

Protecting your home against bushfires — clearing of native vegetation

Native vegetation is important to Victoria and is protected by law. Under planning laws, a permit is required to remove, destroy or lop native vegetation. However, there are exemptions which allow residents to clear native vegetation in order to protect their homes and properties. Property owners who undertake bushfire prevention works should be aware there are guidelines on the amount of vegetation that can be removed.

Please note that the exemptions described below relate to planning permits for native vegetation removal, *only*. You may require other approvals to carry out works. For example, you may require a 'permit to burn' from the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) or the Country Fire Authority (CFA) to conduct fuel reduction burning. If in doubt, please check with your local Council.

If your property is covered by an overlay

For land covered by an Environmental Significance, Vegetation Protection or Significant Landscape Overlay, the same exemptions *generally* apply. However, there are some differences. If your property is affected by one of these overlays, please check with your local Council.

Before a Bushfire —Trimming or removing native vegetation for bushfire prevention

Can I remove native vegetation around my house without a permit?

You can remove the branch of a tree if it is overhanging the roof of your house.

You can also reduce fuel up to 30 metres around your house without further approval. You cannot remove trees under this exemption, however, up to 50% of native shrubs may be removed and native grasses can be cut to 10 cm. This exemption is based on fire research which has shown that fine fuels such as grasses, shrubs and twigs, contribute the most to the heat and spread of wildfire.

You can also prepare a plan that may allow you to further reduce fuel up to 95 metres from your house for fire protection purposes. The plan needs to be submitted to DSE for approval. See Table 1 and Figure 1 for general distances allowable under a plan. Please note that the maximum distance allowable under an environmental overlay (listed earlier) is 30 metres. Your local Council will be able to provide you with more information.

There are other exemptions that apply to buildings. For instance, you are allowed to remove native vegetation within 10 metres of an existing building (approved prior to 15 September 2008) for maintenance purposes.

If in doubt, contact your local Council for more information.

What are the rules for clearing dangerous trees?

Native vegetation can be removed, destroyed or lopped if it presents an immediate risk of personal injury or damage to property. However, only that part of vegetation which presents the immediate risk can be removed, destroyed or lopped. If the whole tree is presenting the risk, it may be removed. Public authorities or municipal councils can also remove native vegetation to create an emergency access or to enable emergency works.

Can I build a firebreak without a permit?

Yes, you can remove native vegetation to create a fuel break or fire fighting access track up to 6 metres wide.

What if I am issued with a fire prevention notice?

You can remove native vegetation without a permit to comply with a *fire prevention notice* issued by Country Fire Authority (CFA) or Department of Sustainability & Environment (DSE). You can also remove native vegetation without a permit for fire fighting measures.

Do I need a DSE or CFA permit to carry out fuel reduction burning on my property?

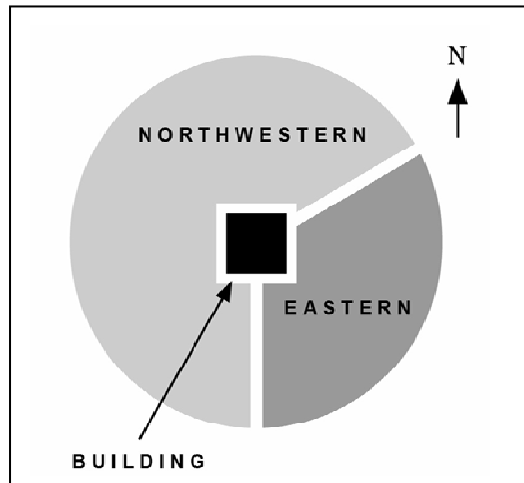
Yes. You should also be aware of fire restrictions in your area before lighting any fire. If in doubt, please check with your local Council.

Table 1

Maximum distance from a building used for accommodation within which native vegetation (other than trees) may be removed, destroyed or lopped without a permit:

Vegetation Categories	Upslope or flat ground	Upslope or flat ground	Down slope	Down slope
	Northwest zone	Eastern zone	Northwest zone	Eastern zone
Shrub and heath - Shrubs up to 6 metres in height above ground level. It may include some trees.	80 metres	40 metres	80 metres	45 metres
Medium forest - Forest between 10 metres and 30 metres in height above ground level, with a tree canopy cover of more than 30 percent. It may include shrubs and grassy understorey.	60 metres	30 metres	90 metres	50 metres
Tall forest - Forest more than 30 metres in height above ground level, with a tree canopy cover of more than 30 percent. It may include shrubs and grassy understorey.	80 metres	40 metres	95 metres	50 metres

Figure 1



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

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