

Bushfire recovery hazards

Edition 1 – January 2020

Bushfires remain a threat to people's health and safety even after the flames have passed or been extinguished. People engaged in recovery work must be aware of the wide range of hazards and risks to their health and safety during recovery work and must enter a bushfire recovery area only when a thorough assessment has identified all hazards and risks. It is important to consider hazards and risks that would not normally exist on the site.

Recovery workers must use appropriate plant and wear appropriate personal protective equipment.

Bushfire recovery hazards

High risk

Hazard	Risk	Location	What to do
Gas cylinders and gas bullet tanks, including compressed gases and liquid gases such as welding gases, medical oxygen, carbon dioxide or beer gas, nitrogen, argon, helium, air, LPG, acetylene, sulphur dioxide, chlorine, ammonia	Explosion, flammable gas, oxidising gas, toxic gas	Barbecues, petrol stations, shops, houses, farms, medical and dental clinics, workshops including mines and quarries	<p>For emergencies contact 000 for fire services.</p> <p>Do not use cylinders, vessels or bullets that have been burnt or affected by fire. Contact your gas supplier for further advice.</p> <p>Consider any concealed cylinders which may be present in your environment, for example, in fridges or buried under debris.</p> <p>Cylinders containing flammable gases such as acetylene that are hot to touch should be considered extremely dangerous. Evacuate area and contact 000.</p> <p>If safe to do so, move cylinders to well-ventilated area and ensure the cylinders are restrained in an upright position. Keep cylinders cool by spraying with water or placing in a large water source, for example, a dam.</p> <p>Note: Some cylinders, vessels and tanks will vent when exposed to high heat generated during fire. This is a safety feature to reduce pressure. If cylinders, vessels and tanks are in a well-ventilated area away from people, leave them to vent and evacuate the area.</p> <p>Gas company contact numbers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elgas 131 161 or 1800 819 783 for emergencies • Kleenheat 132 180 or 131 351 for electricity emergencies, 131 352 for natural gas emergencies or 1800 093 336 for LPG cylinders, tanks and reticulated gas network emergencies • Origin Energy 133 574 • Supagas 137 872 or 1300 275 021 for emergencies in Victoria • United LPG 03 9413 1400 • Air Liquide 03 9697 9888 or 1300 360 202 for healthcare/medical oxygen emergencies and 1800 812 588 for transport and industrial emergencies • BOC 131 262 or 1800 653 572 for emergencies
Explosives facilities and magazines, power gel, detonators, flares, ammunition, det cord, fireworks, ammonium nitrate-based explosives	Explosion	Dedicated storage facilities, magazines, quarries, mines, farms, industrial facilities, shops	If the storage facility has been affected by fire, evacuate to a safe distance and contact WorkSafe Advisory on 1800 136 089.

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Hazard	Risk	Location	What to do
Live electricity, for example, powerlines	Electrocution, electric shock	Fire-damaged property	<p>Do not enter property unless emergency service officers, power authorities or the local council have advised that it is safe to do so. If you discover damaged powerlines, Energy Services Victoria recommends staying more than 10 metres clear and calling 000 if lives are in danger.</p> <p>To report damage to powerlines:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• AusNet Services (Electricity) 131 799 www.ausnetservices.com.au• Citipower 131 280 www.powercor.com.au• Essential Energy 132 080 www.essentialenergy.com.au• Jemena 1300 131 871 www.jemena.com.au• Powercor 132 412 www.powercor.com.au• United Energy 132 099 www.uemg.com.au <p>The Australian Energy Regulator and Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning have information about electricity distributors in Victoria.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Australian Energy Regulator www.aer.gov.au/consumers/who-is-my-distributor/victoria• Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning www.energy.vic.gov.au/electricity/electricity-distributors <p>Energy Safe Victoria has information about bushfire and powerline safety.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Energy Safe Victoria 1800 800 922 www.esv.vic.gov.au/safety-education/bushfire-and-powerline-safety

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Hazard	Risk	Location	What to do
Reticulated (piped) gas leakage	Explosion Flammable gas	Fire-damaged property with piped gas from the mains gas supply	<p>Turn gas off at the meter if there is safe access. If this is not possible move upwind and away from the area and immediately call 000.</p> <p>Contact a licensed plumber to check the installation.</p> <p>To report gas leaks or other emergencies, call your gas provider:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • AusNet Services 136 707 www.ausnetservices.com.au • Australian Gas Networks Limited 1800 676 300 www.australiangasnetworks.com.au • Multinet Gas 132 691 www.multinetgas.com.au <p>The Australian Energy Regulator has information about gas distributors in Victoria.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Australian Energy Regulator www.aer.gov.au/consumers/who-is-my-distributor/victoria <p>Energy Safe Victoria has information about bushfire and gas safety.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energy Safe Victoria 1800 800 158 www.esv.vic.gov.au/safety-education/gas-safety-outdoors/gas-safety-and-your-bushfire-plan
<p>Unstable trees and over hanging branches.</p> <p>Many trees already weakened by continuing dry conditions have been further weakened by heat and fires. Trees and large limbs are likely to fall without warning. Tree roots can burn underground for several weeks posing a risk of unstable and hot ground.</p>	Injury or death	Fire-damaged property, roads	<p>Suspect trees need to be inspected by a competent person and then trimmed or felled as required. If this cannot be performed immediately, barricade area to prevent access. If required, for example, trees on public land, trees on boundaries to public land or trees requiring permits to remove, contact your local government for assistance. Unsafe trees and branches should be removed before any other work activity or clean-up operation is undertaken.</p> <p>Be cautious of areas where tree roots are burning underground. Wear appropriate safety footwear and test ground surfaces for stability and residual heat.</p>

