

# A guide to a safe return to your property

It is important to remember that everyone's situation is different. This information is intended as general advice only for those affected by the Victorian February 2009 bushfires.

**NEW  
EDITION**

**Don't return to your bush fire-damaged home before the area is declared safe by emergency services or your Local Council**

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Bushfire Building

Advice Line

 **1300 360 320**

Building Commission (8am – 8pm Monday to Friday)



## Returning to assess your home

It is important for your own safety and the safety of your community that you don't return to your home before the all-clear is given by emergency services or your Local Council. It is equally important that when you do return home you are aware of the hazards and other issues you will face. Returning to your property can be both physically and mentally challenging so it is essential that you use caution.

Emergency services will attempt to eliminate obvious hazards, however, you are responsible for ensuring your property is safe before undertaking any activity in or around damaged structures – you must seek professional advice to do this. A hazard assessment by experts may be necessary to determine the stability of full and partially standing walls, roofs and chimneys and the safety of services. Your insurance company may also have conditions about what you can or cannot do until the loss assessor visits.

This document is a guide only and if you have any doubt about the risks involved in returning home, please seek the advice of appropriate authorities and building professionals. Many readers will have already returned to their homes and many will be familiar with the information and advice in the guide. However, it is important that all residents in bushfire affected areas can access the information and utilise it in line with their individual needs.

## Important information

The State Government has advised that it is not safe to return to live permanently on your land until the site has been cleaned up. The Victorian Bushfire Recovery and Reconstruction Authority (the VBRRRA) is currently developing a coordinated approach to the cleanup of sites.

## On-site death or injuries

If you discover a deceased or injured person call **000** immediately.

Do not attempt to move any injured person unless they are in immediate danger of death or further injury. If you must move an unconscious person, first stabilise the neck and back, then call for help immediately.

## Before you return home

There are a number of things that you should do or have with you before you return home. Use the checklist below to assist you:

- Check with emergency services and/or your Local Council that it is safe to return home
- Notify someone that you are returning home and what time you expect to be back if you are returning
- Keep a battery-powered radio with you so you can listen for emergency updates and news
- Have a battery-powered torch to inspect damaged buildings.
- You should turn the torch on outside before entering – the battery may produce a spark that could ignite leaking gas, if present
- Wear protective clothing (see page 8) and take a supply of facemasks (P2/N95)
- Take sufficient drinking water and food for consumption on site
- Call SP AusNet on **13 17 99** to check if your power is turned on or off
- Bring a mobile phone.

## On the way to your home

Watch for fallen objects; downed electrical wires; and weakened walls, bridges, roads, trees, low branches, burning debris and footpaths.

## Returning home

For safety reasons, initial access should be limited to adults.

The following is a checklist of the things that you should do when you arrive at your home.

- Immediately put on your P2 (also known as N95) facemask and all protective clothing
- Walk around the outside of your house to check for the following hazards:

HAZARDS	Yes	No
<p><b>Live electricity</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Electrical hazards may exist such as "live" powerlines that may be down. Do not enter your property until you are advised that it is safe to do so by officers from Emergency Services, utilities or Local Council or have checked with your power authority.</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Leaking gas (odour or gas hissing)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If you smell gas or hear a hissing noise, turn off the gas at your meter or isolating valve at the cylinders for LPG. If the problem persists or you cannot find the tap, move away and immediately phone your gas supplier. Do not enter any buildings.</li> <li>• Any work on gas appliances and pipes must be carried out by a Licensed Plumbing Practitioner.</li> <li>• Gas piping may have ruptured, allowing gas to escape. If this occurs immediately turn off the meter or cylinder valve and seek help. For emergencies ring <b>the National Response Centre 13 27 71</b>.</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Septic or sewerage leaking</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be aware that lids of buried septic tank systems may have collapsed or have moved (or been removed) and may be a hazard. Be careful where you walk.</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Hot embers</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be aware that hot, smouldering coals and other potentially hazardous materials may be hidden under the rubble.</li> </ul>		

HAZARDS	Yes	No
<p><b>Trees and over-hanging branches</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be aware that trees could be affected by heat and weakened. Any over-hanging branches pose a risk to you and your property.</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Major structural damage</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Buildings and other structures (e.g. water tanks and stands) may be unstable to enter or walk over. If you are unsure seek advice from your Local Council before attempting to recover items or enter the property.</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Asbestos</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If your building was built before 1988 it is highly likely that it may contain asbestos.</li> <li>• If you think buildings on your property may contain asbestos cement sheeting, take extra care when handling building wreckage.</li> <li>• Breathing asbestos fibres can cause serious illness including cancer. It is important to read the asbestos section on page 8 of this document and the Department of Human Services – 'Hazards on your property after a bushfire' fact sheet.</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Hazardous chemicals</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hazardous household materials that may be present after the fire include medicines, garden or farm chemicals, other general chemicals (e.g. cleaning products, pool chlorine etc.), metals and other residues from burnt household appliances as well as ash and dusts.</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Chemical drums</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Damage to chemical drums may lead to the unknown contents posing a threat to both personal and community safety. Your Local Council will have storage facilities. Agsafe and local councils are working to manage this.</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Burnt treated timber</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Some timber is treated with copper chrome arsenate (CCA). It is a wood preservative that is impregnated into the timber giving it a distinctive, pale green colour that fades to grey over time.</li> <li>• CCA-treated timber is commonly used in private and public recreation areas for pergolas, decking, cubby houses, claddings, posts, gates, fencing and landscaping purposes. Generally, it poses very low health risks for normal use. However, the ash from CCA-treated timber can pose a health risk.</li> </ul>		

If any of these hazards are apparent please do not proceed until you believe it is safe.

