

MediaRelease

The good wood on rebuilding in bushfire-prone areas

R&D shows compliant solution can be met with more wood in the roof system

Victoria -23 July, 2009: Independent research jointly funded by Forest and Wood Products Australia Limited (FWPA), BlueScope Steel Limited and Promat Limited has helped develop two new bushfire approved roofing systems. One of the roofing solutions actually calls for increased use of wood to help reduce the impact of a bushfire.

The new roofing systems combine timber, plywood, steel and magnesium board - and actually increase the use of wood - largely by the addition of an insulating plywood membrane over the entire roof.

Acting Building Commissioner Sarah McCann-Bartlett and CEO of FWPA Ric Sinclair, welcomed the results of the testing.

"I applaud Forest and Wood Products Australia for initiating and driving the cross-industry collaborative approach. This independent research is a great example of industry partners working together for the greater benefit of the Victorian community," Ms McCann-Bartlett said.

The Victorian Government introduced the new residential building standard in March 2009 in response to the overwhelming need to better protect our communities after the February bushfires. Roof systems needed to pass a new test, but as a result of the fast adoption, no compliant roof systems had been developed. As a stop-gap measure, until now, home owners were asked to submit plans without specific roofing material specifications.

"FWPA was able to broker a cross-industry approach to find a solution. The jointly funded initiative helped speed up the process - and the outcome ensured that timber was tested as part of the solution rather than assuming that it would not be part of the solution," Mr Sinclair said.

The research tested and demonstrated several suitable roofing options which use timber trusses in conjunction with a plywood membrane, protective fascia including magnesium board and a Colourbond™ roof. The roofing solutions meet the stringent requirements of Bushfire Attack Level (BAL) FZ zone under the new standard and will help people get on with the rebuilding process.

About Forest and Wood Products Australia

FWPA aims to improve the competitiveness and sustainability of the Australian forest and wood products industry through innovation by investing in effective and relevant R&D and promotion of the industry's products, services and values. FWPA undertakes industry-level activities where a collective approach delivers more effective and valuable commercial outcomes than individual action. We deliver services that support the industry's capacity as a major exporter and mainstay of regional communities in many parts of Australia.

“There was a real risk that some interpretations of the new regulations would restrict or even prevent the use of timber in construction of homes and buildings in bushfire-prone areas. It was important to separate emotion from fact by conducting this independent research to find the right solution. It’s great to see that wood not only continues to be used in the trusses and frames but also to provide greater fire insulation and protection across the whole roof as well as the eaves and fascia,” said Mr Sinclair.

“This R&D provided important results for the forest and wood industry by demonstrating that timber can and will continue to be part of the rebuilding solution in bush-fire prone areas while still meeting the rigorous building regulations and standards put in place,” said Mr Sinclair.

The outcome is also important for the building industry, which can continue to enjoy the positive attributes of working with timber such as versatility, durability and on-site workability,” said Mr Sinclair.

Further information

Technical datasheets for the roof solutions will be available from www.timber.org.au/bushfire in the coming weeks.

An information bulletin on timber housing in bushfire-prone areas is available for download and a design and construction guide for AS3959 – Building with timber in bushfire-prone areas will be available in August. Visit www.timber.org.au/bushfire to download or request materials.

Further enquiries:

Keith Ritchie
Group Director
Professional Public Relations
(03) 8643 1629