

Fire safety guide for in-home service providers

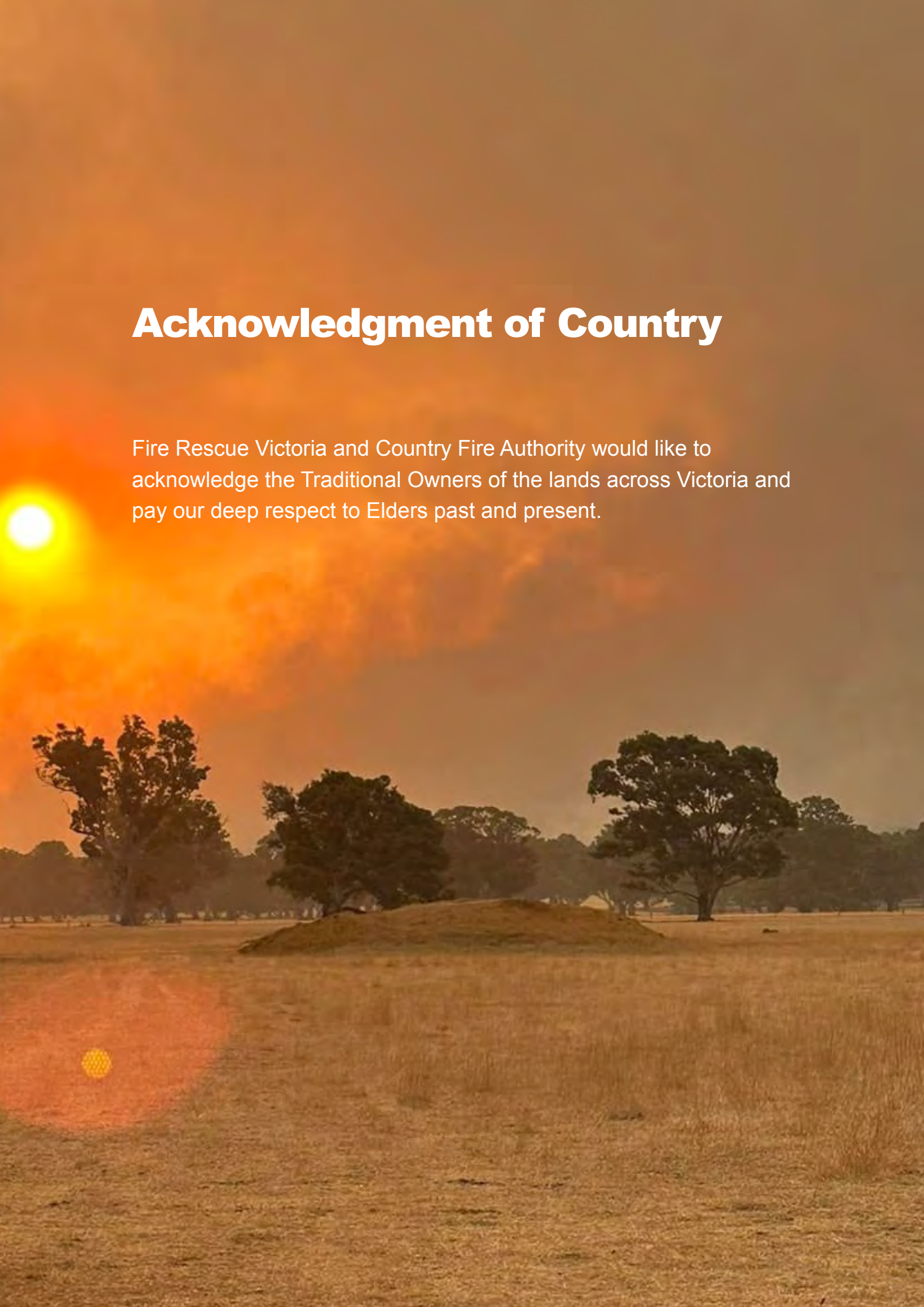
For disability, aged care, TAC and allied health providers in Victoria

CFA

FIRE RESCUE VICTORIA

Acknowledgment of Country

Fire Rescue Victoria and Country Fire Authority would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands across Victoria and pay our deep respect to Elders past and present.



Fire safety guide for in-home service providers, November 2026

This Guide was produced by the Victorian Fire Services, Country Fire Authority (CFA) and Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) as part of ongoing work to improve fire safety for those in the community at higher risk of fire.

