means of how to arrive at an appropriate level of bushfire attack and the subsequent construction requirements, it is a matter for Governments to regulate when and where a particular attack level is applied and the associated cost-benefit balance," said Mr Tucker.

Several items including the issue of refuges and shelters (sometimes referred to as bunkers) will be considered as amendments to AS 3959:2009 or for future editions of the Standard. It is expected outcomes from the Victoria Government's Royal Commission will assist the Committee in making improvements to subsequent editions of this Standard.

“The commitment and dedication of our expert Committee at this time of need for Victoria is greatly appreciated. The Committee’s cooperation and responsiveness over the past two weeks has enabled Standards Australia to expedite the final stages of the development of this Standard which will be critical in helping Victoria rebuild after the devastation of Black Saturday,” said Mr Tucker.

Standards Australia would like to acknowledge the hard work and expertise of the representatives on Committee FP-020, nominated by the following organisations:

Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC)
Australian Building Codes Board
Australian Institute of Architects
Australian Institute of Building Surveyors
Australian Steel Institute
Australian Window Association
CSIRO
Engineers Australia
Fire Protection Association Australia
Housing Industry Association
Master Builders Australia
Plastics and Chemicals Industries Association Incorporated
Property Council Australia
Testing Interests (Australia)
Think Brick Australia
Timber Preservers Association of Australia
Wood Council Australia

The revised Standard will supersede AS 3959:1999.

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