



TECHNICAL BULLETIN – TB001

INSTALLATION OF LARGE FORMAT CERAMIC AND HEAVY STONE TILES

July 2024

INTRODUCTION & SCOPE

This technical bulletin aims to raise awareness concerning the trend towards using large-format ceramic and/or Heavy Stone tiles (excluding thin-sheet porcelain tiles) so that appropriate tile design, selection, and application can be made, considering all factors.

WHAT IS A LARGE FORMAT OR HEAVY STONE TILE?

Due to fashion considerations, tile size has continued to grow, requiring particular attention to fixing techniques that may not have been required with traditional tile sizes. Today tiles can now be defined as large format when one side is at least 400mm long. Typically, a large format tile is 400mm x 400mm, although we are now seeing the trend towards tiles in the size range 300mm x 600mm to 600mm x 1000mm tiles, and even larger sizes have become available (though large sheet tiles are not as heavy on a square meter basis). Rectangular shape tiles (400 x 100mm & 600 x 150mm) are also becoming increasingly popular.

Heavy stone or ceramic tiles are defined as those that exceed 32 kg/m² in weight, although an often-used guide when fixing with adhesive is a maximum weight of 4 kg per tile. Some of the new, extra-large tiles have more in common with fascia or facade cladding elements than traditional tiles, for example, so-called 'stacked stone' tiles, which are commonly 400mm-600mm long, 100mm-150 mm wide, and 15 mm-30 mm thick.

WHAT FACTORS SHOULD BE CONSIDERED WHEN FIXING A LARGE FORMAT TILE?

1. BACKGROUND

The first consideration is the background's capability to support the tile's weight. Traditional ceramic tile sizes of up to 300mm x 300mm have not normally been an issue; however, the trend towards adhesive fixing of large format ceramic and stone tiles quickly raises the total bonded load to above the wall substrate manufacturer's recommended load carrying capacity. The most contentious issue relates to the industry maximum capacity of 32 kg/m² loading of the most common backgrounds. Whilst this figure is quoted within the Tiling Industry in Australia and overseas, no current Tiling Standards validate this limit.

The limit has been established based on the success of in-practice applications within the building industry, and the broad potential risk associated with system failure has been considered. The question of the ability of the adhesive to support a weight of a 32 kg/m² tile does not become an issue since the shear strength of selected ARDEX adhesives is far greater than this limit, provided that suitable adhesion is established to both the tile and the substrate. Where destructive testing has taken place, we will generally see the destruction of the tile and/or cohesive failure of the substrate before witnessing a failure of the adhesive bond.



Another issue is the substrate manufacturer's position regarding the application of tiles or cladding. For example, one manufacturer of fibre cement sheets has stated that tiling over their external cladding boards is neither recommended nor warranted.

Surface coatings such as paints are not intended to carry the loads of applied tiles in most cases.

2. TILE PROPERTIES

Beyond the limitations posed by the background to sustain continuous loading under the environmental conditions imposed on it, the next consideration is the ability of the tile to sustain its own weight after exposure to the working environment. A case in point was an installation of sandstone tiles (dry weight of 48 kg/m²) to masonry walls, the limitations here being the ability of the masonry wall to support the sandstone's weight and the sandstone's cohesive strength to support itself. Porous tiles such as sandstone will absorb water and become heavier, resulting in delamination within the stone. In addition, the loading on the wall substrate may increase to be greater than the capacity of the wall to support the load.

3. ENVIRONMENT CONDITIONS

The service conditions and environment that the tiling system is exposed to can affect the integrity of natural stone tiles and their backgrounds. This should influence the choice of fixing method. The example here is sandstone for external cladding which has a higher risk factor simply because the cohesive strength of sandstone is reduced when it is wet, increasing the chance of delamination within the stone when it becomes too heavy. A similar situation applies to the backgrounds. For some types of backgrounds, such as fibre cement sheets or plasterboard, the surface strength reduces while it is wet, and consequently, this reduces the maximum weight-carrying capacity of the substrate.

Some types of stone materials are subject to weathering. For example, limestone or marble suffer from acid rain and other fallout, which dissolve or disrupt the stone tile matrix.

