

**Submission to Parliament of Australia**  
**House of Representatives**  
**House Select Committee on the recent Australian Bushfires**

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Standards Australia responded to the devastation created to property from the 1983 Ash Wednesday bushfires in Victoria by establishing a dedicated technical committee – Construction of buildings in bushfire-prone areas. The committee was constituted in 1984 and comprised representation from a wide range of industry and community bodies including the Australasian Fire Authorities Council, CSIRO, Timber Council, Housing Industry Association and the Master Builders Association.

The terms of reference for the bushfire committee was fundamentally to establish a set of requirements in a Standard that would minimise damage to a building in the event of bushfire attack.

Australian Standard AS 3959 was published in 1991 following consensus reached by the committee to provide requirements for improving external building elements, such as, walls, windows and doors, to resist bushfire attack from burning embers. At this point in time, higher bushfire hazards namely, attack from radiant heat and direct flame contact together with a methodology to assess the bushfire hazard, was under development and did not appear until the current edition of AS 3959 was published in 1999.

The 1999 edition has been substantially revised to include an improved scientific base for the assessment of bushfire hazard. Research into the 1:50 fire weather scenario and the fire danger index together with further studies of vegetation will result in an improved methodology to assess bushfire hazard.

Refining the requirements for special construction detail in the revised 2003 edition on a cost-effective basis has proved to be a challenge; however, comment received on the Public Comment Draft issued on 19 March 2003 has provided the necessary scope for improvement. Comment on the draft closed on 30 April 2003.

Australian Standard AS 3959 has been written in prescriptive terms and has been referenced in the Building Code of Australia since the first edition and provides the deemed to comply requirements.

Although AS 3959 is essentially a construction Standard designed to improve a building's ability to better withstand bushfire attack, it is viewed by many as assisting with life safety in addition to property protection.

Since the devastation caused by bushfires in the last two years, interest in the Bushfire Standard has heightened and currently every effort is being made to publish the new edition by September 2003.

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