

# Clearing of native vegetation affected by bushfires

## General safety after fires

People and visitors to fire affected areas need to be vigilant about hazards not only on their property but also along public and private roads, in parks and forests, and around public places such as sporting and camping grounds.

Do not enter your property until you are advised that it is safe to do so by officers from emergency services, utilities or your local council.

When entering your property be aware of dangers including:

- Live powerlines
- Unstable buildings or structures
- Smouldering coals
- Household, garden, or farm chemicals
- **Dangerous trees or limbs**

## Bushfire and native vegetation

Native vegetation is important to Victoria and is protected by law. However the exceptional circumstances of the recent bushfire emergency mean special exemptions for clearing have been put in place as part of the 2009 bushfire recovery effort.

The new rules apply to all planning schemes and overlays, except for areas covered by a Heritage, Floodway, Land Subject to Inundation, Special Building or Environmental Audit Overlay where other approvals are required. For more information, please contact your local Council.

## Bushfire recovery amendment 2009

A planning permit is not required for activities *directly* associated with bushfire recovery, including site clean-up and safety, demolition and temporary accommodation. Please note that this amendment does not change the requirement for a planning permit to rebuild your house.

The amendment relates to the clearing of all native vegetation including trees, shrubs, grasses, leaves, twigs and fallen logs. This means, for example, that you can remove burnt or unburnt vegetation to gain access to your property for the removal of demolition rubble.

Under the amendment, native vegetation can be removed, destroyed or lopped:

- to make a site safe
- to gain access to a site
- to remove building and demolition rubble from a property
- to enable emergency and bushfire recovery works to be undertaken by a municipality, the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority, utility service provider or other public authority.

The Bushfire Recovery exemptions apply until 31 March 2010.

## What if I want to remove native vegetation that is not covered by the bushfire recovery exemption?

You can remove native vegetation for a number of other reasons without permission. If you need to remove native vegetation to prepare your house for bushfires, please refer to the fact sheet; *Clearing of Native Vegetation to Prepare for Bushfires*.

If you need to remove native vegetation for reasons other than fire protection or bushfire recovery, you should contact your DSE office or local council as you may need permission to remove it.

## Trimming or removing native vegetation after bushfires

### *What about dangerous trees?*

You can remove trees if they pose a risk of personal injury or damage to your property. This means, for example, if you have a burnt-out tree that is overhanging your house or temporary accommodation you can arrange to have it removed.

***I think I have a dangerous tree on my property that was burnt by a bushfire.***

***Who do I contact?***

Property owners should not undertake clearing of dangerous trees. Instead, licensed contractors will remove trees on private properties.

This arrangement is part of a joint Victorian and Commonwealth demolition program, which is expected to run for approximately six months.

Under the demolition program:

- The Coroner needs to approve access for you to your property.
- Site assessment will be undertaken for risk and removal of risks, such as burnt gas bottles, dangerous trees and unstable chimneys.
- You will be given a final opportunity to recover any possessions.
- Clearance of trees and other hazards will then be done by licensed contractors.

Please contact your local council or community service hub to arrange clearing of your property, including the removal of dangerous trees.

***Who do I contact about dangerous trees on public land adjoining my property (e.g. state forest, national park, crown land reserve, road reserve)?***

Please contact the local office of the public land management agency responsible for the land (e.g. Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE), Parks Victoria (PV) or Vic Roads). If you don't know who the public land manager is, contact your local council or community service hub who will be able to direct you to the appropriate public land management agency's local office.

***How do I tell if a tree is dangerous?***

The Government and the contractors will be undertaking assessment of dangerous trees in bushfire-affected areas, as part of the demolition program (see above). Contractors will be deciding if trees are dangerous and need to be removed in consultation with DSE and your local council.

***Can I remove native vegetation to rebuild a fence?***

Yes, you can remove native vegetation to a maximum width of 4 metres to rebuild either a boundary (includes Crown Land Boundary) or internal fence. Please refer to the fact sheet; *Repair of Fences Damaged by Bushfire or Construction of Control Lines*.

**If in doubt, please check with your local Council or DSE office *prior to* clearing native vegetation.**

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