- Check your water on-site as it may be contaminated. Please do not consume any water until you have conducted the check described on page 14.
- You will need to assess the state of your home to determine if you can move back in, your home will fit into one of the following categories:
  - Requires demolishing and is unlivable (see page 18)
  - Is damaged but could be lived in (see page 20)
  - Is undamaged (see page 20)

*Please refer to the relevant pages to determine the appropriate actions for the state of your home.*

Air quality is likely to be affected by the dust from the site. Ensure you are wearing your 'P2' (N95) facemask and ensure that if you change your facemask, you replace it with a new facemask. Once the facemask is taken off it cannot be reused.

Any demolition work should be carried out by a registered demolisher or someone experienced in the field of demolition.

## Where do I take all the site rubble?

It is not recommended that you move any rubble or waste matter before you check with your Local Council and the EPA.

## After you have left the site

Once you have left your bushfire damaged home, please notify your point of contact to let them know you are safe.

## Animal welfare

In the process of cleaning up your property you may find dead or injured animals. This could be distressing, particularly if pets are involved, so you may need to seek the support of family or friends.

In the case of a dead animal, if it is a small animal, such as a pet or wildlife, you may wish to bury it on your property. However, if you are unable to do so, you should contact your Local Council to seek their advice and assistance.

In the case of larger animals, such as dead livestock and wildlife, you should contact your Local Council to seek their assistance in the disposal, which may be more appropriate at an authorised site.

In any instance of burying dead animals on your property you need to consider proximity to water courses and underground water supplies.

If you find a burnt or injured animal you should call the **Victorian Bushfire Information Line on 1800 240 667**. DPI staff will assess livestock and provide assistance in treatment, humane destruction and disposal of animals as necessary. Contact the local **Department of Primary Industries (DPI)** Animal Health Advisor on **13 61 86**.

## Check for animals in your tank water

It is important to check your water tanks and your gutters and downpipes as wildlife may have sought refuge there. It is important that animals or birds are removed in the clean up process to ensure the health of your water supply. If you find dead animals or birds in your water tank you should not drink or use the water in your home or to water stock. However, it can be used for gardens or fire fighting. You should contact your Local Council or professional tank cleaner regarding making sure your future tank water supplies are safe.

## Protective Clothing

When returning to assess your home, please remember you are returning to a very dangerous place and you should try to wear as much protective clothing as possible.

Protective clothing might be hard to find as these items could have been damaged or destroyed in the fires. Check at Community Services Hubs in your area. However, personal safety is very important and can reduce any more injuries or fatalities occurring.

### Protective Clothing

- Wear sturdy footwear (steel capped work shoes if possible) and heavy duty work gloves to protect you from broken glass, standing on sharp objects or getting burnt by smouldering coals
- Wear protective overalls (and/or long sleeves and trousers). If convenient, wear disposable coveralls and throw them out with the site waste after use. Any non-disposable clothing (including shoes) should be cleaned/launched before reuse
- Wear safety goggles or protective glasses.

## Wearing a facemask

- Special facemasks (called 'P2' or 'N95') should be worn to filter out fine particles, including asbestos fibres. They are available at most hardware stores 'P2' (N95). Facemasks filter out a slightly higher proportion of fine particles than 'P1'
- 'P2' (N95) facemasks are a recommended minimum if you are in the vicinity of a bush fire affected home.
- Ordinary paper dust facemasks, handkerchiefs or bandannas do not filter out fine ash or dusts or any asbestos fibres that may remain. Therefore they are generally not very useful in protecting your lungs
- Wearing a facemask can make it harder for you to breathe normally. If you have a pre-existing heart or lung condition seek your doctor's advice before using one
- It is also important to note that these types of facemasks are much less effective if there is a poor seal around the face and mouth. Men with beards can have difficulty getting a good seal.

