

TECH TALK *from* Georgia-Pacific Gypsum

Technical Insight from the Roof Board Experts

Parapet Walls: When is a Wall a Roof?

Some discussion to clarify the use of DensDeck® Roof Board vs. DensGlass™ Exterior Sheathing on vertical surfaces.

By Reinhard Schneider
Technical Development Manager
Georgia-Pacific Gypsum

In some cases, a wall isn't a wall. A parapet wall projecting above the roof plane may be a part of the roof.

According to Webster, a parapet wall is "a low wall or railing to protect the edge of a platform, roof or bridge." Lally's *The Science and Technology of Traditional and Modern Roofing Systems* says it is "generally an extension of exterior building walls or party- and fire-walls that usually extend about three feet or less above the roof."

Why do we have parapet walls?

Parapet walls can serve several purposes. One of them is fire protection. By extending the wall above the roof plane, a parapet wall prevents flames coming up the exterior of a building from immediately igniting a combustible roofing membrane.

A parapet wall can improve wind-uplift resistance. Wind-induced catastrophic roofing failures typically start when wind forces lift the roof edge, and then peel back the entire roof system. A parapet wall helps prevent elevated wind pressure from compromising the vulnerable roof edge.

In older masonry buildings, parapet walls provided vapor pressure relief for the building. Since water vapor can't pass through the roofing membrane, it finds its way to the roof edge and exits through the back side of the parapet, which is typically finished with permeable clay bricks.

A parapet wall can also perform an aesthetic function. It may hide rooftop equipment or may increase the apparent height of the building to improve the proportions.

Parapet wall designs may have several parts

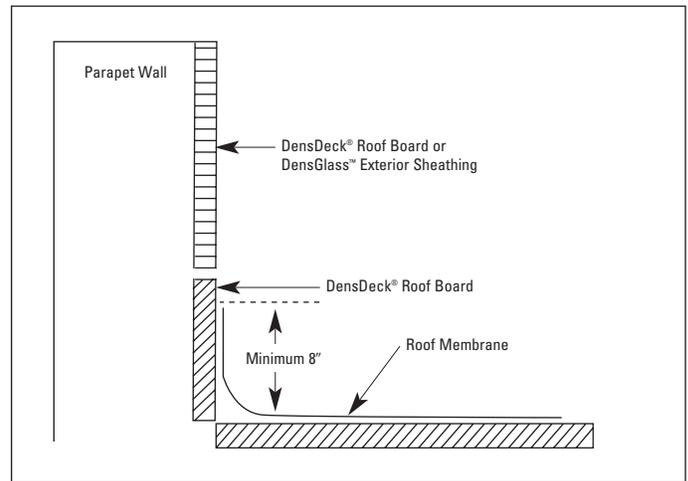
On frame-construction buildings, the exterior finish of the front of the parapet wall will usually be similar to the rest of the exterior walls. But the sheathing used on the roof side of the parapet wall will be dependent on the surface treatment.

If the front of the parapet wall is EIFS (Exterior Insulation Finish Systems), brick veneer, stone or metal, then the sheathing could be DensGlass™ Exterior Sheathing. But if the back side of the parapet wall is to be covered with roofing membrane to help keep water out of the building, that surface actually becomes part of the roof. Then the sheathing should be DensDeck® Prime Roof Board.

Testing and warranties

Much of the choice between DensDeck® Roof Boards and DensGlass Exterior Sheathing in parapet wall applications centers on testing, certification and roof-system warranty.

Georgia-Pacific Gypsum and the roofing industry have aggressively tested all types of DensDeck and DensDeck Prime Roof Boards to UL, FM and other test



In most membrane roofing systems, membranes must extend up the inside of a parapet wall at least 8 inches, and the membrane must be backed by a suitable roofing substrate.

standards as a substrate for roofing systems including EPDM, PVC, TPO, SBS torched and modified bitumen cold mastics. The test results and product properties have earned certifications for DensDeck as a non-structural component in many membrane roofing systems.

In contrast, DensGlass Exterior Sheathing board is designed for vertical applications. It has been tested as a component in EIFS and exterior insulation systems, and also with brick veneer, where the DensGlass Sheathing is a fire barrier or secondary weather barrier behind the facing. Georgia-Pacific Gypsum has not tested DensGlass Sheathing or any of the other Dens™ Brand products for roofing applications, and DensGlass Sheathing is not certified in membrane roofing systems.

So if you put DensGlass Sheathing behind a vertical membrane, you're putting a component into the roofing assembly that hasn't been evaluated by the agencies that give approval and certification. With DensGlass Sheathing as a substrate, roof system warranties may not apply. Some roof system manufacturers say, "If the membrane bonds satisfactorily, we'll accept DensGlass Sheathing as a substrate, but we won't warranty it."

Georgia-Pacific Gypsum provides a limited commercial warranty with DensDeck products that covers manufacturing defects in roofing applications. Our limited warranty in roof applications is specifically limited to DensDeck products.

DensDeck may be used above vertical membranes

Most roofing membrane manufacturers require that the membrane come up the wall at least eight inches above the roof plane. The edge of the membrane is sealed and flashed and the rest of the wall may have another finish on it. DensGlass Sheathing is appropriate for finishing the rest of the vertical surface above the membrane, but DensDeck could also be used, so there's only one substrate material to deal with.

Fire ratings require tested substrates

The membrane could go over the top of the wall, be covered with a cap and finished off on the outside. (See diagram on front.) In this case, the entire inside of the parapet wall is a vertical roof, and you need to deal with it as a roof.

