

A GUIDE TO A SAFE RETURN TO YOUR PROPERTY AFTER A BUSHFIRE

**Don't return to your home before the area is
declared safe by local officials.**

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It is important to remember that everyone's situation is different. This information is intended as general advice only for those affected by Victoria's bushfires.

Introduction

When returning to your property after a bushfire, you may be faced with a variety of hazards. These can include unsafe building structures, exposed electrical wiring and missing fencing panels around swimming pools.

Fully or partially burnt debris that could be hazardous to your health include asbestos, ash from burnt treated timber (i.e. copper chrome arsenate [CCA]), medicines, garden or farm chemicals, other household chemicals and cleaning products, damaged LPG gas bottles, metal and other residues from burnt household appliances, and various dusts.

More information can be found on the [VicEmergency](#) website. The Red Cross also provides safety information about [returning home after a bushfire](#). Alternatively, refer to the [Better Health Channel](#) website for key information on what to do to keep you and your family safe.

Before you return home

There are several things you should do or have with you before you return home:

- Check with emergency services and/or your local council that it is safe to return to your home.
- Notify someone that you are returning. If you are not returning permanently, let them know when you expect to be back.
- 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. Remember to turn on the torch before entering, as the battery may produce a spark that could ignite leaking gas, if present.
- Wear protective clothing (see page [Protective clothing](#)⁸) and take a supply of P2/N95 facemasks.
- Take enough cool drinking water and food for consumption on site.
- Call SP AusNet on 13 17 99 to check whether your power is on or off, or if you have a power emergency.
- Take a fully charged mobile phone. Be aware that mobile coverage may not be available in some areas due to damaged telecommunications equipment.

On the way to your home

Watch for fire-affected or unstable trees, downed electrical wires, damaged bridges, roads and footpaths, weakened structures and fallen or falling objects.

Returning home

Don't return to your home before the area is declared safe by local officials. Returning home can be both physically and mentally challenging. For safety reasons, initial access should be limited to adults. Above all, use caution.

The following information is a guide only. If you are in any doubt as to the risks at your property, seek the advice of an appropriate professional. Contact details are provided at the back of this document.

The fire brigade and police will attempt to eliminate obvious hazards. However, you are responsible for ensuring your property is safe before undertaking any activity in or around damaged structures. A hazard assessment by an expert, such as a structural engineer, may be necessary to determine the stability of walls, roofs and the safety of services. Your insurance policy may also have conditions about what you can or cannot do until the loss assessor visits.

On-site death or injuries

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

In the case of injured persons, do not attempt to move them unless they are in immediate danger of death or further injury. If you must move an unconscious person, first stabilise the neck and back, then call for help immediately.

Personal well-being

Before, during and after returning home, you need to consider your well-being and that of 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.

You can also contact:

- your doctor or local community health centre
- a counsellor or psychologist
- Parentline (13 22 89) or the Kids Helpline (1800 551 800)
- NURSE-ON-CALL (1300 606 024) – for expert health information and advice (24 hours a day, seven days a week); or the
- Australian Psychological Society Referral Service (1800 333 497).

Assessing hazards

The following table is a checklist of the things you should do when you arrive at your home. Remember to put on a P2/N95 facemask, eye protection and protective clothing before walking around the outside of your house.

Hazard	Yes	No
<p>Live electricity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electrical hazards may be present, such as fallen powerlines. Be aware that these may be ‘live’. • Do not enter your property until you are advised that it is safe to do so by officers from the emergency services, utility companies or your local council. Damaged solar panels may still be generating electricity and present a hazard, even if mains power is offline. 		
<p>Leaking gas (odour or gas hissing)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If you smell gas or hear a hissing noise, turn off the gas at your meter or, if using LPG cylinders, at the isolating valve. If the problem persists or you cannot find the tap, move away and immediately phone your gas supplier. Do not enter any buildings. • Any work on gas appliances and pipes must be carried out by a licensed gasfitter. • Gas piping may have ruptured, allowing gas to escape. If this occurs, immediately turn off your meter or LPG cylinder valve and seek help. • For emergencies, phone the gas leaks and emergency services number (1800 427 532). 		