For further information contact CFA communityprograms@cfa.vic.gov.au or submit an enquiry to Fire Rescue Victoria.

This Guide was developed in consultation with aged care and disability service providers.

To help improve this guide, please provide any feedback to communityprograms@cfa.vic.gov.au.

Disclaimer: This Guide contains advice to support organisations and individuals in considering their obligations and approach to fire safety. It is not comprehensive and does not constitute legal advice. Every organisation and individual must do their due diligence to understand the requirements of their specific organisation and context. Changes to Standards and Regulations may occur, it is the responsibility of the organisations and individual to stay up to date with these changes.

Accessibility statement

Contact us to receive this document in another format.

Please phone the Country Fire Authority on 03 9262 8444, or email communityprograms@cfa.vic.gov.au.

If you are d/Deaf, hard of hearing, or have a speech/communication difficulty please contact us through your preferred National Relay Service (NRS) call channel. Then, provide the NRS with our phone number (03 9262 8444). For more information visit https://www.accesshub.gov.au/about-the-nrs.

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Introduction

Some people in the community are at higher risk from fire.

This guide aims to improve shared responsibility and collaborative action between Victoria's fire services and in-home care providers.

By working together, we can reduce fire fatalities and injuries and keep people safer.

What is Shared Responsibility?

Fire and emergency management is the shared responsibility of all Victorians, not just emergency services. A commitment to shared responsibility means we all have an active role to play. Preparing for fire emergencies requires each of us taking our share of the responsibility. This includes the individual, family, in-home service providers and workers, and the fire services.



This Guide will assist you to more confidently answer YES to all these questions:

1. Do you understand the fire risks that your clients face?
2. Do you know your legal obligations and responsibilities in relation to fire safety?
3. Do you have procedures and policies in place to manage fire safety for your clients and workers and have they been communicated?
4. Have you included fire risks in your organisation's risk assessment processes?
5. Do you have a process for fire and emergency planning with clients?
6. Do you have safety procedures for your workers to improve their fire safety?
7. Does your workforce have the capability to identify, assess and respond to fire risks?
8. Do you understand your obligations for safety measures such as smoke alarms and home fire sprinklers?
9. Do you have systems in place to identify and mitigate individual fire risks, (e.g. hoarding, unsafe smoking, unable to self-evacuate) and know when and how to engage the Victorian Fire Services for support?

About the Guide

Fire safety is a vital part of safeguarding and organisational risk management. Victorian coronial findings have identified in-home support providers, including My Aged Care, TAC and disability providers as having a role in reducing preventable home fires. This guide provides practical guidance to support organisations, including sole traders, to adopt a whole-of-organisation approach to fire safety.

It is designed to enhance understanding, implementing, and monitoring of fire safety practices as part of emergency management responsibilities for both workers and clients in in-home support settings.

Fire safety is a shared responsibility and service providers are obligated to assist the people they support to improve their safety and wellbeing.

Do you know your role in fire safety?

This Guide will assist you to:

- ☑ identify fire risks
- ☑ mitigate fire risks
- ☑ know when to engage fire services for additional support and collaborative action.

Better practice example

Agapi Care is a disability support service. This better practice example shows how fire safety practice is implemented with their clients and staff.



WATCH VIDEO:
Better Practice Case Studies in Fire Safety – Agapi Care
Agapi Care is a disability support service. Watch Agapi Care's better practice example which shows how fire safety practice is implemented with their clients and staff.

Who the Guide is for

This Guide is designed for service providers and individuals who provide services to people in community-based and in-home settings and will be relevant for:

- Disability service providers
- My Aged Care providers
- Allied health professionals, including occupational therapists, social workers, nurses etc.
- Transitional funded care provider such as a hospital social work team arranging discharge back to the home or HARP (Hospital Admission Risk Program) or other Short-term Transition Care agency
- Other professionals and supports who work alongside people in emergency and disaster preparedness.

No matter what the size and scope of the in-home support services your organisation provides, from sole traders to large organisations, this guide has information relevant to your organisation.

It may also be relevant to disability and aged care supported independent living (SIL), including retirement villages with independent living.

What about residential aged care?

This Guide does not provide fire safety advice about facility-based residential aged care. Residential aged care facilities must adhere to strict fire safety regulations to ensure the safety of residents and staff.

Who we are

Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) and Country Fire Authority (CFA) are Victoria's statutory fire authorities. Empowered through state law, our services hold distinct responsibilities to prevent and suppress fires and other emergencies in Victoria. CFA and FRV have teams dedicated to improving fire and emergency safety for people who are at higher risk. People at higher risk often experience multiple factors of vulnerability.

