This data sheet provides general guidance on member sizes, connections and suitable materials for the construction of handrails and balustrades. The information provided in this data sheet does not preclude the use of manufacturer’s proprietary information where this satisfies the requirements of the regulatory authority.

**INTRODUCTION**

For all Classes of building, handrails and balustrades are required to comply with the Building Code of Australia (BCA). The BCA requirements include design and construction provisions for the various components including compliance with the loading provisions of AS 1170.1 Structural design actions Part 1: Permanent, imposed and other actions.

For handrails and balustrades, the BCA is primarily concerned with the safety of building users and occupants. Design and construction must therefore take into consideration both the strength and durability of materials and components as well as the “geometric” constraints prescribed by the BCA to prevent people from accidentally falling through, under or over the balustrade.

The BCA should be consulted to determine where handrails and balustrades are required and for specific details regarding handrails for stairs, geometric limitations and other criteria.

**LOADS**

AS 1170.1 requires balustrades and railings together with members and connections which provide structural support to be able to resist the following factored limit state loads: 0.9kN inward, outward and downward load at any point. It also requires balustrades and handrails to be able to resist factored horizontal or vertical loads of 0.53kN/m for all areas within or servicing exclusively one dwelling including stairs and landings but excluding external balconies and 1.13kN/m for external balconies in domestic and other residential buildings. Infill, including balusters, should be capable of resisting 0.75kN in any direction.

Note: In addition, AS 1170 recommends other design loads for specific conditions such as to restrain crowds or people under panic conditions. For this case, design to resist a uniform load of 4.5kN/m is required. For these conditions, handrail and balustrade systems should be specifically designed and are not covered in this data sheet.

**Figure 1. Balustrade terminology and dimensions**
MATERIALS (Timber - general)

Durability
In weather exposed above ground applications or, where subjected to other sources of moisture, handrails, posts, newels, balusters, and infill should be either Above Ground Durability Class 1 species such as blackbutt, spotted gum, ironbark, jarrah, merbau or kwila with any sapwood present treated to H3 (or higher) or, H3 (or higher) treated softwood such as slash, Aruacana (hoop) or radiata pine. Preservative treatment shall comply with AS 1604.

Note: Meranti, Victorian Ash and Tasmanian Oak are not suitable for weather exposed applications.

For internal use, timber of any durability class is suitable.

Timber Grade
The timber should be free from any major strength reducing features, be straight grained and be in accordance with the following:-

- Hardwood (Including Meranti) – AS 2796 – Timber – Hardwood – Sawn and milled products - Clear or select grade
- Softwood (Including imported softwood) – AS 4785 – Timber - Softwood, Sawn and milled products - Clear grade

Note: Finger jointed timber shall comply with AS 1491 – ‘Finger jointed structural timber’ and laminated timber shall comply with AS 1328 – ‘Glued laminated structural timber’.

MATERIALS (Structural Properties & sizes)

Posts / Newel Posts
Newel posts with handrails attached (handrails not greater than 1000mm from the floor) and posts connected to and restrained by the roof frame, up to 2700mm high shall be in accordance with Table 1

### TABLE 1 - POSTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timber Grade</th>
<th>Newel Posts (external)</th>
<th>Full Height Posts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Minimum size (mm x mm)</td>
<td>Maximum Post Spacing (m)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F8 (Softwood)</td>
<td>88 x 88</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F17 (Hardwood)</td>
<td>90 x 90</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F27 (Hardwood)</td>
<td>90 x 90</td>
<td>3.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

F8, 88 x 88 newel post used internally may be spaced up to 2.7 m.

Where posts support roof and or floor loads, refer to AS 1684 to determine minimum grade and size but shall be min F8, 88 x 88.

Handrails
Handrail sizes and spans shall be in accordance with Table 2.

1. Manufacturers that use this data sheet as the basis of their design should ensure that their products satisfy Australian Standards and have the relevant minimum mechanical properties including the following:

- **Hardwood** – Stress Grade F22, (characteristic bending strength f’b = 65 MPa, Modulus of elasticity E = 16000 MPa) and Joint Group JD2. Examples - spotted gum, ironbark, blackbutt, kwila and merbau.

- **Meranti and Australian Grown Softwood** – (characteristic bending strength f’b = 25 MPa, Modulus of elasticity E = 9100 MPa) and Joint Group JD4. Examples - radiata pine, hoop pine, slash pine and meranti.

- **Imported Softwood** - (characteristic bending strength f’b = 25 MPa, Modulus of elasticity E = 6900 MPa) and Joint Group JD4. Examples - New Zealand radiata pine.

2. Unless branded to identify that it is ‘Australian Grown’, softwood balustrades spans shall be determined from the ‘Imported Softwood’ spans given in Table 2.