Hazard	Yes	No
<p>Septic or sewerage leaks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be aware that lids of buried septic tank systems may have collapsed, moved or been removed, and may be a hazard. Be careful where you walk. • Exposed sanitary waste pipes can also be damaged, leaking sewage. 		
<p>Hot embers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be aware that hot, smouldering coals and other potentially hazardous materials may be hidden under rubble. 		
<p>Trees and overhanging branches</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be aware that trees could be weakened or affected by heat. • Any overhanging branches pose a risk to you and your property. • Take extreme caution near any trees. 		
<p>Major structural damage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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. 		
<p>Asbestos</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If your building was built before 1988, it is highly likely that it may contain asbestos. If you think buildings on your property may contain asbestos cement sheeting, take extra care when handling building wreckage. • Breathing asbestos fibres can cause serious illness, including cancer. It is important to read the asbestos section on page 8 of this document and access the ‘Hazards on your property after a bushfire’ fact sheet at www.health.vic.gov.au. 		
<p>Hazardous chemicals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hazardous household materials that may be present after a bushfire include medicines, garden or farm chemicals, other general chemicals (such as cleaning products or pool chlorine), metals and other residues from burnt household appliances, ash and various dusts. 		
<p>Chemical drums</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Damage to chemical drums may lead to the unknown contents posing a threat to personal and community safety. Your local council may have disposal facilities. 		
<p>Burnt treated timber</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Some timber is treated with copper chrome arsenate (CCA) – a wood preservative impregnated into the timber to give it a distinctive, pale-green colour that fades to grey over time. • CCA-treated timber is commonly used in private and public recreation areas for pergolas, decking, cubby houses, claddings, posts, gates, fencing and landscaping purposes. Generally, it poses very low health risks for normal use. However, the ash from CCA-treated timber can pose a health risk. 		

If any of these hazards are apparent, please do not proceed until you believe it is safe.

Water supply

Check your water supply, as it may be contaminated. Please do not consume any water until you have conducted the check described on page 14.

Can you move back in?

You will need to assess the state of your home to determine whether you can move back in. In general, your home will fit into one of the following categories:

- Unliveable and requires demolition (see page 17)
- Damaged but could be lived in (see page 18); or
- Undamaged (see page 18).

Please refer to the relevant pages to determine the appropriate actions for the state of your home.

Air quality

Air quality may be affected by smoke and dust from the site. Ensure you are wearing your P2/N95 facemask and ensure that if you change your facemask, you replace it with a new facemask. Once you take off your facemask, it should not be reused.

Any demolition work required should only be carried out by a registered demolisher or a suitably experienced registered building practitioner.

Where do I take all of the site rubble?

It is not recommended that you move any rubble or waste matter before you check with your local council on the volume of waste to be sent to landfill stations.

After you have left the site

Once you have left your bushfire-damaged property, please notify your point of contact to let them know you are safe.

If you have any concerns or questions, please contact the appropriate authorities.

Animal welfare

When cleaning up your property, you may find dead or injured animals. This could be distressing, particularly if pets are involved, so you may need to seek the support of family or friends.

In the case of a dead animal, if it is a small animal, such as a pet or wildlife, you may wish to bury it on your property. However, if you are unable to do so, you should contact your local council to seek their advice and assistance.

In the case of larger animals, such as dead livestock or wildlife, you should contact your local council to seek their assistance with the disposal, which may be more appropriate at an authorised site.

When burying any dead animals on your property, you must consider proximity to water courses and underground water supplies.

If you find a burnt or injured animal, you should phone the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning on 13 61 86 for details of wildlife carers or check <https://www.wildlife.vic.gov.au/injured-native-wildlife/help-for-injured> for local wildlife shelters and carers.

For farm animal health, contact Agriculture Victoria on 1800 226 226.

Check for animals in your tank water

It is important to check your water tanks, gutters and downpipes, as wildlife may have sought refuge in and around them.

Any dead animals or birds should be removed in the clean-up process to ensure the quality of your water supply. If you find dead animals or birds in your water tank, do not drink or use the water in your home or use it to water stock. You can, however, use contaminated water for gardens or firefighting.

You should contact your local council or a professional tank cleaner to ensure your future tank water supplies are safe (refer to page 14 for more information).

Protective clothing

When returning to your home following a bushfire, please remember that you are returning to a very dangerous place and that you should wear as much protective clothing as possible.