FRV and CFA are part of Victoria's emergency management sector which also includes Emergency Management Victoria (EMV), Victoria Police, Ambulance Victoria, The State Emergency Service (SES), municipal councils and many other stakeholders. The roles of stakeholders are listed in the State Emergency Management Plan (SEMP).



Definitions of terms used in this Guide

Definition	Meaning
Bushfire Management Overlay (BMO)	A planning regulation in Victoria that applies to land that may be significantly affected by extreme bushfires.
Bushfire	Unplanned vegetation fire. A generic term which includes grass fires, forest fires and scrub fires.
Bushfire safety	Planning and preparation for bushfire, for people residing in an area of bushfire management overlay.
Client	A person receiving a funded service in their home such as a NDIS participant, service recipient, patient or customer.
Home fire safety	Preventing and preparing for a fire in any place where someone sleeps/resides, either permanently or temporarily. This relates to a fire that starts inside the home.
Home Fire Escape Plan	A plan of how everyone in the home will get out if there is a fire. It will include the two quickest ways out of every room, often drawn as a map of the house showing how to exit. It also includes an agreed-upon meeting place outside, such as the letterbox plus, who and how to call Triple Zero (000).
P-CEP	Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness.
PEEP	Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans.
People at higher risk	People who are unable to receive, understand, or act on information, prior to or during an emergency.
Risk	Risk is the possibility of something bad happening. Risk is a measure of the likelihood of something happening, and the consequences if it does happen. Fires are low likelihood events, but they can have extreme consequences.
Service Providers	Organisations and sole traders that provide in-home care and support people who are older, people with disability and people with chronic or acute medical conditions.
Workers	Staff who have direct contact with clients, often in the client's home, or who conduct or assist with tasks such as planning, risk management or safeguarding.



SECTION 1

Understanding home fire and bushfire risks

1

Understanding home fire and bushfire risks

Fires can kill, injure and traumatise people. They destroy possessions and property. There are substantial health and wellbeing benefits to preventing and preparing for fire and reducing its' impact on individuals and the community.

Bushfires and home fires have a disproportionate impact on people with disability, older people and people experiencing social disadvantage.

Home fire risk

In Australia, an average of 64 people die in preventable home fires every year. This has been called a diffuse disaster because the impacts of home fires are spread out over time and location.

In Victoria, there are 3000 home fires every year. That's an average of 8 fires every day! Approximately 18 Victorians die each year in home fires that could have been prevented.

Fires are fast. People are at increased risk of injury or death in their home if one or more of these factors apply:

- they are slow or unable to **identify** that a fire has started
- they are slow or unable to **escape** to a safe location
- they have behaviours or a living environment that makes it **more likely** that they will have a fire.