## Asbestos hazards

- Buildings built before 1988 may contain asbestos cement (or 'AC') sheeting in walls, roofs, floor, underlays, eaves, chimney flues or in the backing of some vinyl floor tiles. These sheeting materials are not a health risk unless they are cut up, broken up or ground, in which case they may release asbestos fibres
- During a bushfire, the amount of asbestos fibres released into the air is likely to be low
- After a bushfire, fibres may become airborne when excavation and cleanup works disturb the asbestos clumps. If a large amount of asbestos material (e.g. house or shed) requires demolition and removal, a licensed asbestos removalist should be engaged. The waste must be transported in an EPA-approved vehicle and taken to an EPA-approved landfill for disposal

- If you are present during cleanup works wear a 'P2' (N95) facemask and protective clothing and gloves.
- If asbestos-containing material on your site is not burnt, and limited to only a few AC sheets, wrap it securely in two layers of heavy duty plastic (or double bagged in two plastic bags for small fragments) and take to a landfill approved by Council or the **Victorian Environmental Protection Authority (EPA), phone (03) 9695 2722**.
- For General Enquiries contact **WorkSafe Victoria Advisory Service on (03) 9641 1444 or 1800 136 089 (toll free)**. Otherwise email [info@worksafe.vic.gov.au](mailto:info@worksafe.vic.gov.au)
- For information about safe handling of building rubble or ash, contact **WorkSafe Victoria on 1800 136 089 (toll free)**.

## Removal of chemicals and hazardous materials

Information kits are available at Community Services Hubs, selected public meetings and through your Local Council relating to the removal of chemicals and hazardous materials.

Local Council	Contact number	Local Council	Contact number
Alpine Shire Council	(03) 5755 0555	Macedon Ranges Shire Council	(03) 5422 0333
Baw Baw Shire Council	(03) 5624 2411	Mansfield Shire Council	(03) 5775 8555
Benalla Rural City Council	(03) 5760 2600	Mitchell Shire Council	(03) 5734 6200
City of Greater Bendigo Council	(03) 5434 6000	Mount Alexander Shire Council	(03) 5471 1700
Cardinia Shire Council	1300 787 624	Murrindindi Shire Council	(03) 5772 0333
City of Casey Council	(03) 9705 5200	Nillumbik Shire Council	(03) 9433 3111
Corangamite Shire Council	(03) 5593 7100	Greater Shepparton City Council	(03) 5832 9700
Hindmarsh Shire Council	(03) 5391 1811	Southern Grampians Shire Council	(03) 5573 0444
Horsham City Rural Council	(03) 5382 9794	Towong Shire Council	(02) 6071 5100
Indigo Shire Council	(03) 5728 8000	Rural City of Wangaratta Council	(03) 5722 0888
Knox City Council	(03) 9298 8000	Wellington Shire Council	1300 366 244
Latrobe City Council	1300 367 700	City of Whittlesea Council	(03) 9217 2170
		Yarra Ranges Shire Council	1300 368 333

Contact **WorkSafe Victoria** for general enquiries, Advisory Service on **(03) 9641 1444 or 1800 136 089 (toll free)**. Otherwise email [info@worksafe.vic.gov.au](mailto:info@worksafe.vic.gov.au)

For general health information about asbestos, copper chrome arsenate (CCA) or other chemicals, contact the Environmental Health Unit of the **Department of Human Services (DHS) on 1300 761 874**.

For information about transport and disposal of hazardous materials (e.g. asbestos) contact the **Victorian EPA (03) 9695 2722**.

For information about safe handling of building rubble or ash, contact **WorkSafe Victoria on 1800 136 089 (toll free)**.

## Copper Chrome Arsenate (CCA) treated timber

"CCA" stands for copper chrome arsenate. It is a wood preservative that is fixed into the timber giving it a distinctive, pale green colour that fades to grey over time.

CCA-treated timber is commonly used in private and public recreation areas for pergolas, decking, cubby houses, claddings, posts, gates, fencing and landscaping purposes. Generally, it poses very low health risks for normal use.

### What happens to CCA-treated timber when it is burnt?

If you know that you had structures made from CCA-treated timber, when cleaning up the ash, remember:

- The remaining ash and char can contain up to 10% (by weight) arsenic, copper and chromium. This ash may pose a health hazard if swallowed by young children or grazing animals
- It is not possible to tell if ash contains arsenic just by looking at it. If you had CCA treated timber structures before the fire you should assume the ash will contain arsenic, chromium and copper.

### CCA ash precautions for young children and farm animals

Young children are more likely to put the ash in their mouths, and swallowing only a few grams of ash is harmful. Farm animals may also lick or swallow the salty ash residue. Children, pets and farm animals should be kept away from CCA ash until it is cleaned up.

**Poisons Information is available 24 hours a day seven days a week on 13 11 26.**

### Collection and disposal of CCA ash

- **CCA ash should be collected** and taken to an EPA-approved landfill site for disposal
- **Do NOT bury CCA ash** or other building waste on your property. This practice could contaminate land or water and potentially expose your family, animals and the broader community later.

### Health Symptoms

- Eating CCA ash can cause nausea and/or vomiting, diarrhoea and/or a "pins and needles" feeling in the skin
- If you have or anyone in your family has these symptoms see your doctor as soon as possible or go to the nearest hospital.