The system's durability performance must also be considered in terms of whether changes from extreme heat to cold or wet or aging over time create stresses between the substrate and the cladding, in the cladding, or in the substrate itself. Differential movements between the cladding and the substrate could create shear strains or even fatigue of the components or adhesive.

4. OH&S AND PUBLIC SAFETY

The most obvious consideration that needs re-emphasis is a risk assessment based on occupational health and safety principles and the consideration of potential catastrophic failure of the tiling system. Very weighty tiles may require considerations whereupon their application by the fixer can safely take place with suitable mechanical constraints engineered to ensure the safe placement of the tile. In addition, suitably engineered restraints may be required to secure the tile where the maximum design carrying capacity of the background or the limitations of the stone tile cohesive strength due to service or environmental conditions is exceeded.

Applying large format and/or heavy stone tiles to external facades and ever-increasing tiling heights requires due diligence concerning establishing application limits where total reliance on the adhesive to support the tile is necessary. The location of tiles, in the event of catastrophic failure, becomes a critical consideration for all tile sizes. Best practice is achieved by limiting tiling heights internally and externally to a 3-metre height limit whilst evaluating the potential risk of failure to public safety. Therefore, support for adhesive fixed tiles above 3 meters in height will only be considered by ARDEX on a case-by-case basis.



Note: ARDEX Australia does not nominally recommend tiling ceilings or above open thoroughfares, and this installation falls outside of the tiling applications discussed in AS3958. Ardex will consider such requests on a case-by-case basis for adhesives such as ARDEX WA100.

5. MECHANICAL FIXING

Where mechanical fixing becomes a requirement, appropriate design considerations are required to ensure that all components are suitable for the tiling system's service conditions and working life. Mechanical fixings include epoxy-bonded stainless-steel pins, clamp fixings, head and sill capture of stone, grooved stone edges with metal angle fixings, and support or specialized proprietary systems. Using an adhesive as a secondary support to the primary mechanical fixing could result in an additional level of security that would enable tiling application that may not be acceptable if the adhesive was solely relied upon. Since the nature of large-format ceramic and/or heavy stone tiles varies in material nature, thickness, shape, and size, selecting a suitable fixing method resides with the architectural engineer who has designed the total system. ARDEX can work with architectural engineers to enable the correct adhesive selection. ARDEX has produced Technical Bulletin TB148 to discuss some methodologies for mechanical fixing, and the fibre-cement manufacturers normally have design load tables in their literature for internal tiling.

6. SITE CONDITIONS

The selection of a suitable ARDEX adhesive is best done after considering the exposure conditions the adhesive will endure, such as the background and tile types. Providing a consistent, structurally sound, and suitably prepared dry substrate free of contaminants is critical to successful tile application. Tilers must recognize deficiencies in site conditions that may affect the adhesive's bond to the background or the tile. Allowances must be made for full cure, settlement, and shrinkage of the background with additional consideration of the potential structural shrinkage of concrete structures in high-rise applications.

External façade tiling of some high-rise applications may need to address the need for mechanical fixing of large-format tiles applied lower than 3 meters above floor height, where high negative wind loadings become an issue, particularly at corners. Another issue is whether the site is in a seismic hazard or mine subsidence area, which can create dynamic loads on the cladding.

EXPLANATORY TO TABLE 1

The reference Table 2 (on page 6) depicts the limits of typical backgrounds used for the application of wall tiles; otherwise, a suitable system for mechanical retention will be required in addition to the adhesive.

Special note: Tiling onto sand/cement renders

The weight limitation of fixing tiles/stone onto a mechanically prepared and roughened porous concrete surface (suitable for tiling) is 60 kg/m².

Whilst it may be assumed that a sand/cement render falls into the category of a masonry finish, it should be noted that a 15mm sand/cement render weighs approximately 33kg/m². —Add the



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weight of typical tiling at 27 kg/m². The combined weight loading of the background will approach the 60 kg/m² weight limit recommended for concrete surfaces.

Naturally, these weight loadings of the sand/cement render rely on the bond and cohesive strength of the render, in that correct background preparation, water/cement ratios, correct mix design, and best-practice installation procedures are employed.

Where the background is suitable for wet areas, the same load limits apply when ARDEX-approved waterproofing membranes are used.