Infill / Balusters
The minimum size of infill/balusters shall be as follows:-

- Hardwood - 25 x 19 mm or 25mm diameter
- Softwood - 62 x 19 or 35 mm diameter

(see notes over page)
Notes
1. Handrails with no intermediate vertical supports may be used on flat or edge. See Figure 3.
2. Handrails with intermediate vertical supports shall be installed on flat with intermediate vertical supports spaced not greater than the allowable spans given for the same handrail with no intermediate vertical supports. See Figures 2 and 3.
3. Where a mid-rail (minimum size 42x65) is within 150mm of the main handrail and is rigidly fixed to it (using blocks, or balusters or dowels that pass through the mid rail and are fixed to the top rail) at least once at mid span, the allowable span of the handrail may be increased by 300mm.
4. Handrail spans have been limited to 3600 mm maximum.
5. Profiled sections typically include bread loaf, ladies waist and colonial profiles.
6. There is no negative tolerance permitted on the breadth or depth dimensions (overall outside dimensions of profiled shapes) given in the above table.

Corrosion Resistance
For weather exposed applications, all metal connections including nails, screws, bolts and brackets should be a minimum of hot dipped galvanised (or for screws, Class 3 corrosion resistance as per AS 3566). For coastal environments subjected to airborne salt deposition, stainless steel or equivalent corrosion resistant metal connections should be used.

CONNECTIONS

TABLE 3 - LOADS ON HANDRAILS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Span Type</th>
<th>Handrail Span (mm)</th>
<th>Handrail Connection Loads (kN)</th>
<th>EXAMPLE OF DETERMINING HANDRAIL CONNECTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Within or exclusively servicing one Dwelling (exc. external balconies)</td>
<td>Other Areas in Residential Buildings (inc. external balconies)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single Span</td>
<td>1800</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2100</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2400</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2700</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3000</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3300</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3600</td>
<td>0.95</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The shaded areas in Tables 3 and 4 provide a guide to the selection of an appropriate connection for a Class 3 Building with a continuous span softwood handrail span of 2400mm.

Step 1. From Table 3 determine the load on the handrail = 3.4 kN

Step 2. From Table 4 and Figure 4, determine a connection with the capacity to resist 3.4 kN.

Step 3 Acceptable solutions determined from Table 4 are:-
- Type A connection, 1/M10 bolt or
- Type B connection, 2/No 10 screws or
- Type D connection, 2 No 14 screws per leg of bracket
TABLE 4 - CAPACITY OF HANDRAIL CONNECTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timber</th>
<th>Capacity of Connections (kN)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Type A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. Bolts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardwood (JD2)</td>
<td>M10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Softwood and meranti (JD4)</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
1. For Type B connections, minimum screw penetration into post is 38mm.
2. For Type C connections the minimum screw penetration into post is 40mm and the minimum nail penetration into post is 38mm.
3. Midrails and bottom rails shall be fixed with a minimum of 2 / 3.15 dia. skew nails.

TABLE 5 - CONNECTORS FOR BALUSTERS / INFILL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Timber</th>
<th>Type A - Minimum Nail / Screw Penetration ‘l’ (mm)</th>
<th>Type B - Nail in shear minimum penetration ‘l’ (mm)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nails</td>
<td>Screws</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 / 2.5 dia.</td>
<td>2 / 2.8 dia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardwood (JD2)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Softwood and meranti (JD4)</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Where the balusters / infill are slotted into a groove or a dowel into a hole (i.e. top connection in Figure 5 Type A) that restraints both inward and outward forces, the above nail / screw fixing requirements are not applicable.
PAINTING AND FINISHING – EXTERNAL

Unprimed Timber
Nail holes should be stopped with an exterior grade wood filler. Dirt or any loose material should be removed prior to coating. All surfaces, ends and joints should be primed prior to assembly with a quality solvent based alkyd primer or stain, in accordance with manufacturers recommendations.

Final top coats of exterior paint or stain should then be applied in accordance with manufacturers recommendations.

Pre-primed LOSP Treated Timber
Refer to TDS 24 - Recommendations for the use of H3 LOSP Treated Pine. Pre-primed handrail and balustrade components should be sanded back and dusted off to remove any loose or powdery coatings prior to finishing. Cut ends, holes, notches etc should be treated with a spray on or brush on supplementary preservative. Nail holes should be stopped with an exterior grade wood filler.

All surfaces, ends and joints should be primed prior to assembly with a quality, solvent based alkyd primer. When the primer has dried in accordance with the manufacturers recommendations, apply two full coats of premium 100% acrylic exterior topcoat in accordance with manufacturers recommendations.

SAFE WORKING
Working with timber produces dust particles. Protection of the eyes, nose and mouth when sanding, sawing and planing is highly recommended. Refer to tool manufacturers for safe working recommendations for particular items of equipment.

DISPOSAL OF OFFCUTS AND WASTE
For any treated timber, do not burn offcuts or sawdust. Preservative treated offcuts and sawdust should be disposed of by approved local authority methods.