### Further CCA ash information

For information about:

- **DHS Environmental Health Unit on 1300 761 874.**
- Transport and disposal of CCA ash – contact the **Environment Protection Authority (EPA) on (03) 9695 2722.**
- Domestic garbage requirements and landfill locations - contact your Local Council.
- CCA and farm animal health – contact the local **Department of Primary Industries (DPI) Animal Health Advisor on 13 61 86.**

## General Waste Management

For replacement of garbage and recycling bins contact your Local Council.

It is recommended that you do not move any non-household rubbish, rubble or waste until you have checked with your Local Council on the volume of waste to be sent to landfill stations. If you require temporary bins for this transportation, again contact your Local Council. Scrap metal, iron, concrete and bricks should be separated as some materials can be recycled.

For general health information about asbestos, CCA or other chemicals, contact the Environmental Health Unit of the **Department of Human Services (DHS) on 1300 761 874.**

For information about transport and disposal of hazardous materials (e.g. asbestos) contact the **Victorian EPA (03) 9695 2722.**

For information about safe handling of building rubble or ash, as part of your employment, contact **WorkSafe Victoria on 1800 136 089 (toll free).**

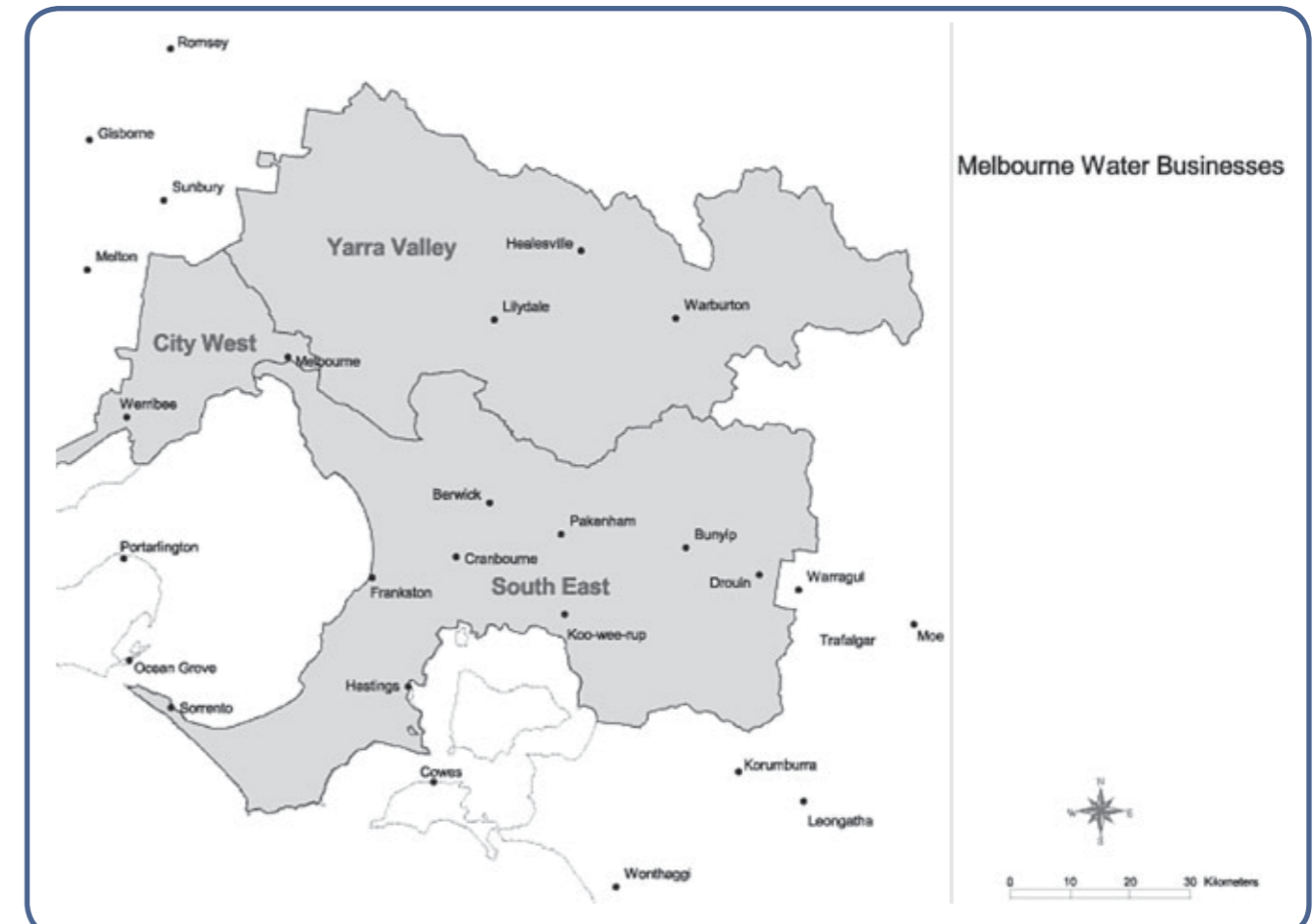
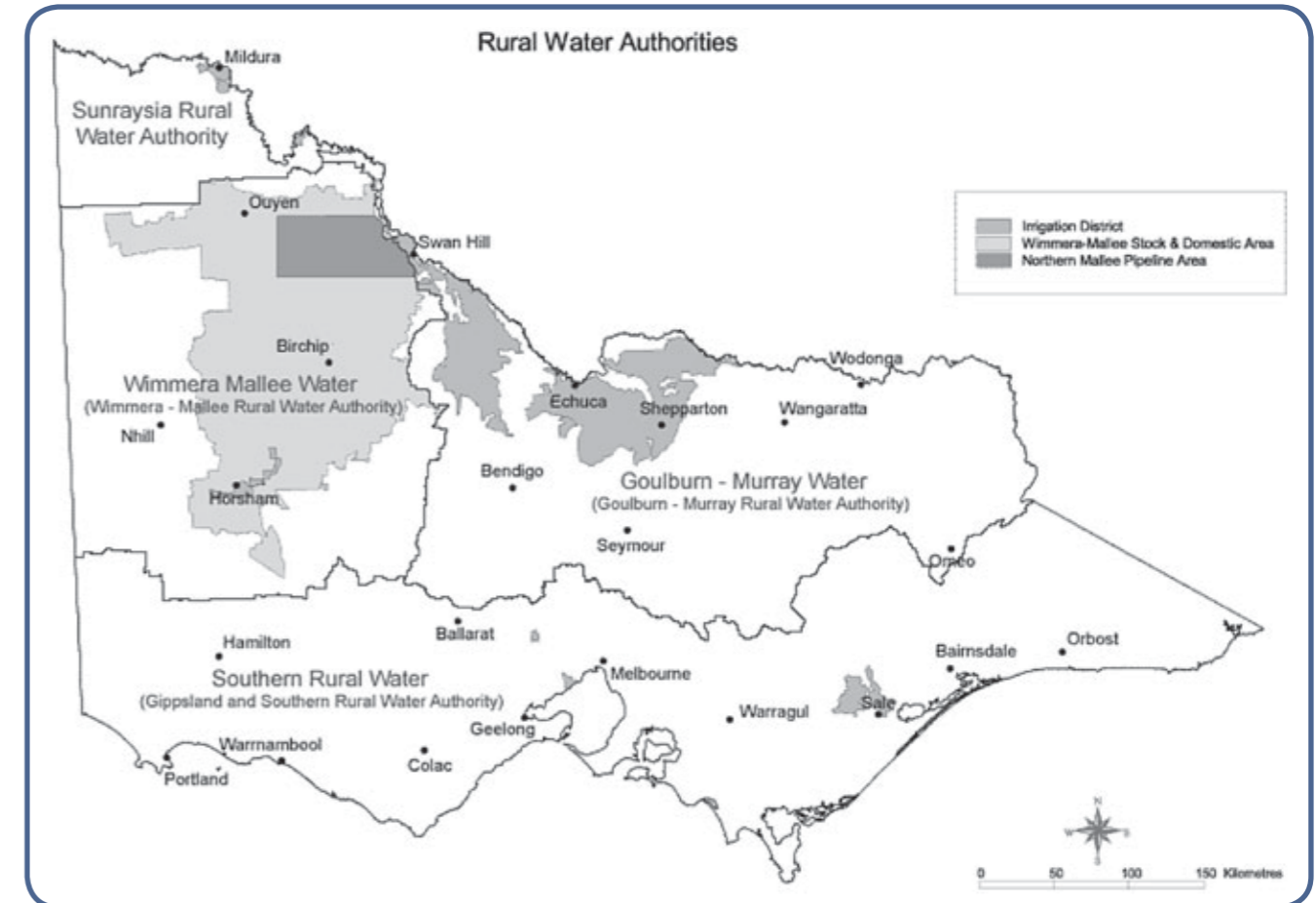
**The VBRRRA will provide updates when coordinated cleanup work is undertaken.**