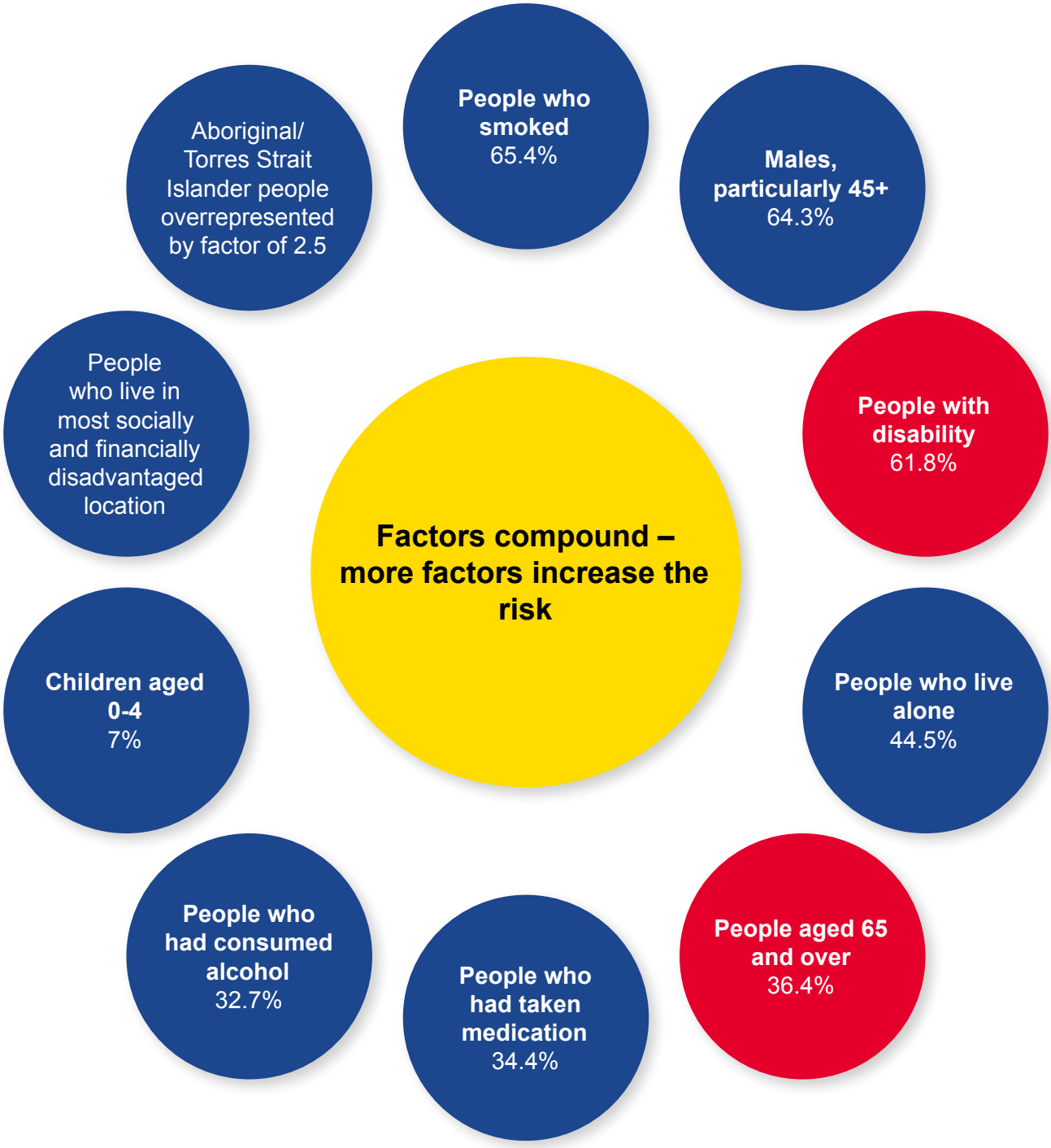
The 2019 study *Preventable residential fire fatalities in Australia July 2003 to June 2017*[1] found that a combination of factors increased the risk of an individual dying in a home fire, including **behaviour**, **residential environment**, and other **social and economic factors**.





1 Coates, L., Kaandorp, G. and Harris, J., 2019. *Preventable Residential Fire Fatalities in Australia July 2003 to June 2017*

People most at risk of dying in a house fire



What factors do your clients have? Are they at higher risk?

From the 2019 study *Preventable residential fire fatalities in Australia July 2003 to June 2017*

Coronial findings – home fires

Coronial findings in Victoria have been important in articulating the obligations of organisations and funding bodies in supporting their clients' home fire safety. They have specifically outlined involvement of service providers in their findings and have explicitly stated the importance of fire safety training, working smoke alarms and fire safety inclusions in risk assessment processes.



Trigger warning: These Coronial inquest reports contain descriptions of how people died in a fire that some readers may find distressing. Please take care while reading and feel free to skip sections or stop at any time.

- Mrs Audrey Svikers (COR 2008 2158) – incident occurred May 2008, findings released November 2012.
  - Following the Coroner's recommendations, the Department of Health and Ageing issued an Industry Feedback Alert on basic home fire safety (2013).
- Mrs Pearl Recht (COR 2011 3161) – incident occurred August 2011, findings released December 2012.
- Ms Cheryl Currie (COR 2009 2905) – incident occurred June 2009, findings released August 2015.
- Ms Vivianne May Rodger (COR 2019 000309) – incident occurred 17 January 2019, findings released 18 December 2023. Recommendation 1: That the National Disability Insurance Scheme Quality and Safeguards Commission ensure that training and information provided to NDIS service coordinators and providers includes information regarding the importance of ensuring appropriate fire safety measures are put place for clients, including hardwired smoke alarms connected to monitored personal alarm devices.
- Ms Stephanie Rebernik (COR 2023 001125) – incident occurred February 2023, findings released April 2026.

Identifying elevated home fire risk

When risks are identified, they can often be mitigated. Even small improvements in an individual's fire safety can lead to significantly better outcomes.

