

Accessible Shower Design and Water Containment: Finding the Right Balance

The introduction of the National Construction Code (NCC) Livable Housing Design Standards has brought important changes to residential bathroom design across Australia.

These changes aim to improve accessibility and make homes easier to use for people of all ages and abilities. One of the key requirements is the provision of at least one step-free shower within a dwelling, helping create safer and more accessible bathrooms.

While the intent of these requirements is widely supported throughout the building industry, they have also introduced some practical challenges that homeowners, builders and installers are increasingly encountering.



Why Are More Bathrooms Experiencing Water Escape?

Traditional shower screen installations often incorporated larger threshold sections or hob details that helped contain water within the shower area.

Under current NCC requirements, accessible showers are generally designed with minimal floor transitions and thresholds. In many situations, this means shower screens can only incorporate very low-profile water retention barriers, limited 5 mm or less in height.

While these designs improve accessibility, they also reduce the physical barrier available to help contain water within the shower area. As a result, water escape can occur more easily during normal shower use, particularly where factors such as the following are present:

- High-flow shower heads
- Shower heads directed toward openings
- User positioning close to door openings
- Large shower areas with minimal screen coverage
- Floor level variations
- Cleaning activities involving significant water volumes



Compliance Does Not Always Prevent Water Escape

One of the challenges facing homeowners and builders is that a shower can be fully compliant with the NCC, installed correctly and functioning exactly as designed, yet still experience some water escaping the shower area during use.

This can understandably create frustration for homeowners who reasonably expect a shower enclosure to completely contain water.

In many cases, there is no installation defect. Instead, the issue arises from the practical limitations associated with balancing accessibility requirements and water containment performance.



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Industry-Wide Challenges

Across the construction industry, builders, designers, certifiers, manufacturers and installers are working to achieve the best possible outcomes within the current regulatory framework.

The increased prevalence of accessible shower designs has contributed to:

- Higher numbers of water escape enquiries and service inspections
- Greater homeowner expectations regarding water containment
- Additional discussions around bathroom design and shower layout
- Increased consideration of alternative design solutions during planning

The Importance of Good Bathroom Design

Achieving the best performance from an accessible shower often requires careful consideration during the design stage.

Factors such as shower size, shower head placement, drainage design, floor falls, screen configuration and bathroom layout all play an important role in reducing the likelihood of water escaping the shower area.

When these elements work together effectively, accessible showers can provide both excellent usability and strong water containment performance.

Looking Ahead

As manufacturers and installers, we support the goal of creating more accessible homes while also recognising the importance of functionality, water containment and homeowner satisfaction.

Ongoing collaboration between industry participants, builders, regulators and the Australian Building Codes Board will help ensure future standards continue to achieve the right balance between accessibility and everyday performance.

If you have questions about shower screen design, water containment or NCC-compliant shower solutions, the team at Civic Shower Screens & Wardrobes is always happy to help.