Protective clothing might be hard to find, considering most of these items are likely to have been damaged or destroyed in the fires. Personal safety, however, is very important and can reduce the likelihood of any further injuries or fatalities occurring.

What should I wear?

- Wear sturdy footwear (e.g. steel-capped work shoes, if possible) and heavy-duty work gloves to protect you from broken glass, standing on sharp objects or getting burnt by smouldering coals.
- Wear protective overalls (with long sleeves and trousers). If convenient, wear disposable coveralls and throw them out with the site waste after use. Any non-disposable clothing (including shoes) should be cleaned/laundered before reuse.
- Wear safety goggles or protective glasses at all times.

Wearing a facemask

- P2/N95 facemasks should be worn to filter out fine particles, including asbestos fibres. They are available at most hardware stores. Please note that P2/N95 facemasks filter out a slightly higher proportion of fine particles than P1 facemasks.
- P2/N95 facemasks are the recommended minimum if you are in the vicinity of a bushfire-affected home.
- Ordinary paper dust facemasks, handkerchiefs and bandannas do not filter out fine ash, dusts or any asbestos fibres that may remain in the air. Therefore, they are not very useful in protecting your lungs in these situations.
- Wearing a facemask can make it harder for you to breathe normally. If you have a pre-existing heart or lung condition, seek your doctor's advice before using one.
- It is also important to note that these types of facemasks are much less effective if there is a poor seal around the face and mouth. Men with beards can have difficulty getting a good seal.

Asbestos hazards – clean-up and disposal

- Buildings built before 1988 may contain asbestos cement (or 'AC') sheeting in walls, roofs, floors, underlays, eaves and appliance flues. It may also be present in the backing of some vinyl floor tiles.
- Exposure to extreme heat may cause asbestos to crumble (i.e. become friable).

- Non-friable asbestos cannot be easily crumbled, pulverised or reduced to a powder when dry. Some asbestos products can become friable if damaged by fire.
- Asbestos sheet materials may release asbestos fibres when cut up, broken up, ruptured or ground. They do not pose a health risk when intact.
- Fibres may become airborne when excavation and clean-up work disturb asbestos clumps.
- If a large amount of asbestos material from a house or shed requires demolition and removal, a licensed asbestos removalist should be engaged. The waste must be transported in an EPA-approved vehicle and taken to an EPA-approved landfill for disposal.
- In most cases, asbestos removal must be done by a licensed removalist. (Unlicensed removal of limited amounts of non-friable asbestos is permitted in some circumstances.)
 - A Class A asbestos removal licence holder can remove fire-damaged asbestos containing products that have become friable or are suspected to be friable.
 - A Class B asbestos removal licence holder is only permitted to remove non-friable asbestos containing product that is fixed to, or installed in, a fire-damaged building or structure.

If asbestos-containing material on your site is not burnt and limited to only a few AC sheets, wrap the material securely in two layers of heavy-duty plastic (or in two plastic bags for small fragments) and take the plastic-wrapped material to a landfill approved by your local council or the Environment Protection Authority Victoria. Phone **1300 372 842** for more information.

If you are present during clean-up works, wear a P2/N95 facemask, protective clothing and gloves.

If you are unsure whether your bushfire-damaged buildings contain asbestos, WorkSafe Victoria recommends that you engage an occupational hygienist to inspect the site and confirm its safety.

For information about the safe handling of building rubble or ash after a bushfire, contact the WorkSafe Victoria Advisory Service on **1800 136 089**. Otherwise, email info@worksafe.vic.gov.au.

Removal of chemicals and hazardous materials

Chemical removal kits may be available through your local council for the safe removal of chemicals and other hazardous materials.

For general advice on the removal of chemicals and hazardous materials, contact the WorkSafe Victoria Advisory Service on **1800 136 089** or 13 23 60 if out of hours. Otherwise, email info@worksafe.vic.gov.au

For general health information about asbestos, copper chrome arsenate or other chemicals, contact the Environmental Health Unit of the Department of Human Services (DHS) on 1300 650 172.

For information about the transport and disposal of hazardous materials (such as asbestos), contact the Environment Protection Authority Victoria on 1300 372 842.

For information about the safe handling of building rubble or ash, contact WorkSafe Victoria on 1800 136 089.