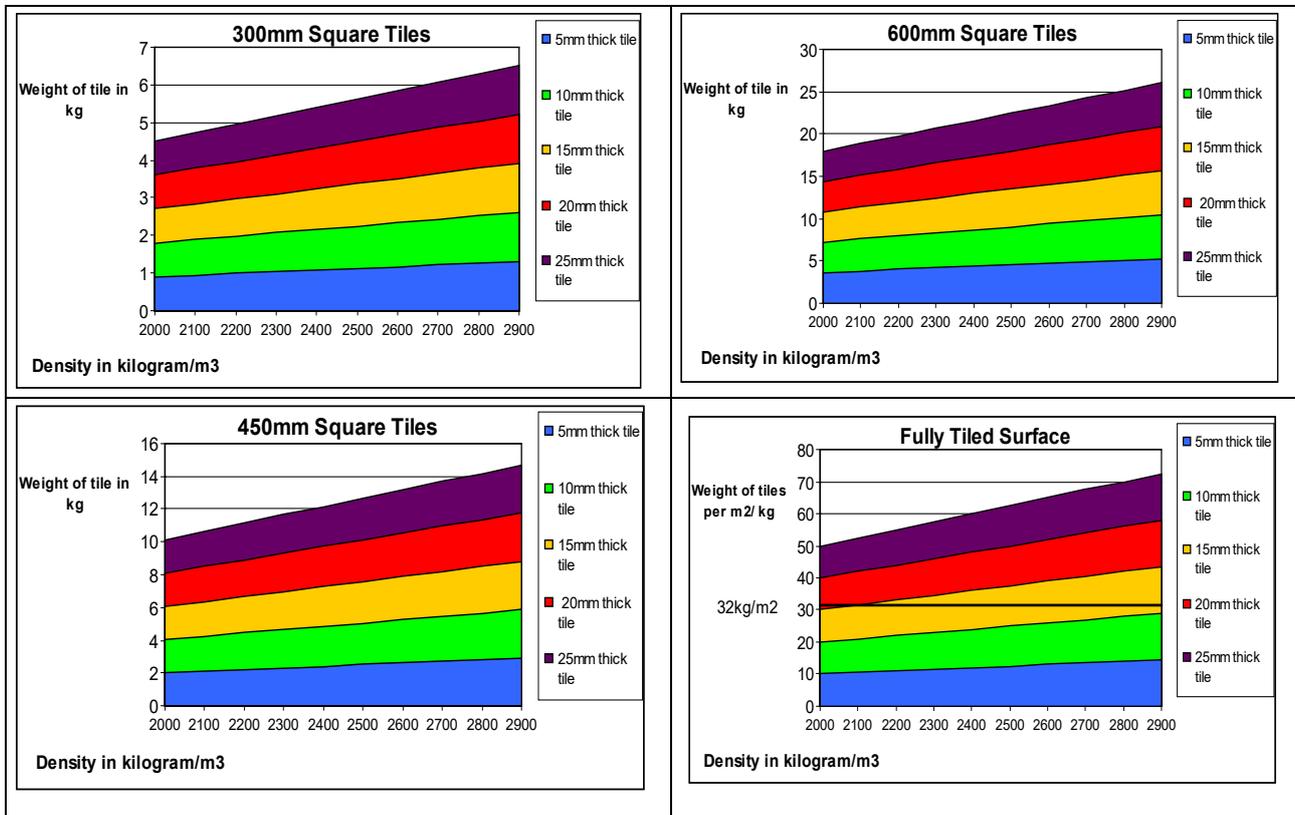
When selecting the weight (kg/m²) limit for the nominated background, the lowest value to the maximum tile weight must always be selected.

Example 1: A 12.5 kg/m² rated background would not be suitable to support a 400mm x 400mm tile that weighed 26 kg/m² but would be suitable if a lighter ceramic tile whose dimension was 600mm x 600mm but only weighed 11.1kg/m² was used. The 400mm x 400mm tile would require mechanical fastening and adhesive to reduce the dead load stress applied to the background.