The risk from home fire increases dramatically when:

- there are no working smoke alarms in the home
- a person is unable or slow to self-evacuate
- a person's home is affected by excess clutter/hoarding
- a person engages in unsafe fire behaviours such as smoking in bed, cooking unsafely, or unsafe heating and electrical use.

An Elevated Fire Risk Checklist is now available for in-home service providers (see Appendix 2).

Risks from lithium-ion batteries

Victorian fire agencies now attend almost one lithium-ion battery-related fire every day. They are a fire risk that needs to be managed.

Many portable devices – like laptops, phones, toys, e-scooters, and e-cigarettes – use lithium-ion batteries. These batteries are lightweight and long-lasting but more volatile than traditional types. Improper charging, handling, or disposal can lead to overheating, fire, or explosion, posing risks of property damage and injury.

Bushfire risk

Victoria has some of the most bushfire-prone areas in the world. Victoria's high bushfire risk is due to a combination of factors including population density in fire-prone areas, topography, weather and climate change. Each year in Victoria, there are hundreds of bushfires and grassfires, and climate change is making them worse.

Major bushfires can lead to loss of life, injury, loss of property, and damage to infrastructure such as electricity transmission lines, water supply assets and transport links. Victoria has a history of catastrophic bushfires. The worst bushfire disaster was the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires where 173 people died.



People most at risk from dying in a bushfire

The 2019-2020 Black Summer bushfires had a disproportionate impact on people with disability and their support networks. They commonly faced problems with access to support and services during the disaster and found accessing evacuation centres difficult.

The Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission after Black Saturday in 2009 found that **44% of the people who died during the 2009 bushfires were classed as 'vulnerable'**. Risk factors included age (under 12 years or over 70 years), and people who had acute or chronic illness or disability.

Three characteristics of vulnerability were identified



Being 70 years old or older



Being 12 years old or younger



and/or having an acute/chronic disability.

Identifying elevated bushfire risk

People are at elevated risk when any of these are present:

- they live in a Bushfire Management Overlay and their home is close to a forested area
- they are unable to self-evacuate and require extra support
- they cannot interpret or respond to bushfire warnings.

Risk is increased for someone when:

- they have no or poor access to fire prevention and preparedness information that meets their needs
- they are excluded from the emergency planning and preparedness process
- they don't have a plan, or their plans don't consider what they are vulnerable to, and what to do to remove barriers and increase safety
- their plans lack detail on any planned reliance that is needed to leave safely, including planned reliance on other people and assistive technology
- their plans are not shared with family, informal supports and other support providers.

Why we need to work with service providers

The interdependence of people with disability and their support networks is critical for achieving safety in fires and other emergency situations. CFA and FRV have resources, programs, training, and referral pathways specifically for in-home providers to improve fire safety so that nobody is left behind.

SECTION 2

Service provider fire safety obligations and responsibilities

2

Service provider fire safety obligations and responsibilities

It is essential for service providers to understand and actively engage in safeguarding clients using effective fire safety practices.

People who live independently and have capacity are ultimately responsible for making decisions that affect their own safety. However, people who have limited fire safety literacy, poor access to information, reduced decision-making capacity, unsafe behaviours, face economic or social barriers, or don't have a strong support network, may need extra support to be fire safe.

Requirements under the Aged Care and Disability Standards

Disability and Aged Care service providers must consider their legal and regulatory obligations when working with their clients on emergency planning, including home fire and bushfire. Every organisation needs to review their specific obligations, based on the type, scope and scale of their services, and document how the organisation is fulfilling their obligations.

Service providers may need to work with other stakeholders alongside their client, including family and friends, other service providers, allied health professionals and fire and emergency services to ensure that critical supports are put in place to support their client's safety.

Regulations and regulators relating to fire safety

Service providers will have different legislated or contracted responsibilities depending on their funding and/or regulator. This is not a complete list.

NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission

- Practice Standards – Obligations for emergency planning, service coordination and incident reporting.
- The NDIS Code of Conduct – Provide competent and safe care
  Fire safety is a core component of safeguarding.
- Core Module – Risk management
  Registered NDIS providers must have a risk management system that include emergency and disaster management.



- Practice Standards – Emergency and disaster management
  Addresses the planning required by providers to prepare, prevent, manage, and respond to emergency and disaster situations; mitigate risks; and plan for continuity of supports that are critical to the health, safety, and wellbeing of NDIS Participants.
- Practice Alert – Fire Safety Measures (Dec 2024)
  Explains the fire safety obligations of providers and support workers.