Copper chrome arsenate (CCA)-treated timber

Copper chrome arsenate (CCA) is a wood preservative impregnated into timber to give it a distinctive, pale green colour that fades to grey over time.

CCA-treated timber is commonly used in private and public recreation areas for pergolas, decking, cubby houses, claddings, posts, gates, fencing and landscaping purposes. Generally, it should pose very low health risks for normal use.

What happens to CCA-treated timber when it is burnt?

In the event of a bushfire, structures made from CCA-treated timber are damaged or destroyed. If you know that structures on your property were made from CCA-treated timber, when cleaning up the ash, remember:

- The remaining ash and char can contain up to 10 per cent (by weight) arsenic, copper and chromium. This ash may pose a health hazard if swallowed by young children or grazing animals.
- It is not possible to tell if ash contains arsenic just by looking at it. If you had CCA-treated timber structures before the fire, you should assume the ash will contain arsenic, chromium and copper.

CCA ash precautions for young children and farm animals

Young children are more likely to put ash in their mouths. Swallowing only a few grams of CCA ash is harmful.

Pets and farm animals may also lick or swallow the salty ash residue. Keep pets and farm animals away from areas with CCA ash until they are cleaned up.

Collection and disposal of CCA ash

- **CCA ash should be collected** and taken to an EPA-approved landfill site for disposal.
- **Do NOT bury CCA ash** or other building waste on your property, in nearby gullies or in other locations. Doing so could contaminate land or water and potentially expose your family, animals and the broader community to potential toxins.
- **CCA ash** can be double-bagged, sealed and taken directly to your local landfill. Partially burnt timber can also be disposed of at landfill. Contact your council for specific advice or local requirements, or contact your EPA regional office.

Personal protection when collecting ash

- Do not touch ash with your bare skin. Wear gloves and consider wearing disposable overalls.
- Wear a disposable P2 particulate facemask to minimise dust getting into your mouth.
- Minimise dust by moistening the ash prior to handling it.
- Use a shovel to pick up ash — **DO NOT** spread it around.
- Remove and wash clothing, and clean your shoes, after handling ash.
- Wash your hands after finishing clean-up work and before eating, smoking, preparing food or picking up young children.

Health symptoms

- Eating CCA ash can cause nausea and/or vomiting, diarrhoea, and a “pins and needles” feeling in the skin.
- If you or anyone in your family experiences these symptoms, see your doctor as soon as possible, or go to the nearest hospital.

Further CCA ash information

- CCA and human health – contact the Department of Health and Human Services' Environmental Health Unit on 1300 761 874.
- Transport and disposal of CCA ash – contact the Environment Protection Authority Victoria on 1300 372 842.
- Domestic garbage requirements and landfill locations – contact your local council.
- CCA and farm animal health – contact Agriculture Victoria on 1800 226 226.

General waste management options

For replacement of garbage and recycling bins, contact your local council.

It is recommended that you do not move any non-household rubbish, rubble or waste until you have checked with your local council on the volume of waste to be sent to landfill stations. If you require temporary bins for this transportation, contact your local council.

Scrap metal, iron, concrete and bricks should be separated, as some materials can be recycled.

For general health information about asbestos, copper chrome arsenate or other chemicals, contact the Department of Health and Human Services' Environmental Health Unit on 1300 761 874.

For information about the transport and disposal of hazardous materials (such as asbestos), contact the Environment Protection Authority Victoria on 1300 372 842.

For information about the safe handling of building rubble or ash, contact WorkSafe Victoria on 1800 136 089.

Mains water supply

Water supplies and water quality remain largely unaffected across the state. However, bushfires sometimes impact drinking water supply or quality. In all cases, residents across Victoria are advised to contact their local water authority for further information.

