

Earlier start to Australia's bushfire season brings forward the need to prepare your property

The Victorian Building Authority has backed the 2019–20 Victorian Fire Season Campaign with a range of last-minute measures homeowners can still take to help prepare their properties ahead of what promises to be a highly challenging bushfire season.

Australia's 2019–20 bushfire season got off to an early, devastating start in late August, with blazes in New South Wales and Queensland destroying almost three million hectares of vegetation and more than 740 properties. Six lives were also tragically lost.

Fortunately, despite parts of Victoria reporting their driest winter and spring on record, the state has so far avoided the same fate as its northern neighbours – with a small number of relatively smaller fires reported, and only one 'Code Red' fire danger day declared. However, as history shows, things can change swiftly, and a long, hot summer lies ahead.

The VBA's Director of Technical and Regulation, Dr Darryl O'Brien, said Victorians should use this reprieve to ensure their fire safety and survival plans are in place and take steps to protect their homes as best as possible, including from ember attack, which research has shown to be the key factor in more than 85 per cent of houses destroyed by bushfire.

"There are some easy and affordable actions people can still take to help prepare their homes before the full force of summer arrives, particularly in relation to ember attack. We would encourage people in bushfire-prone areas to act quickly," Dr O'Brien said.

The actions include:

- Sealing gaps with joining strips, silicon weather strips and draught excluders on side-hung doors
- Sealing vents and weep holes in external walls with corrosion-resistant steel, bronze or aluminium mesh
- Sealing around roofing and roof penetrations
- Protecting evaporative coolers with mesh screens
- Clearing leaves from gutters and considering the installation of an appropriate leaf-guard type product
- Checking that your gutters are in good condition and will hold water if you block the downpipes
- Enclosing the subfloor of your home with a non-combustible material; and
- Installing shutters or metal flyscreens to doors and windows.

Dr O'Brien said a Registered Building Practitioner can advise on whether property owners can retrofit safety elements, and to what extent it is possible before bushfire season is fully upon us.

"In addition to these steps, routine building maintenance, vegetation management and the removal of flammable materials close to buildings are easy bushfire protection measures you can take," he said.

The VBA and the CFA have produced the [Guide to Retrofit Your Home for Better Protection from a Bushfire](#) as practical information for people wishing to upgrade their existing homes to be better protected from bushfires. The guide is for properties up to Bushfire Attack Level (BAL) 29.

For more information on bushfire preparedness, visit the 2019–20 [Victorian Fire Season campaign website](#), the VBA website for a range of [information on building and bushfires](#), or the CFA website for information on [home improvements and other preparations to make your house safer](#).

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