Resources for NDIS Emergency and Disaster Management

R4NED – Resources for NDIS Emergency and Disaster Management website (Funded by the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission)

- R4NED – Resources for NDIS Emergency and Disaster Management
  A website designed for NDIS providers and participants to plan for emergency and disaster management.



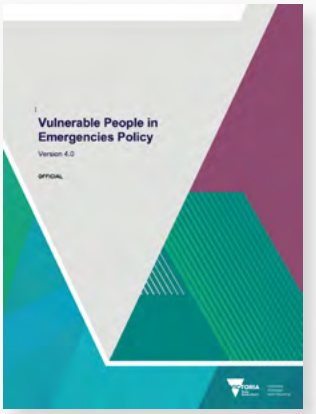
WATCH VIDEO
Understand what the NDIS Practice Standard for Emergency and Disaster Management and how you can meet it.

- NDIS Practice Standard evidence checklist
  The Practice Standard Checklist can help providers map their obligations and actions for this standard.

VICTORIA State Government | Families, Fairness and Housing

Funded Service Providers in Victoria

- DFFH Vulnerable People in Emergencies Policy
  Funded agencies (those providing personal care, support and/or case management services either in home or community settings, to clients living in the community) must comply with this policy as well as any additional stipulations in the service agreement.



The policy states that funded agencies have a responsibility to encourage and, where necessary, support clients (who meet the definition of a vulnerable person) to undertake personal emergency planning. Where there is recognised bushfire risk, specific bushfire planning should be undertaken in addition to basic personal emergency planning.

Victorian Social Services Regulator

- Social Services Regulator
  A website strengthening protections for social services users to safeguard people from harm, abuse and neglect
- Reporting a notifiable incident
  Service providers registered with the Social Services Regulator under the Social Services Regulation Act 2021 (the Act) are responsible for reporting serious incidents that occur during the delivery of a registered social service. This includes fire, flood or other emergency event that results in a service user requiring medical treatment at a hospital; and/or the relocation of service users.

WorkSafe Victoria

- Reporting an incident
  Organisations may have reporting obligations where a person (employee, service user and other people) is harmed or exposed to serious risk from a fire at work. Employers have an obligation under the Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (OHS Act) have a duty to protect the health and safety of employees while at work by providing and maintaining a working environment that is safe and without risks to health.

Australian Government
Department of Health, Disability and Ageing

Aged Care

Strengthened Aged Care Quality Standards (August 2025)



Outcome 2.10: Emergency and disaster management

Outcome statement: The provider must demonstrate that emergency and disaster management planning considers and manages the risks to the health, safety and wellbeing of individuals and aged care workers.

Actions that relate to fire safety, preparedness and planning:

- 2.10.1 The provider develops emergency and disaster management plans that describe how the provider and aged care workers will respond to an emergency or disaster and to manage risks to the health, safety and wellbeing of individuals and aged care workers.
- 2.10.2 The provider implements strategies to prepare for, and respond to, an emergency or disaster.
- 2.10.3 The provider engages with individuals, supporters of individuals and aged care workers about the emergency and disaster management plans.
- 2.10.4 The provider regularly tests and reviews the emergency and disaster management plans in partnership with individuals, supporters of individuals, aged care workers and other response partner.

Outcome 4.1a: Environment – services delivered in individual's home

Outcome Statement: When delivering funded aged care services to individuals in their homes, the provider must support the individuals to mitigate environmental risks relevant to the services.

Actions related to fire safety and excess clutter or hoarding:

- 4.1.1 Where funded aged care services are delivered in the individual's home, as relevant to the services being delivered, the provider
  a) identifies any environmental risks to the safety of the individual
  b) discusses with the individual any environmental risks and options to mitigate these.
- 4.1.2 Equipment and aids provided by the provider are safe, clean, well-maintained and meets the needs of individuals.

Outcome 4.1b: Environment – services delivered other than in the individual's home

Outcome Statement: Where the provider delivers funded aged care services to individuals other than in their homes, the provider must ensure that individuals are able to access funded aged care services in a clean, safe and comfortable environment that optimises their sense of belonging, interaction and function.

