

Tips for Developing Houses in Bushfire Zones



Be aware of the “BAL” (Bushfire Attack Level) control over your property

You should be made aware of this at the time of purchase. However, zoning or classifications to individual properties can be revised without notice, so get a planning certificate to confirm. Bushfire hazard controls can vary according to topography, size and extent of vegetation, etc. The classifications or ratings are based on a scale set out in Australian Standard for Bushfire Design AS 3959 from BAL(Bushfire Attack Level) 19 up to FZ (“Flame Zone”).

Materials and devices

It's understood that external cladding materials for new works would be non-combustible (i.e. not timber) so metal, fibrous cement, masonry, etc. would provide the necessary fire resistance. For sites that are steep or remote lightweight materials would probably be the better solution. With other materials like fire resistant plasterboard, reflective linings, etc. they can provide a compliant solution. Window and door openings require fire rated windows (v. thick steel framed) or shutters (automated roller or solid panel manually operated) from accredited suppliers for protection. Exposed steel structure may need to be treated in fire-resistant “intumescent” paint.

Upgrading of existing

Council's and other official bodies (e.g. Bushfire Commissioners) may require parts of the existing building to be upgraded. It may not be to the same BAL as the new proposed works but, is intended to balance the need for risk reduction with cost. These can include steel mesh screens to windows, gutter guard, etc. to reduce the risk of air-borne embers building up heat within the structure.

Cost

BAL FZ could add around 20% min. to a typical domestic residential project. This includes a time impact due to production of specialised items, some of which are imported. Many bushfire prone sites are steep and surrounded by trees, in rural or outlying locations all of which add to cost.

Hope you find the above useful and for more information or a possible solution call us on 0431 734 120 or (02) 9799 5252 or email: andrew@hebdenarchitects.com.au

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