# Mains water supply

Bushfires can impact on drinking water supply and quality. You are advised to contact your local water authority regarding the quality of the water.

To find out if your mains water supply is safe to drink contact your local water authority. If unknown, check the map to identify local water authority.

Business	Customer Service	Telephone
Barwon Water	1300 656 007	
Gippsland Water		5177 4600
Central Highlands Water		5320 3100
Coliban Water	1300 363 200	
East Gippsland Water		5150 4444
Goulburn Valley Water	1800 454 500	5832 0445
Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water		5382 4611
Lower Murray Water		5051 3400
North East Water	1300 361 622	(02) 6022 0555
South Gippsland Water		5682 0444
Wannon Water	1300 926 666	
Western Water	1300 650 425	
Westernport Water	1300 720 711	5956 4100
Melbourne Water	13 1722	9235 7100
City West Water	13 1691	9313 8422
South East Water	13 1694	9552 3000
Yarra Valley Water	13 1721	
Southern Rural Water	1300 139 510	5139 3100
Goulburn - Murray Water	1800 013 357	5833 5500
Falls Creek Resort Management		5758 1200
Lake Mountain Management Board		5957 7222
Mt Buller & Mt Stirling Management Board		5777 6077
Mt Baw Baw Management Board	1300 651 136	5165 1136
Mt Hotham Resort Management Board		5759 3550
Parks Victoria	13 1963	8627 4699



## Water tanks

You will need to check the quality of your tank water. Wildlife may have sought refuge in the tank during the fire and fire retardants may have also made their way into your water supply from aerial spraying and wind drift.