Actions related to fire safety and excess clutter or hoarding:

- 4.1.1 The provider ensures the service environment is:
  a) routinely cleaned and well-maintained
  b) safe, welcoming and comfortable
  c) fit-for-purpose.
- 4.1.2 The provider ensures the service environment:
  a) is accessible, including for individuals with a disability
  b) promotes movement, engagement and inclusion through design
  c) enables individuals to move freely both indoors and outdoors
  d) unobtrusively reduces safety risks, optimises useful stimulation and is easy to navigate.
- 4.1.3 Equipment used in the delivery of funded aged care services is safe, clean, well-maintained and meets the needs of individuals.

Australian Government
Department of Health, Disability and Ageing

Department of Health and Ageing

- Industry Feedback Alert – Basic home fire safety (2013)
  Alert of recommendations from Victorian Coroner for all Australian Government subsidised providers of home care services, based on two Coroners reports. Even though this is an older Alert, it contains relevant and critical recommendations for fire safety directed to aged care providers.



What is a provider's duty of care in reducing the risk of fires?

A provider's duty of care in reducing fire risks involves taking all reasonable steps to identify, document, and manage potential fire hazards within the home and externally. This includes conducting risk assessments that consider the clients:

- physical and cognitive needs
- living arrangements
- use of medical or mobility equipment.

Service providers should document the risks that they identify and the actions they undertake to eliminate or reduce the identified risk.

Service providers should provide their workers with training to recognise and manage fire hazards in line with maintaining a safe working environment and a safe home.

Dignity of risk in mitigating fire hazards

It is important to recognise the right of people to make informed choices about their living environment, even when those choices involve a degree of risk.

Providers have a duty of care to identify and clearly communicate fire risks and engage their clients in:

- open, transparent discussions about identified fire risks
- available safety measures and
- potential consequences.

Discussions should support the client to make informed choices by offering clear information and practical solutions that align with their values, preferences, and lifestyle. These discussions and actions should be documented.

When a person chooses to make decisions that are unsafe or that place them or others at increased risk from fire

These situations are complex. A service provider should consider all the individual circumstances and risks in answering the following questions:

- Can we provide a service that is safe to the person in these circumstances?
- Can we provide a safe work environment (the home) for our workers?

Some considerations:

- **Information** – Does the person have access to fire safety information suitable to their needs to help them make an informed decision?
- **Harm reduction** – Can measures be put in place that will allow the person to continue to undertake a risky activity more safely?
- **Service refusal** – Is the risk to workers too great to reasonably and safely provide a service in a person's home?
- **Capacity assessment** – Where appropriate or required, has a client's advocate or guardian been consulted in decisions around safety?
- **Documentation** – Have the risks, proposed mitigations and relevant discussions, choices, decisions, and actions been documented?



SECTION 3

Procedures and policies to manage fire safety of your workers and clients

Procedures and policies to manage fire safety of your workers and clients

All service provider organisations, including sole traders, must understand their emergency and fire safety obligations. What procedures and policies do you have in place? It may depend on your services and where they are located. Do you service clients in high bushfire risk areas? Do you support clients with high risk fire behaviours such as hoarding or smoking?

When clients are linked with multiple services ask if an assessment has already been done so that they are not confused by multiple plans. Never assume this has happened, it is always better to ask the question.

When supporting children with disability, it is important to work with their parents or guardians with fire and emergency planning.



The Disability Inclusive Emergency Management (DIEM) Toolkit from The University of Sydney comprehensively facilitates self-assessment, encourages collaboration and guides tailored action planning for organisations.

Create and strengthen organisational policies and procedures relating to fire safety

All organisations should establish fire safety and emergency management policies and procedures. The scope and detail of these policies will vary depending on factors, including:

- **Size of the organisation and workforce:** Policies should be proportionate to the scale of operations and number of workers.
- **Service types and complexity:** The nature of services provided, the complexity of client needs, and associated fire risk profiles must be considered.
- **Service delivery locations:** Organisations operating in regional or bushfire-prone areas must include specific provisions for bushfire preparedness and worker safety in their policies and procedures.