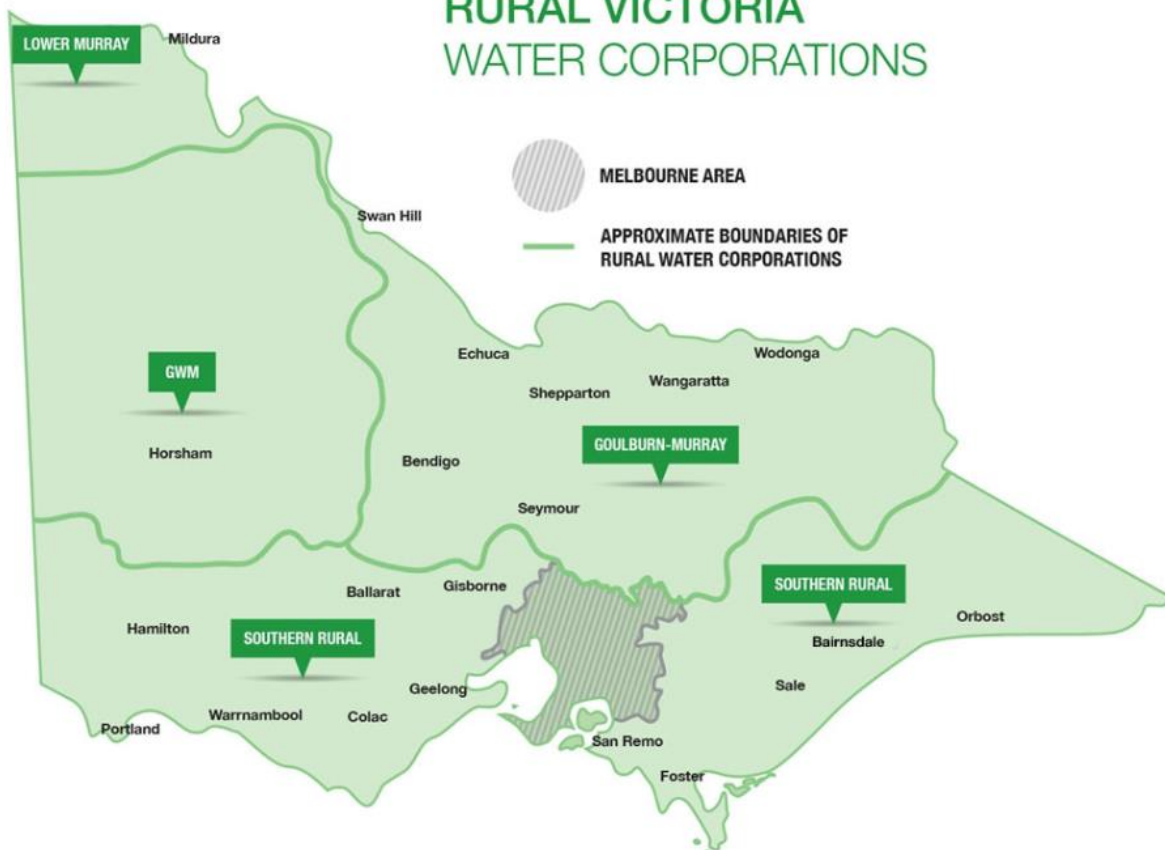
Business	Customer service number	Telephone
Barwon Water	1300 656 007	5221 2500
Central Highlands Water	1800 061 514	5320 3100
City West Water	13 1691	9313 8422
Coliban Water	1300 363 200	
East Gippsland Water	1800 671 841	5150 4444
Falls Creek Resort Management		5758 1200
Gippsland Water	1800 050 500	5177 4600
Goulburn–Murray Rural Water	1800 013 357	5826 3500
Goulburn Valley Water	1800 454 500	5832 4800
Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water	1300 659 961	5382 4611
Lake Mountain Management Board		5957 7222
Lower Murray Urban & Rural Water		5051 3400
Melbourne Water	13 1722	
Mt Baw Baw Management Board	1300 651 136	5165 1136
Mt Buller & Mt Stirling Management Board		5777 6077
Mt Hotham Management Board		5759 3550
North East Water	1300 361 622	(02) 6022 0555
Parks Victoria	13 1963	8427 2001
South East Water	13 1694	9552 3000
Southern Rural Water	1300 139 510	5139 3100
South Gippsland Water	1300 851 636	5682 0444
Wannon Water	1300 926 666	
Western Water	1300 650 422	
Westernport Water	1300 720 711	5956 4100
Yarra Valley Water	1300 853 811	8691 3207

REGIONAL VICTORIA WATER CORPORATIONS



The above map shows indicative water corporation boundaries, contacting the water corporation is the most accurate way of determining up to date boundary information.