### How do I know if my tank water is contaminated after a bushfire?

The best guide is your knowledge of what your tank water usually looks and smells like.

- If the water smells unusual, or is cloudy, has an unusual colour or contains particles, assume it is contaminated. You should seek an alternative supply of water for drinking, cooking and teeth cleaning
- If in doubt, assume the tank water is contaminated
- Boiling the water will not remove contamination from ash and debris
- Water that is not suitable to drink may still be used for other purposes, like fire fighting or watering the garden.

### I haven't got power but still have the tank and pressure pump.

Firstly you need to ensure/test water quality (refer to previous question). Contact **Energy Safe Victoria, on (03) 9203 9700 or 1800 800 158**, to ensure the electrical safety of the pump and your safety. For health information about the quality of your water in the tank after a fire, contact the Environmental Health Unit, **Department of Human Services on 1300 761 874**.

### When can I start using my rainwater tank again for drinking water?

- When it is safe to do so, you should clean the ash and debris from your roof and gutters. If it rains prior to cleaning, you should ensure that the first flush of rainwater is not collected in your tank by disconnecting the tank or using a first flush diverter. Only do this if you are sure your building is structurally sound (see 'Assessing the state of your home' on page 18)
- Check the structural soundness of the tank
- Dead birds or other small animals found in gutters should be removed using gloves and put in a plastic bag for disposal
- DO NOT ENTER A TANK (confined space)
- A tank cleaning professional should be engaged to clean the tank
- Contact a Licensed Plumbing Practitioner for reconnection and commissioning of your system. Also contact **Energy Safe Victoria on (03) 9203 9700** (or a suitably qualified electrician) to ensure the electrical safety of the pump.

For further health information about the quality of your rainwater tank after a fire, contact the Environmental Health Unit, **Department of Human Services on 1300 761 874**.

## Catchment areas

Debris and ash will wash into creeks and streams. Therefore water from creeks or streams will not be suitable for drinking.

## Septic tanks/grey water treatment plants

### Can I use my septic tank?

A number of treatment plants rely on computer operated systems that may have been damaged. These will need to be checked by a Licensed Plumbing Practitioner. Other treatment systems that are not computerised may need to be checked also for operational issues (again by a Licensed Plumbing Practitioner and the local environmental health officer).

#### Safety issues that need to be checked:

- Open covers/pits
- Ruptured leaking systems (plumbing pipe work)
- Damaged/exposed plumbing pipe work that may need capping/sealing off.

**Note: This will also apply to below ground rainwater tanks.**

The EPA approves the type of onsite systems that may be installed in Victoria, via a 'certificate of approval system'.

Local government operates a permit system, which controls the installation, maintenance and monitoring of individual units.

Councils issue the permit generally as part of any planning approval required. Seek advice from your council to clarify what permits are required.

Council's Environment Health Officer is able to provide advice about appropriate systems.

### My toilet appears to be blocked. What should I do?

Contact a Licensed Plumbing Practitioner to check the installation.

### What do I need to do to my septic tank prior to using it?

Contact a Licensed Plumbing Practitioner to check the installation.

### Can I empty my portable toilet into my septic tank?

Yes.

### Can I use my water and sewage systems?

If pipes are damaged, turn off the main water valve. Check with local authorities before using any water; the water could be contaminated. Pump out wells and have the water tested by authorities before drinking. Do not flush toilets until you know that sewage lines are intact.



## Gas

For general enquiries about reticulated gas supply (piped gas from the mains gas supply) connection and/or disconnection of your gas you need to contact your retailer.

Retailer	Contact number
Origin	132 461
AGL	132 692
TruEnergy	133 466
Red Energy	131 806
Simply Energy	138 808
Vic Electricity	1300 136 749

For all enquiries about LPG gas supply, connection and/or disconnection, contact your retailer.

Retailer	Contact number
AGL (LPG)	132 692
ELGAS (LPG)	131 161
Kleenheat (LPG)	132 180

It is recommended that you contact a Licensed Plumbing Practitioner to check the installation and recommissioning of any existing appliances.

Alternatively for emergency gas services, such as gas leaks, contact **the National Response Centre on 13 27 71**.

### What do I do if I smell gas?

Contact the National Response Centre on 13 27 71.

If the source is from LPG bottles, isolate by turning off valves. If it is mains gas, isolate the gas supply at meter.

### I have got a disconnected LPG cylinder. I am unsure what to do with it?

Contact the retailer/supplier or a Licensed Plumbing Practitioner.

