

# IS YOUR SHOWER GLASS SAFE?

*There have been some recent reports of shower panels “exploding” unexpectedly in Perth, causing injury to several youngsters. Master Builders director Michael McLean reports on the likely causes and how to avoid the problem.*

**T**HE phenomenon of exploding glass panels relates to toughened or tempered glass shattering without any apparent reason. The most common causes include:

- Internal defects within the glass itself such as the presence of nickel sulphide
- Thermal stresses in the glass
- Damage to the edges of the glass during the installation process
- Inadequate glass thickness
- Fitting glass panels incorrectly; and
- Providing inadequate room in the frame for expansion and contraction as a result of changes in temperature.

A process known as heat soaking of toughened glass can help eliminate imperfections.

The simplest and easiest way to determine whether your toughened glass is fit for purpose is to ensure your product meets Australian Standard 2208:1996. If it does, it should have a logo on it.

Imported glass, which is generally cheaper than Australian-manufactured equivalents, may or may not meet Australian Standards. Regrettably, these overseas imports are becoming more prevalent due to their lower cost.

Local and international glass manufacturers who are approved to use the Australian Standards stamp are subject to random audits to check on their performance

and compliance.

To minimise the risks of toughened glass exploding, users are always recommended to use an accredited glazier to install their shower screen or any glass products.

To reassure homeowners, the chemistry behind toughened or tempered glass ensures it crumbles or explodes into thousands of tiny pieces rather than breaking into few, large, sharp and dangerous pieces. This ultimately tends to keep people in the vicinity of the explosion safe, albeit slightly shocked.

Although there may have been reports and recent publicity surrounding shower glass explosions, the incidence is extremely low. Reputable builders and qualified glaziers report very few problems with their shower screen installations.

The Australian Glass and Glazing Association recommends consumers make sure they check that their shower screen meets Australian Standards. Those who think they might save money by buying a cheaper product that is not compliant with the Australian Standard will invariably pay more for their product in the long run. Likewise, installing a shower screen yourself as a ‘do it yourself’ project without being competent is extremely risky should you damage the glass panel in any way.

Once again, it’s a case of ‘you get what you pay for’.