Example 2: A background rated for 32 kg/m² would be suitable for the 400mm x 400mm tile weighing 26 kg/m². However, the individual tile may weigh 4.2 kg and exceed the 4 kg single tile limit. Consequently, the tile will require some mechanical fastening and the adhesive to hold its weight.

EXPLANATORY TO TABLE 1

Table 1 provides some indicative Stone/Tile weight for size and density





Occupational health and safety concerns limit wall tiling to a maximum height of 3 meters, where only the adhesive holds the tile in place. The exceptions to this are internal applications of glass mosaics, where individual tile elements have a maximum size of 25mm x 25mm x 4mm. Please contact Ardex Australia technical services for external tiling above 3 meters.

A typical 400mm x 400mm fully vitrified tile or ceramic tile would be limited to a thickness of about 10mm to be within the 32 kg per m² limit. Care should be taken when assessing agglomerate and natural stone tiles as the bulk density of stone tiles can range from 2300kg/m³ to 3200kg/m³, depending upon the composition.

CONCLUSION

Considering all these factors, the responsibility of selecting the appropriate tiling system will reside with the project engineer to evaluate the interaction of building elements with the proposed fixing system. The engineer must consider the service environment, site conditions, background loadings, tile weights, fixing methods, issues concerning Occupational Health and Safety for the intended end use of the project, and the overall “Risk Management” assessment.

Reference is made to other Ardex Technical bulletins associated with the issue of large format and/or heavy stone tiles to be fixed to wall surfaces. These include a summary of the uses of fibre cement sheeting as intended by the sheet manufacturer, considerations when tiling over existing wall tiles, and guides to estimating dead loads to be imposed on wall substrates.



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TABLE 2

BACKGROUND	Maximum Weight Capacity
Concrete*: Mechanically prepared to provide a roughened porous solid surface.	60 kg/m ²
Sand/Cement Render*: Applied to solid open porous roughened concrete, brick, or masonry surface.	32 kg/m ²
Paper-faced plasterboard generic Gyprock plasterboard	32 kg/m ² Remove wallpaper, vinyl, and paint finishes.
Gyprock Aquachek Sheet fixing @ 200mm centres Waterproof membrane -Yes	12.5 kg/m ²
Gyprock Aquachek Sheet fixing @ 100mm centres Waterproof membrane - Yes	32 kg/m ²
Fibre Cement Wallboard# Sheet fixing @ 200mm centres	20 kg/m ²
Fibre Cement Wallboard# Sheet fixing @ 100mm centres	32 kg/m ²
Fibre Cement sheets for External Facades^ James Hardie EasyLap BGC – Innova Stonesheet	50kg/m ² 40kg/m ²
Gypsum Plaster	20 kg/m ²
Masonry and blockwork May require rendering before tiling installation - refer to AS 3958.1 – 2007, Section 4.5 refer to sand/cement render.	32 kg/m ²
Hebel Block Walls/Hebel Wall Panels	32kg/m ² max. Internal walls only. No additional mechanical fixings to be used.



Notes:

*Maximum weight capacities of backgrounds are based on concrete and sand/cement render mixed and applied according to the relevant standard.

Refer to the fibre cement manufacturer's position regarding the application of tiles onto fibre cement boards in external environments. These sheets are not typically recommended for tiled external environments.

^ These two external fibre-cement boards have specific systems associated with them; the loadings are specified by the sheet suppliers.

Additional References associated with weight limitations

Ardex Technical Bulletin TB117 Applications of Tiles onto Pre-existing Tiles

Ardex Technical Bulletin TB220 Checklist of Fibre Cement Sheets and Their Intended Uses

Ardex Technical Bulletin TB223 Quick Checks for Natural Stone Tiles – Dead Loads and Environmental Stability.

IMPORTANT

This Technical Bulletin provides guideline information only and is not intended to be interpreted as a general specification for the application/installation of the products described. Since each project potentially differs in exposure/condition, specific recommendations may vary from the information contained herein. For recommendations for specific applications/installations, contact your nearest Ardex Australia Office.

DISCLAIMER

The information presented in this Technical Bulletin is to the best of our knowledge true and accurate. No warranty is implied or given as to its completeness or accuracy in describing the performance or suitability of a product for a particular application. Users are asked to check that the literature in their possession is the latest issue.

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