### I turned my cylinder off when the fire was approaching. Can I turn it back on?

Prior to turning the cylinder back on, contact your retailer/supplier and engage a Licensed Plumbing Practitioner to check the integrity of the installation.

### My gas meter has been damaged or removed. What should I do?

Contact your gas retailer/supplier or a Licensed Plumbing Practitioner.

### My gas meter was turned off during the fire. What should I do?

Do not turn your gas meter on. Ring your supplier. Then engage a Licensed Plumbing Practitioner to test the installation and recommission the appliance.

### How do I know if my appliances (stove, water heater etc) are suitable for use?

We recommend you contact a Licensed Plumbing Practitioner to check the installation and commission the appliances.

## Heating and Cooling

Evaporative coolers will require maintenance on the pads/filters and pan to remove any debris/cinders etc (other water appliances with filters should also be cleaned).

Split systems and heating systems may need to be inspected or recommissioned by a Licensed Plumbing Practitioner.

## Electricity

Electricity retailers/suppliers are working around the clock in an effort to restore power to homes which lost electricity because of the bushfires. Residents are encouraged to keep out of electricity easements and to use a registered electrician if connecting a generator.

It's very important for people to note that if they are in fire-affected areas they need to be prepared to be without power for up to several weeks, as the damage to electricity infrastructure is anticipated to be very significant.

If your meter box and/or supply line from the street or residence has sustained damage, you will need to contact a registered electrician and your retailer to undertake repairs before power can be reconnected.

For further information or an emergency call **SP AusNet Faults Line directly on 13 17 99**.

## Air Quality

EPA will be temporarily establishing additional air quality monitoring facilities in areas likely to have prolonged smoke impacts. This will assist in monitoring impacts from fires on local communities. For more information call the **Victorian EPA Victoria on (03) 9695 2722**.

## I cannot determine my home site boundary anymore

Prior to any re-building works or replacement of fencing it is important that title boundaries of properties be re-established and marked on the ground by a licensed land surveyor.

The Office of Surveyor General Victoria in partnership with the office of Spatial Information Infrastructure, the Association of Consulting Surveyors Victoria (ACSV), Melbourne University and RMIT University are forming a Surveying Task Force to develop and enact a plan to ensure that the property entitlements of all landowners are protected.

The initial tasks will involve setting up new GPS base stations, locating and flagging all existing survey control marks within the burnt areas and undertaking surveys to connect these marks to property boundaries.

To ensure that the surviving survey marks are protected and preserved, these tasks need to be done prior to mass clearing works by heavy machinery. To ensure that property boundaries are accurately re-established, it is critical that as many survey control marks as possible remain intact and undisturbed.

For further information contact the **Office of Surveyor General Victoria on 8636 2525** or the **ACSV office on 9326 9700**.

## Assessing the state of your home

You will need to have the state of your property assessed, taking into consideration the professional advice about what needs to be done to existing structures. While existing structures may appear to be habitable, an inspection report may need to be carried out by the Municipal Building Surveyor or building inspector. The inspection report will detail if the building is structurally sound and whether it is safe to be occupied. The following scenarios guide you through the three different scenarios you are likely to face.

### Scenario A: Does my house need to be demolished?

#### Demolishing your house

If your house has been completely destroyed or is unsalvageable you need to ensure you follow the correct process, so you can successfully make an insurance claim and, more importantly, for your own safety. Hidden in the rubble of your house could be dangerous chemicals, heavy metals, broken glass, charred and twisted metal...etc.

The following steps are related to the demolition of buildings and structures:

### Step One – Insurance and inspection

#### Have you contacted your insurance company?

Your insurance company may have a process that will need to be followed to ensure your claims can be processed appropriately.

#### Has your property been inspected?

If not, you may need to organise for an inspection to be carried out by your local Council's Municipal Building Surveyor or using a registered building surveyor or inspector organised by the MBS to determine what action needs to be taken.

### Step Two – action and reporting

#### What type of action has been determined by the building surveyor?

##### Action A – Emergency Order – demolish \*

If structures are on the property which are a danger to the safety of the occupants need to be demolished and/or made safe, an emergency order will be issued by the Municipal Building Surveyor only.

##### Action B – Building Order to Demolish

A building order to demolish may be issued by your Local Council's Municipal Building Surveyor or a registered building surveyor where appointed and could include requests for the removal of rubble (dwelling or buildings) from site that have been destroyed by the fires.

##### Action C – Inspection Report \*

A site inspection may identify that the buildings on site may be restored or partially demolished. The inspection report can be carried out by a Municipal Building Surveyor or registered building surveyor.

*\* Any emergency orders, building orders or inspection reports must be forwarded to your insurance company before any action is taken on-site.*

### Step Three – demolishing buildings (if needed)

#### Who can do demolition work?

It is recommended that a registered demolisher carries out demolition works or a suitably experienced Registered Building Practitioner.

#### Can I remove the rubble myself?

It is recommended that if the demolition works is extensive and involves structural elements, a suitably experienced Registered Building Practitioner be used.