Fire ratings on vertical surfaces may require non-combustible substrates.

continued on back

If there's a combustible surface such as plywood or OSB behind a vertical membrane, it may not have a fire rating, because of the slope limitations on combustible decks. If you put in a component that has not been approved for fire resistance, you may lose the fire performance for the whole roof system. Clearly, the substrate should be DensDeck, which has been tested in fire-rated assemblies.

Bond strength matters on vertical surfaces

Another issue in the vertical wall is the strength of the bond of the membrane to the substrate. When the membrane comes up just eight inches, it's virtually self-supporting. But if the membrane goes up the vertical surface two, three, five, even ten feet, some manufacturers require additional attachments, such as rails or plates. That's because, on a vertical surface, the weight of the membrane tends to pull it off the substrate. If the substrate isn't tested for that application, the whole roof may be in jeopardy.

Bond strength is also tested by pressure differentials that try to separate the membrane from the wall. Wind turbulence may tend to pull the membrane away from the vertical surface. Direct wind forces that come through defects in the wall, or building air pressure that comes up inside the wall may tend to push the membrane away from the substrate. DensDeck® Roof Board has been tested

for peel bond strength, which is critical in membrane to substrate bonding.

Construction decisions can pose dilemmas

In the real world, the substrate choice can be complicated. When a building is built, the contractor will sometimes put DensGlass™ Exterior Sheathing on the vertical inside face of a parapet wall. When the roofers arrive on the job, the wall already has DensGlass Sheathing on it. Now the roofers have a dilemma: Is the DensGlass Sheathing acceptable?

In some cases, the roofers may apply a layer of DensDeck over the DensGlass Sheathing so they'll have an acceptable substrate for the membrane. They may even remove the DensGlass Sheathing and replace it with DensDeck. But if the installers attach the membrane directly to the DensGlass Sheathing, the building may not have a fire-rated roof.

On any roof assembly, designers should consider factors of moisture gain, proper ventilation and allowances for condensation. For example, if a brick wall has deteriorated and is being refaced with a non-permeable membrane, the designer should allow for proper venting between the brick and the DensDeck substrate.

GP support can help with choices

For all these reasons, warranty, fire ratings and known bond-strength, the appropriate board

behind a vertical roof membrane is DensDeck, not DensGlass Sheathing. While Georgia-Pacific Gypsum does not design roof systems, we do attempt to provide products and test information that allows proper use of DensDeck products.

For more information about the use of DensDeck products within a roof system, call your area Georgia-Pacific Gypsum commercial roofing manager, your Georgia-Pacific Gypsum DensDeck agent or our Technical Hotline at 1-800-225-6119. Or visit our Web site at www.densdeck.com.

- Guidelines for installation: 1/2" DensDeck can be applied to vertical studs with up to 16" center spacing. 5/8" DensDeck can be used on vertical studs with up to 24" centers. Screws to be installed on 8" centers.
- Guidelines for installing DensDeck in a parapet wall appear in the Georgia-Pacific Gypsum brochure titled DensDeck Roof Boards.
- Parapet wall framing and fastening guidelines are available online at www.densdeck.com, in the DensDeck architectural specifications.



SALES INFORMATION AND ORDER PLACEMENT

U.S.A. Midwest: 1-800-876-4746 West: 1-800-824-7503
South: 1-800-327-2344 Northeast: 1-800-947-4497

CANADA Canada Toll Free: 1-800-387-6823
Quebec Toll Free: 1-800-361-0486

TECHNICAL INFORMATION

Georgia-Pacific Gypsum Technical Hotline
U.S.A. and Canada: 1-800-225-6119
www.gpgypsum.com

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The information in this document may change without notice. Visit our website at www.gpgypsum.com for updates and current information.

LIMITATION OF REMEDIES AND DAMAGES

Unless otherwise stated in our written warranty for these products, our sole liability for any product claim shall be limited to reimbursement of the cost of repair or replacement of the affected product, up to a maximum amount of two times the original purchase price for the affected product. We shall not be responsible under any circumstances for lost profits,

damage to a structure or its contents, or indirect, incidental, special or consequential damages. Claims shall be deemed waived if they are not submitted to us in writing within ten (10) days after discovery of a product defect/circumstance giving rise to a claim.

CAUTION: For product fire, safety and use information, go to gp.com/safetyinfo.

HANDLING AND USE

CAUTION: This product contains fiberglass facings which may cause skin irritation. Dust and fibers produced during the handling and installation of the product may cause skin, eye and respiratory tract irritation. Avoid breathing dust and minimize contact with skin and eyes. Wear long sleeve shirts, long pants and eye protection. Always maintain adequate ventilation. Use a dust mask or NIOSH/MSHA approved respirator as appropriate in dusty or poorly ventilated areas.

For additional product fire, safety and use information go to www.gp.com/safetyinfo or call 1-800-225-6119.

FIRE SAFETY CAUTION

Passing a fire test in a controlled laboratory setting and/or certifying or labeling a product as having a one-hour, two-hour, or any other fire resistance or protection rating and, therefore, as acceptable for use in certain fire rated assemblies/systems, does not mean that either a particular assembly/system incorporating the product, or any given piece of the product itself, will necessarily provide one-hour fire resistance, two-hour fire resistance, or any other specified fire resistance or protection in an actual fire. In the event of an actual fire, you should immediately take any and all actions necessary for your safety and the safety of others without regard for any fire rating of any product or assembly/system.