RURAL VICTORIA WATER CORPORATIONS



The above map shows indicative water corporation boundaries, contacting the water corporation is the most accurate way of determining up to date boundary information.

Refer to www.vicwater.org.au or <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/water/drinking-water-in-victoria/water-suppliers> for further details or to determine which business supplies your mains water.

Water tanks

You will need to check the quality of your tank water for wildlife and contaminants.

Wildlife may have sought refuge in your water tank during the bushfire. Fire retardants may also have made their way into your water supply from aerial spraying and wind drift.

How do I know if my tank water is contaminated after a bushfire?

The best guide is your knowledge of what your tank water usually looks and tastes like.

- If the water smells unusual, or is cloudy, has an unusual colour or contains particles, assume it is contaminated. You should seek an alternative supply of water for drinking, cooking, teeth cleaning and bathing.
- If in doubt, assume the tank water is contaminated.
- Boiling water will not remove contamination from ash and debris.
- Water that is not suitable to drink may still be used for other purposes, like firefighting or watering the garden.

I haven't got power but still have the tank and pressure pump

Firstly, you need to test the quality of your tank water (refer to previous question).

Contact Energy Safe Victoria on (03) 9203 9700 or 1800 800 158 to ensure the electrical safety of the pump and your safety.

For health information about the quality of your tank water after a fire, contact the Department of Health and Human Services' Environmental Health Unit on 1300 761 874.

When can I start using my rainwater tank for the purposes of drinking water?

- When it is safe to do so, clean the ash and debris from your roof and gutters. If it rains prior to cleaning, ensure that the first flush of rainwater is not collected in your tank by disconnecting the tank or using a first-flush diverter. Only do this if you are sure your building is structurally sound (see 'Assessing the state of your home' on page 17).
- Check the structural soundness of your water tank.
- Dead birds or other small animals found in gutters or water storage tanks should be removed using gloves and put in a plastic bag for disposal.
- Do NOT enter a water tank, as it is a confined space.
- A professional tank cleaner should be engaged to clean your rainwater tank.
- Contact a licensed plumber for reconnection and commissioning of your system.
- Contact Energy Safe Victoria (or a suitably qualified electrician) to ensure the electrical safety of the pump and your safety.
- For further health information about the quality of your tank water after a fire, contact the Department of Health and Human Services' Environmental Health Unit on 1300 761 874.

Catchment areas

Debris and ash will wash into creeks and streams. As a result, water from creeks or streams will not be suitable for drinking.

Gas

For general enquiries about reticulated gas supplies (i.e. piped gas from a mains gas supply) and connection or disconnection, you need to contact your natural gas distributor.

If you suspect the natural gas is leaking from the mains gas supply or from the gas meter assembly, **contact your gas distributor immediately**. If you suspect gas is leaking from consumer piping, contact a licensed gasfitter to check the installation and any existing appliances.

Who is my gas distributor?

There are three gas distributors in Victoria. Each is responsible for a separate geographic region.

Each distributor provides information on their website to assist customers in determining whether you are in their area.

- Multinet Gas covers areas of inner and outer-east Melbourne, the Yarra Ranges and South Gippsland.
- Australian Gas Networks covers north and south-eastern Melbourne and northern and eastern Victoria.
- AusNet Services covers central and western Victoria.

	<u>Multinet Gas</u>	<u>Australian Gas Networks</u>	<u>AusNet Services</u>
Faults and emergencies	132 691	1800 427 532	136 707
General inquiries	1300 887 501	1300 001 001	1300 360 795

Most LPG storage cylinders display the name of the LPG gas supplier and emergency contact details. Keep these details close at hand and use them if you suspect your cylinder or tank is leaking.

For all enquiries about LPG gas supplies, connection and/or disconnection, contact your LPG retailer.

Retailer	Contact number
Elgas	131 161
Kleenheat Gas	132 180
Origin	1800 808 526
Powergas	(03) 9305 3415
Supagas	137 872
United Gas	1300 655 784

It is recommended that you contact a licensed gasfitter to check the installation and recommissioning of any existing appliances whether connected to a natural or LPG gas supply.

What do I do if I smell gas?

