

Returning safely to your property after bushfire

Key safety measures

Precautions before returning to your home

- Before returning to your home, check with your council and/or emergency services (Incident and Regional Control Centres) and/or the Relief and Recovery tab on the Vic Emergency website that it is safe to return to your home.
- It is important to remember that everyone's situation is different.
- Do not return to your home before the area is declared safe by local officials.
- Do not enter your burnt-out home or shed until it has been inspected by a qualified person.
- Call **SP AusNet on 13 17 99** to check if your power is turned on or off or if you have a power emergency.
- Notify someone that you are returning and what time you expect to be back if you are not staying.
- As you are entering a very dangerous place, you should wear as much protective clothing as possible. Sturdy footwear, protective overalls, safety glasses are all recommended.
- Air quality is likely to be affected by the dust and ash from the site, so ensure you wear protective clothing and take a supply of P2/N95 facemasks.
- Take cool drinking water and food for consumption on site.
- Have a battery-powered radio with you so you can listen for emergency updates and news.
- Have a battery-powered torch to inspect damaged buildings.
- Turn the torch on outside the property before entering – as the battery may produce a spark that could ignite leaking gas, if present.
- Take a mobile phone that is fully charged.

Hazards

- After a bushfire, when returning to your property you may be faced with a variety of debris that can be hazardous to your health:
 - Buildings and other structures (e.g. water tanks and stands) may be unstable and in danger of collapse. Do not enter a building or walk over debris in these circumstances. If you are unsure, seek advice from your local council's municipal building surveyor before attempting to recover items or enter your property.
 - Unsafe building structures, exposed electrical wiring and missing fencing panels around swimming pools.
 - Asbestos, ash from burnt treated timber, medicines, garden or farm chemicals, other household chemicals and cleaning products, damaged LPG gas bottles, metal and other residues from burnt household appliances as well as various dusts.
 - Do not touch the ash with your bare skin.
 - Buildings built before 1988 may contain asbestos cement sheeting. If you are unsure whether your bushfire-damaged buildings contain asbestos, WorkSafe recommends an occupational hygienist be engaged to inspect the site and confirm.
 - Walk around the outside of your house to check for hazards and do not proceed if any hazards are apparent, especially:
 - live electricity lines
 - leaking gas
 - septic or sewerage system leaks
 - hot embers

- burnt trees and over-hanging branches
- brick chimneys
- major structural damage
- asbestos
- hazardous chemicals and chemical drums
- burnt treated timber.
- If any of these hazards are apparent, do not proceed until it is safe.
- For information about safe handling of building rubble or ash after a bushfire contact the **WorkSafe Victoria Advisory Service on 1800 136 089**.

Remember: If you discover a deceased or injured person, immediately call 000.

Water supplies

- Bushfires can impact on drinking water supply or quality. In all cases, residents across Victoria are advised to contact their local water authority for further information
- Check your water supply has not be contaminated. Do not consume any water until you have conducted a check:
 - If the water smells unusual, or is cloudy, has an unusual colour or contains particles, assume it is contaminated
 - Check rainwater tanks for contamination from ash and debris from the fire.
 - Also check your tanks for animals and birds that may have entered them.
 - In the case of dead animals, contact your council regarding their disposal and don't use the water until the tank has been flushed and cleaned.

Air quality

- Air quality is likely to be affected by the dust from the site. Ensure you are wearing your 'P2/N95' facemask.

Electricity, gas and garbage

- If you smell gas and the source is LPG bottles, isolate by turning off the cylinder valves in a clockwise direction if safe to do so. If it is natural gas, isolate the gas supply at the meter and contact your gas distributor.
 - Prior to turning the cylinder back on engage a licensed gasfitter to check the integrity of the installation.
- Electricity distribution businesses will be working to restore power to homes that lost electricity because of the bushfires.
- If your property has solar panels, contact a registered electrical contractor to clean the panels of dust and debris and to check the equipment and cables for any damage.
- Do not go near the equipment or cables even if the power is turned off to the house.
- For replacement of garbage and recycling bins contact your council.

Mental health help

- You need to consider the well-being of you and your family. If at any time you are worried about your mental health or the mental health of a loved one, call Lifeline on 13 11 14.