

Media Release

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Private bushfire shelters must comply and must have a building permit - VBA

“Don’t buy a death trap” is the warning from the Victorian Building Authority (VBA) to residents of bushfire prone areas of the state who are considering installing a private bushfire shelter on their property.

VBA Director of Technical and Regulation Jarrod Edwards said that for people in bushfire prone areas who wanted a ‘refuge of last resort’ on their property it is vital to choose a shelter that complies with the performance requirements of the National Construction Code (NCC) and for which a building permit has been obtained.

“Bushfire shelters that are not accredited must be thoroughly assessed for compliance with the NCC as part of obtaining a building permit,” Mr Edwards said.

To get a building permit for a private bushfire shelter under regulations introduced after the Black Saturday fires in February 2009, you need to ensure you:

- Buy a shelter that has been accredited by the Victorian Building Regulations Advisory Committee (BRAC) as meeting the NCC performance requirements; or
- Obtain a certificate from a fire safety engineer who did not design the shelter, to satisfy a building surveyor that your non-accredited bushfire shelter meets the requirements of the regulations; or
- Apply to the Building Appeals Board for a determination that a shelter complies with the regulations.

“At this point, only three private bushfire shelters have been accredited by BRAC as meeting the NCC performance requirements and gained accreditation,” Mr Edwards said. “The VBA website (www.vba.vic.gov.au) has a list of accredited shelters, along with other products that have been accredited for use in building.

“By obtaining approval for the construction of a shelter you will not only be doing the right thing by following the NCC and the Victorian *Building Regulations 2006*, you won’t be putting your life, or the lives of your family, at risk in something that has the potential to be a death trap.”

While a building permit is still required, the building surveyor must accept the product design if the use complies with the accreditation or BAB determination.

The VBA’s warning comes after bushfires have already taken a devastating toll this summer, and more extreme fire danger conditions are predicted in coming weeks and months.

“In addition to the potentially tragic outcome of installing a private bushfire shelter that does not meet one of the criteria, at a regulatory level, property owners need to be aware they must obtain a building permit for the shelter before they can be constructed,” Mr Edwards said. “Some councils may also require a planning permit be obtained, so it is important to check at the outset.

“Remember, a private bushfire shelter should only be an option of last resort as part of a bushfire survival plan. It should be viewed as part of an overall bushfire survival plan, rather than a simple solution.”

For more information about private bushfire shelters, visit the VBA website (www.vba.vic.gov.au) or the Country Fire Authority (CFA) website (www.cfa.vic.gov.au) or call the Victorian Bushfire Information Line on 1800 240 667 for further bushfire information.

Other steps to protect your home from bushfire

More broadly on preparing for bushfires, the VBA recommends homeowners seek professional advice on any recommended upgrades or retrofits to their home. For additional tips on protecting homes from bushfire, visit the 'Bushfire Information' section of the VBA website (www.vba.vic.gov.au), which includes the publication *A guide to retrofit your home for better protection from a bushfire*.

In addition, visit the CFA website (www.cfa.vic.gov.au) to download the CFA Fire Ready Kit.

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