If the source is from LPG bottles, isolate by turning off the cylinder valves in a clockwise direction if safe to do so. If the source is from natural gas, isolate the gas supply at the meter.

Contact your gas distributor for further assistance.

I have a disconnected LPG cylinder and I am unsure what to do with it

Contact your local LPG gas retailer/supplier or licensed gasfitter.

I turned my LPG cylinder off when the fire was approaching. Can I turn it back on?

Prior to turning the cylinder back on, engage a licensed gasfitter to check the integrity of the installation.

My gas meter has been damaged or removed. What should I do?

Contact your gas retailer/supplier.

My gas meter was turned off during the fire. What should I do?

Do not turn your gas meter on. Engage a licensed gasfitter to test the installation and recommission the appliances.

How do I know if my appliances (e.g. stove, water heater etc.) are suitable for use?

We recommend you contact a licensed gasfitter to check the installation and recommission the appliances.

Solar hot water

If your property has solar hot water panels, contact a registered or licensed plumber to check the piping and clean the panels of dust and debris, as these will affect the system's operation.

Electricity

Electricity distribution businesses will be working to restore power to homes that lost electricity as a result of the bushfires. Residents are encouraged to keep out of electricity easements and to use a registered electrician if connecting a generator.

People in fire-affected areas need to be prepared to be without power for up to several weeks, as the damage to electricity infrastructure is anticipated to be very significant.

If your meter box and/or supply line from the street or residence has sustained damage, you will need to contact a registered electrician and your retailer to undertake repairs before power can be reconnected.

Solar panels

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 damage. Do not go near the equipment or cables, even if the power is turned off to the house.

Solar panels can produce energy during daylight hours and pose a risk even if the power is turned off. For further information, or in an emergency, call **AusNet Services' Faults Line on 13 17 99**.

Air quality

Smoke from bushfires often lingers, creating prolonged smoke impacts. For information on air quality, contact the Environment Protection Authority Victoria on 1300 372 842.

I cannot determine my home's site boundary anymore

Prior to any rebuilding work or replacement of fencing, it is important that title boundaries of properties be re-established and marked on the ground by a licensed land surveyor.

For further information, contact the Office of Surveyor General Victoria on 9184 0282 or the Association of Consulting Surveyors Victoria on 9690 6660.

Assessing the state of your home

You will need to assess the state of your property and what needs to be done to existing structures.

While existing structures may appear to be habitable, your council's municipal building surveyor or a registered building surveyor or building inspector will need to prepare an inspection report. The report will detail whether your building is structurally sound and whether it is safe to be occupied. The following scenarios guide you through the three different scenarios you are likely to face.

Scenario A: My house needs to be demolished

Demolishing your house

If your house has been completely destroyed or is unsalvageable, you need to follow the correct process to ensure you can successfully make an insurance claim and, most importantly, ensure your own safety. Hidden in the rubble of your house could be dangerous chemicals, heavy metals, broken glass, charred and twisted metal and other hazards.

Below are a few steps to follow when demolishing any buildings or structures.

Step One – Insurance and inspection

Have you contacted your insurance company?

Your insurance company may have a process that will need to be followed to ensure your claims can be processed appropriately.

Has your property been inspected?

If not, you may need to organise for an inspection to be carried out by your local council's municipal building surveyor or use a registered building surveyor or inspector organised by the MBS to determine what action needs to be taken.

Step Two – Action and reporting

What type of action has been determined?

Action A – Emergency Order – demolish *

If structures on the property are a danger to the safety of occupants and need to be demolished and/or made safe, an 'Emergency Order' will be issued by your council's municipal building surveyor.

Action B – Building Order to Demolish *

A 'Building Order to Demolish' may be issued by your local council's municipal building surveyor or a registered building surveyor (where appointed). This order could require the removal of rubble (from a dwelling or buildings) from a site that has been destroyed by fire.

Action C – Inspection Report *

A site inspection may identify that buildings on a site may be restored or partially demolished. You will need to engage a municipal building surveyor, registered building surveyor or registered building inspector to produce an inspection report.

** Any emergency orders, building orders or inspection reports must be forwarded to your insurance company before any action is taken on site.*

Step Three – Demolishing buildings (if needed)

Who can do demolition work?

It is recommended that either a registered demolisher or suitably experienced registered building practitioner carries out demolition work. Demolition must be undertaken by a registered building practitioner if the cost of the work exceeds \$10,000.

