



THATCHERS ASSOCIATION OF SOUTH AFRICA DEKKERSVERENIGING VAN SUID-AFRIKA

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is not technical information confirmed with technical facts, but compiled from complaints received.

18 February 2026

GENERAL INFORMATION REGARDING THE COVERING OF A THATCHED ROOF WITH TILES, CORROGATED IRON SHEETS OR ANY OTHER COVERING

Fitting alternative materials over thatch may improve the structure aesthetically while at the same time maintaining a rustic interior. Covering a thatched roof with tiles (such as Marley concrete tiles) or corrugated sheeting, a practice known as over-sheeting or over-cladding, presents several significant technical and safety risks.

The risk is definitely not in the material – steel sheeting is inherently safe; it is rather in the application and the installation methodology and the other pre-requisites which may be identified by thorough research

SISALATION AND FIRE BLANKETS ON SPRAY LAYER

Many thatched roofs, especially in the interior, are covered with sisalation on the spray layer as a precaution against fire. In the Cape province in particular, fire blankets and drencher systems are installed in thatched roofs. When tiles or another roof covering are installed, all thatch must first be removed. But if only the spray layer is left (to maintain the thatched roof appearance), insurers still consider it a thatched roof.



VOID BETWEEN THE TWO LAYERS

Placing tiles over the thatch creates a void between the two layers. If a fire starts inside the building or roof space, this void supplies oxygen and traps heat, which can significantly fuel the fire.



Complaints are received about birds and especially bats nesting if access can be gained.



ACCELERATED DECAY AND ROT

Trapped Moisture: Over-sheeting can prevent the thatch from "breathing." If the thatch is damp or in poor condition before covering, it will continue to rot and degrade rapidly.

Ongoing Dust Issues: Problems like falling dust or debris from aging thatch will persist and become harder to address because the underlying material is no longer accessible

Sagging roof: The thatch deteriorates and sinks under the tiles over time, causing the tiles to no longer have a solid base and causing the tile roof to sag.

INCREASED FIRE AND SAFETY RISKS

Hidden Fire Spread: If a fire starts in the thatch, the external covering makes it nearly impossible to determine the fire's origin or reach the seat of the fire to extinguish it

Gas and Smoke Trapping: The covering traps toxic gases and smoke inside the building, creating a life-threatening environment for occupants and a high-risk situation for firefighters.

Ineffective Detection: Internal fire detectors may not activate quickly enough because the fire can smolder underneath the outer shell without breaking through

The tiles also create an “oven effect”, raising temperatures within the thatch and making any fire far more aggressive and difficult to control. Fire operations experience has shown that fires beneath tiled or sheeted thatch are especially dangerous and challenging to extinguish.

This method cannot be recommended as a solution from a fire safety or engineering point of view.

STRUCTURAL AND MAINTENANCE ISSUES

Weight Constraints: Concrete tiles (like Marley) are significantly heavier than thatch. Most thatch pole structures are not designed to support the weight of heavy tiles and may require extensive reinforcement or a complete rebuild of the rafters.

RESTRICTED ACCESS

Future maintenance becomes difficult and expensive, as the over-sheeting must be removed to fix leaks or structural issues in the original thatch layer.

SUSCEPTIBILITY TO DAMAGE

Lightweight corrugated sheeting can be easily damaged if walked upon during maintenance or by extreme weather like hail.

INSURANCE CONCERNS

Many insurers will still classify the roof as "thatched" because the combustible material remains. This may result in no reduction in premiums or even a denial of coverage if the over-sheeting was done without approval.

REGULATORY NON-COMPLIANCE

Such modifications often require professional fire-safety assessments and updated building plans. Failure to comply with SANS 10400 (National Building Regulations) can lead to rejected insurance claims.

The SANS 10407 (Thatched Roof Construction) specification that is part of the National Building Regulations SANS 10400 covers thatch roofs that are kept in its natural shape. The TASA, which is responsible for the protection and promotion of the Thatching Industry in South Africa, distances itself from any practice that occurs with a thatch roof after a thatch roof has been erected in accordance with SANS 10407 and signed off by an engineer.

The TASA's registered Trade Mark may only be used with respect to traditional thatch roofs built according to SANS 10407 (Thatched Roof Construction) specification.

RECOMMENDATION

If you are looking to replace thatch, a full conversion (stripping the thatch entirely and replacing it with a suitable modern material is generally safer and more cost-effective in the long term than over-sheeting.

Elzabie Meintjes

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

Thatchers Association of South Africa
Private Bag X 1015
LYTTELTON
0140

Fax	086 6409 151
Mobile	083 283 8429
Email address	admin@sa-thatchers.co.za
Website	www.sa-thatchers.co.za