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Hazard	Risk	Location	What to do
Unstable or damaged structures, for example, walls, chimneys, roofs and water tanks, may be at risk of collapse. Remaining free-standing chimneys, in particular, must be regarded as an imminent risk.	Injury or death	Fire-damaged property	Unstable structures should be knocked down before any work activity or clean-up operation is undertaken. If unsure about the stability of structures seek advice from your local government.
Asbestos	Delayed respiratory disease and cancer	Buildings may contain asbestos-containing material such as asbestos cement sheeting in walls, roofs, floor and floor backing, eaves and chimney flues	Wear a P2 particulate respirator, available from hardware stores, and coveralls when in an asbestos-contaminated area. Minimise activity that generates airborne asbestos fibres. Asbestos removal at a workplace must be carried out in accordance with the Occupational Health and Safety Regulations, 2017. Homeowners carrying out their own removal should refer to WorkSafe's Bushfire Recovery: Recycling and Disposal of Building Materials. Further guidance can be sourced from www.asbestos.vic.gov.au , the Environment Protection Authority and local government.

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Medium risk

Hazard	Risk	Location	What to do
Septic or leaking sewerage or sewer blockage	Injury	Properties with septic tanks	<p>Appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) must be worn, including disposable coveralls, gloves and safety glasses/goggles for skin and eye protection. All PPE must be disposed of as contaminated waste.</p> <p>Look for collapsed or removed septic tank lids. Barricade the area to prevent access where lids are absent. Avoid walking in sewerage-contaminated areas. If the incident involves a mains sewer, contact your local water provider.</p>
Burnt copper chrome arsenic (CCA) treated timber	Toxic ash, mainly by ingestion	CCA-treated timber used in decking, pergolas, fencing, landscaping and so on	<p>Keep children, pets and farm animals away from CCA ash until it is cleaned up. Collect ash and contact the Environment Protection Authority for disposal requirements. Do not bury CCA-treated timber and do not burn it. Do not eat, drink or smoke in areas containing CCA ash.</p> <p>Practice good personal hygiene and wash hands. Minimise generation of airborne dust when working in the area.</p> <p>Wear disposable personal protective equipment (PPE) and clothing and dispose of those as contaminated waste.</p> <p>The EPA has information about ash from CCA-treated timber: https://www.epa.vic.gov.au/about-epa/publications/1720</p> <p>The Victorian Government's Better Health Channel also has information about CCA-treated timber: https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/HealthyLiving/copper-chrome-arsenic-cca-treated-timber</p>

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Low risk

Hazard	Risk	Location	What to do
Aerosol cans	Flammable	Houses, shops and farms	Aerosol cans are likely to have been consumed by fire. If aerosol cans have not been consumed by fire, then household quantities can be disposed of as general waste. Your local government can advise on whether aerosol cans may be included in recycling. For quantities greater than household quantities, contact your local government or chemical waste disposal company.
Diesel tanks, drums and containers	Combustible	Houses, shops and farms	<p>If tank or containers have been damaged by fire, contents should have been consumed by the fire unless tanks are underground.</p> <p>Tanks and containers that have been damaged by fire should be assessed for leakage by a competent person prior to removal or refilling.</p> <p>If tanks or containers not consumed by fire, then contact your local government or chemical waste disposal company.</p>
Swimming pool chemicals, for example, chlorine, sodium/calcium hypochlorite	Toxic gas, oxidising	Public swimming pools, house pools and chemical suppliers	<p>If chemicals have not been consumed by fire, assess condition of chemicals and containers prior to handling.</p> <p>Contact chemical supplier for additional support or disposal advice if required.</p>
Refrigeration systems containing refrigerants, for example, ammonia gas	Toxic gas	Farms, shops, houses	Contact refrigeration specialist company if system has been or may have been damaged by fire for advice specific to that system.
Pesticides and herbicides	Highly toxic	Farms, houses, sheds, nurseries	<p>These substances are likely to have been consumed during a fire. If these substances haven't been consumed or damaged by a fire, they can be kept and used.</p> <p>If they have not been consumed by fire, then household quantities can be disposed of by rinsing containers and disposing them as general waste. For quantities greater than household quantities, contact your local government or chemical waste disposal company.</p> <p>Use recommended personal protective equipment (PPE) when handling herbicides and pesticides.</p>
General chemicals in drums or containers, for example, solvents	Flammable, toxic	Workshops, houses, shops, farms	Most substances are likely to have been consumed by fire. If containers/substances have not been consumed by the fire, contact your local government or chemical waste disposal company for disposal.
Septic or leaking sewerage or sewer blockage	Disease	Properties with septic tanks	<p>Appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) must be worn, including disposable coveralls, gloves and safety glasses/goggles for skin and eye protection. All PPE must be disposed of as contaminated waste.</p> <p>Look for collapsed or removed septic tank lids. Barricade area where lids are absent. Avoid walking in sewerage-contaminated areas. If incident involves a mains sewer, contact your local water provider.</p>