



Neighbourhood Safer Places

Places of Last Resort During a Bushfire

Interim Assessment Guideline (2009/10 Fire Season)

Version 3.1 – October 2009

NEIGHBOURHOOD SAFER PLACES PLACES OF LAST RESORT

INTRODUCTION

Neighbourhood Safer Places are an area or premises that may, as a last resort, provide some sanctuary from the life threatening effects of a bushfire (i.e. direct flame contact or radiant heat). It is envisioned it would be an existing space or structure, (such as an oval or a building) that may protect a person against fire.

This assessment guideline articulates the process by which qualified/experienced CFA Officers assess the suitability of Neighbourhood Safer Places and is not intended for use by the general public.

BACKGROUND

Reducing the impact of bush fires is a shared responsibility between government, emergency service organisations and the community. The community has an integral role to take the necessary steps to prepare their property and to implement their bushfire survival plan.

The intent of this document is to set out criteria for assessment of Neighbourhood Safer Places. The criteria intend to provide a framework to identify Neighbourhood Safer Places that will provide a place of last resort for people to gather during the passage of a bushfire front. The primary purpose of a Neighbourhood Safer Place is the protection of human life from a bushfire.

The 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission Interim report stated that people need a range of options to increase their safety in the event of bushfire. The Royal Commission identified three options (pg 209). They are:

- community fire refuges
- Neighbourhood Safer Places
- privately identified safer places

In identifying these options the Royal Commission noted that safer places were plan B and plan C that would be used in the event of failure of a person's primary bushfire plan. It noted that safer places *"may increase a persons chance of survival, but still entail some risk, both in moving to them during a fire and while sheltering in them. They cannot be considered, nor should they be described as, 'safe'."* (p.209)

Fire refuges can further be described in the OESC Fire Refuges in Victoria – Policy and Practice (2005). However, these guidelines are currently undergoing a review with the OESC and because the issues associated with fire refuges are being considered separately, they will not be considered further in this document.

CONCEPT

- A Neighbourhood Safer Place is a space which is a place of last resort for individuals to access and remain in during the passage of fire through their neighbourhood without the need to take a high risk journey. It is intended to provide a place of relative safety, but does not guarantee the survival of those who assemble there, and should only be accessed when personal bushfire survival plans cannot be implemented or have failed.
- The Neighbourhood Safer Place is an area that provides a level of protection from the immediate life threatening effects of a bush fire (direct flame contact and radiant heat).
- Neighbourhood Safer Places are a place of last resort to be at during the passage of the fire front, if their personal bushfire survival plans cannot be implemented or have failed.
- Neighbourhood Safer Places should be recorded in Township Protection Plans.
- Not all townships will have Neighbourhood Safer Places identified in these Plans because specific criteria identified in this document may not be met.
- It is important to understand that Neighbourhood Safer Places are not to be confused with Fire Refuges, Relief Centres, Recovery Centres, Assembly Centres, or Informal Places of Shelter each has a different and specific purpose.

LIMITATIONS

- They have a limited capacity and do not guarantee safety.
- They do not cater for animals.
- Persons using Neighbourhood Safer Places should not always expect emergency services to be present.
- They do not provide meals amenity or special needs (eg for infants, the elderly, the ill or disabled).
- They may not provide shelter from the elements, particularly flying embers.

The Neighbourhood Safer Place should meet the following criteria:

Specific Criteria

- 1) Neighbourhood Safer Places should provide a safer level of protection for people from lethal levels of radiant heat by providing an appropriate separation distance between fire hazards, particularly vegetation and the site of the Neighbourhood Safer Place. Such an appropriate separation distance may include isolated fire hazards, an example may be an individual tree as long as such hazards do not add to a fires rate of spread nor influence the radiant heat impacting on the Neighbourhood Safer Place.

If a Neighbourhood Safer Place is an open space, the appropriate separation distance should be greater than **310 metres** (*) from the outer edge of the NSP to the fire hazard or should be prescribed to ensure the maximum potential radiant heat impacting on the site is no more than 2kw/m^2 (**).

If a Neighbourhood Safer Place is a building, the appropriate separation distance should be greater than **140 metres** (*) from the outer edge of the building to the fire hazard or should be prescribed to ensure that the maximum potential radiant heat impacting on the building is no more than 10kw/m^2 (**).

NOTE: The appropriate separation distances as prescribed relate to locations where extreme fuel hazards adjoin the Neighbourhood Safer Place. It is recognised that in certain situations this separation distance could be reduced and still fall inside the radiant heat criteria as specified above.

* The lengths are to assist in providing some initial direction to CFA staff and others of the suitability of potential suitable Neighbourhood safer places,

** The consideration of the radiant heat measures is based on fire industry collaboration of suitable criteria for a safer place. It is based on the view however that each Neighbourhood Safer Place needs to be assessed on its merits and should be calculated according to an appropriate assessment tool. The NSW Rural Fire Service Site Bush Fire Attack Assessment Methodology (Douglas and Tan, 2005) is the assessment tool for these guidelines.

APPENDIX 1

NEIGHBOURHOOD SAFER PLACES Places of Last Resort ASSESSMENT CRITERIA CHECKLIST

To be used with the Neighbourhood Safer Places – Places of Last Resort During a Bushfire Guidelines (Sept 2009)

Neighbourhood safer place address:

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Objectives

1	<p>Neighbourhood Safer Places should provide a safer level of protection for people from lethal levels of radiant heat by providing an appropriate separation distance between fire hazards, particularly vegetation and the site of the Neighbourhood Safer Place.</p> <p>If a Neighbourhood Safer Place is an open space, the appropriate separation distance should be greater than 310 metres from the outer edge of the NSP to the fire hazard, or should be prescribed to ensure a maximum potential heat impacting on the site of no more than 2kw/m².</p> <p>If a Neighbourhood Safer Place is a building, the appropriate separation distance greater than 140 metres from the outer edge of the building to the fire hazard or should be prescribed to ensure that the maximum potential heat impacting on the building is no more than 10kw/m².</p> <p style="text-align: right;">RECORD METRES HERE</p>		
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The site is assessed as: (compliant / non compliant).....

SIGNATURE **DATE.....**

PRINT CFA OFFICER NAME

POSITION.....