## Scenario B: My house is damaged but could be lived in

### Structures that have been damaged may pose a safety risk

A site inspection may identify that the buildings on site can be restored or partially demolished. The inspection and report can be carried out by either a suitably registered structural engineer, registered building surveyor, registered building inspector, registered architect or a Registered Building Practitioner who has the suitable experience.

## Scenario C: My house is habitable and I want to move back in

If your house hasn't been fire affected but is located in a fire affected area you should ensure buildings are safe to occupy. You will also need to get all your basic utilities reconnected. However, this might take some time as powerlines and water pipelines could be destroyed.

A check should be made by a suitably qualified person (e.g. electrician or Licensed Plumbing Practitioner) that services are still safe to use.

There could also be hazardous materials on-site for the safe removal of these please consult the 'Hazardous Materials' section of this document on page 9.

### Water supply

Water supplies and water quality remain largely unaffected to date for most towns across the State. However, bushfires sometimes impact on drinking water supply or quality. In all cases, residents are advised to contact their local water authority for further information see list on page 12.

### Postal Services

Australia Post will hold the mail for all addresses in fire affected areas and are asking that people who have lost their home to visit their closest post office to fill in a redirection form (free of charge) for their mail. **Australia Post can be contacted on 13 13 18.**

### Other General Enquiries

For any other enquiries, contact your Local Council.

Local Council	Contact number
Alpine Shire Council	(03) 5755 0555
Baw Baw Shire Council	(03) 5624 2411
Benalla Rural City Council	(03) 5760 2600
City of Greater Bendigo Council	(03) 5434 6000
Cardinia Shire Council	1300 787 624
City of Casey Council	(03) 9705 5200
Corangamite Shire Council	(03) 5593 7100
Hindmarsh Shire Council	(03) 5391 1811
Horsham City Rural Council	(03) 5382 9794
Indigo Shire Council	(03) 5728 8000
Knox City Council	(03) 9298 8000
Latrobe City Council	1300 367 700
Macedon Ranges Shire Council	(03) 5422 0333
Mansfield Shire Council	(03) 5775 8555
Mitchell Shire Council	(03) 5734 6200
Mount Alexander Shire Council	(03) 5471 1700
Murrindindi Shire Council	(03) 5772 0333
Nillumbik Shire Council	(03) 9433 3111
Greater Shepparton City Council	(03) 5832 9700
Southern Grampians Shire Council	(03) 5573 0444
Towong Shire Council	(02) 6071 5100
Rural City of Wangaratta Council	(03) 5722 0888
Wellington Shire Council	1300 366 244
City of Whittlesea Council	(03) 9217 2170
Yarra Ranges Shire Council	1300 368 333

For numbers not listed here please go to: [www.mav.asn.au](http://www.mav.asn.au)

## Temporary Housing

Temporary housing on your fire damaged property is an option you may consider while you rebuild or partially rebuild your home. However, obtaining council permission and meeting certain requirements applies.

A temporary building is defined as:

- A building that is easily transportable and able to be removed from site within 24 hours
- Does not have permanent footings
- Will only be used for a period of six – 12 months maximum, then it must be removed from the site
- Must contain or have access to:
  - Toilet facilities
  - Washing and bathing facilities
  - Food preparation
- Must have adequate natural light and sufficient ventilation
- Must have safe access to the building by way of steps or a ramp
- Operating smoke alarms
- Structurally adequate for a period of 12 months.

It is important to understand that your temporary home will need to be removed when you occupy your newly built home on your site, or within 12 months. If this is not possible, you should discuss the situation with your Municipal Building Surveyor.

In most cases building permits are not required for buildings classified as temporary housing.

You must discuss all temporary housing arrangements with your council's local laws department, Municipal Building Surveyor and the environmental health officer.

## Notes

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# Building permits

Almost all building work will require a building permit to be issued by a registered building surveyor.

An application for a building permit can be made to a Municipal Building Surveyor who works at your council, or a private building surveyor. To search for a building surveyor in your area visit [www.buildingcommission.com.au](http://www.buildingcommission.com.au)

Your building surveyor will issue your building permit which ensures:

- your builder is registered and carries the required insurance
- the paperwork is in place to construct your home
- a review of the building documentation occurs
- key stages of the work are independently inspected.

The Building Commission will reimburse the building permit levy paid by residents of the bushfires who are rebuilding or partially rebuilding, if the levy is NOT paid by an insurer.

## How do I find a Registered Building Practitioner or Registered/Licensed Plumbing Practitioner who can help re-build my home?

To find a Registered Building Practitioner (such as a builder, building surveyor, building inspector, designer, demolisher) or a Licensed or Registered Plumbing Practitioner, **phone 1300 360 320** or visit [www.buildingcommission.com.au](http://www.buildingcommission.com.au) or [www.pic.vic.gov.au](http://www.pic.vic.gov.au)

# Bushfire Building Advice Line

 **1300 360 320**

**Building Commission (8am – 8pm Monday to Friday)**