Can I remove the rubble myself?

If the demolition work is extensive and involves structural elements, it is recommended that a suitably experienced registered building practitioner be used.

Scenario B – My house is damaged but could be lived in

Structures that have been damaged may pose a safety risk

A site inspection may identify that buildings on site can be restored or partially demolished. The inspection and report can be carried out by a suitably registered structural engineer, registered building surveyor, registered building inspector, registered architect or registered building practitioner who has suitable experience.

Scenario C – My house is habitable, and I want to move back in

If your house hasn't been fire-affected but is located in a fire-affected area, you will need to ensure any buildings are safe to occupy. You will also need to get your basic utilities reconnected. This may take some time as power lines and water pipelines could be destroyed or damaged.

A suitably qualified person, such as an electrician or registered/licensed plumber, should check that services are still safe to use.

There could also be hazardous materials on site. Please consult the 'Hazardous Materials' section of this document to learn more about safe removal of these materials.

Temporary housing

If your home was destroyed or rendered unfit for occupation as a result of a major fire, constructing an emergency accommodation building on your fire-damaged property is an option you may consider while you rebuild or partially rebuild your home. Subject to meeting certain requirements, including notifying the relevant council of your intention to occupy such a building, construction of an emergency accommodation building does not need a building permit. For more information, refer to the VBA's 'Emergency Accommodation Buildings' fact sheet.

An emergency accommodation building—

- must be the owner's principal place of residence;
- must have a floor area of 60 m² or less, unless approved in writing by the council;
- may be used for no more than three years or until your permanent home is occupied, whichever is earlier;
- must contain or have access to toilet facilities, washing and bathing facilities, and a food preparation area;
- have operating smoke alarms; and
- be structurally adequate.

It is important to understand that you cannot live in your emergency accommodation building once you move into your newly built or rebuilt home. If this is not possible, you should discuss the situation with your council's municipal building surveyor.

You must discuss all temporary housing arrangements with your council's planning and local laws departments, municipal building surveyor and environmental health officer.

Building permits

Almost all building work, other than construction of an emergency accommodation building, will require a building permit to be issued by a registered building surveyor. An application for a building permit can be made to your council's municipal building surveyor or a private building surveyor. To find a building surveyor in your area, go to www.vba.vic.gov.au/find.

Your building surveyor will issue your building permit and ensure:

- your builder is registered and carries the required insurance
- the correct paperwork is in place to construct your home
- a review of the building documentation occurs; and
- key stages of the work are independently inspected.

How do I find a registered building practitioner or registered/licensed plumber who can help rebuild my home?

To find a registered building practitioner (such as a builder, building surveyor, building inspector, designer or demolisher) or a registered/licensed plumber, contact the Victorian Building Authority by calling **1300 815 127** or go to www.vba.vic.gov.au/find.

Other general enquiries

For any other enquiries relating to building work, contact your local council.

Local council	Telephone number	Email
Alpine Shire	(03) 5755 0555	info@alpineshire.vic.gov.au
East Gippsland Shire	(03) 5153 9500	feedback@egipps.vic.gov.au
Falls Creek Alpine Resort	(03) 5755 0555	info@alpineshire.vic.gov.au
Indigo Shire	1300 365 003	info@indigoshire.vic.gov.au
Latrobe	1300 367 700	latrobe@latrobe.vic.gov.au
Mansfield Shire	(03) 5775 8555	council@mansfield.vic.gov.au
Mount Buller Alpine Resort	(03) 5775 8555	council@mansfield.vic.gov.au
Mount Hotham Alpine Resort	(03) 5755 0555	info@alpineshire.vic.gov.au
Mount Stirling Alpine Resort	(03) 5775 8555	council@mansfield.vic.gov.au
Towong Shire	(02) 6071 5100	info@towong.vic.gov.au
Wangaratta Rural Shire	(03) 5722 0888	council@wangaratta.vic.gov.au
Wellington Shire	1300 366 244	enquiries@wellington.vic.gov.au
Whittlesea	(03) 9217 2170	info@whittlesea.vic.gov.au

If your council is not listed here, please go to www.viccouncils.asn.au/find-your-council/council-map for contact information.