Policies can include:

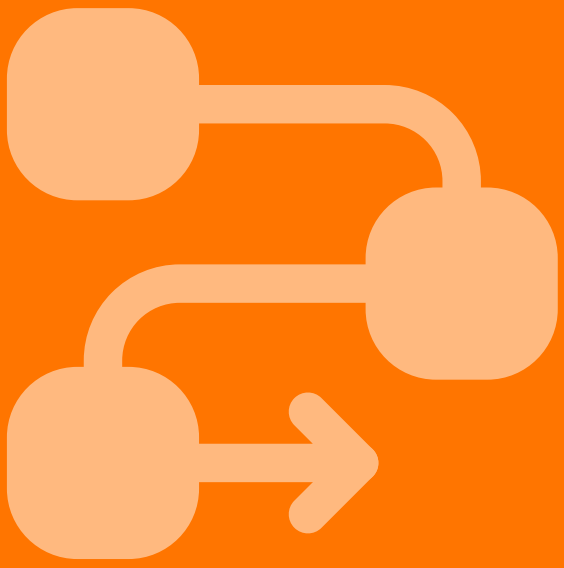
- Fire and emergency planning with clients – see Section 5
- Workplace fire and emergency management – see Section 6 and Section 7
- Organisational policies, procedures, and equipment to manage worker summer bushfire safety for travel and/or work – see Section 6 and Section 7.

Fire and emergency management could also be part of:

- **Risk assessments and risk management:** procedures should include fire risk assessment and mitigation.
- **Risk and incident reporting:** workers should document and escalate fire or other safety concerns to management.
- **Regulator incident reporting obligations:** procedures to comply with regulator incident reporting obligations which include fire and emergency.
- **Worker training:** policies and schedule should include fire safety training.
- **OHS:** policies on managing OHS risks for emergency and fire. An overview of emergency plans and procedures are available from Safe Work Australia.



WATCH VIDEO:
Better Practice Case Studies in Fire Safety – Leisure Networks
Watch this film as an example of shared responsibility between Leisure Networks in Torquay, CFA and Red Cross.



SECTION 4

Fire risks in risk assessment processes

4

Fire risks in risk assessment processes

Fire risk assessment should be part of each client's individual risk assessment. Potential fire risks relating to the home location, home environment, functional capabilities and limitations and behaviours can be identified at this stage.

Risk assessment should be an ongoing process, reassessed every year or as necessary.

Individual risk assessments should be person-centred and, where possible, involve the client's support network, like family or friends.

Recommended minimum questions

Fire Services recommend using the following questions as a minimum when assessing individual client fire risk:

1. Are there a sufficient number of working smoke alarms correctly positioned in the home?
2. Will residents hear the smoke alarm and be able to respond?
3. In the event of a fire in the home, can all residents escape to a safe meeting place within 3 minutes?
4. Are there signs of increased fire risks inside and outside the home? This includes smoking, hoarding, unsafe cooking/ heating practices, and unsafe electrical equipment.
5. Is the home located in a Bushfire Management Overlay*?

   *Identifying elevated bushfire risk – location overlay
   To identify if a client is in a Bushfire Management Overlay, check VicPlan.
   -- For instructions see Appendix 3.

Can workers identify the risks?

To complete effective risk assessments, workers need to have knowledge of risk factors that impact people at higher risk of fire.

To support the identification of risks you can:

1. Use the Elevated Fire Risk Checklist in Appendix 2
2. Mandate CFA and FRV's free online training modules to equip workers with the knowledge and skills to identify fire risks and support reducing the risks – see Section 7
3. Ensure at an organisational level there are sufficient processes in place to support the identification and mitigation of elevated fire risks.



SECTION 5

Fire and emergency planning with your clients

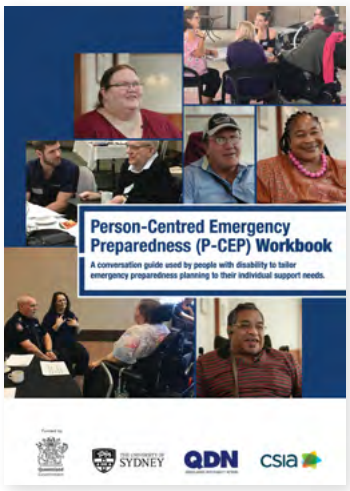
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Fire and emergency planning with your clients

Person-centred emergency planning

Everyone has the right to be involved and informed about decisions that impact their lives.

People are experts in their own lives. What they need are the right tools, time, supports and opportunities to enable them to optimise their self-reliance and planned reliance on others in emergencies. With the right tools and supports, people can self-assess their risk and tailor emergency preparedness to their individual support needs and situation, including their self-reliance and planned reliance on others in emergencies.



Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP) is a tool and a framework that was co-designed by Collaborating4Inclusion at The University of Sydney with people with disability and the services that support them.

The P-CEP Workbook can be utilised for emergency planning. A range of P-CEP tools are available online at P-CEP Tools | Collaborating 4 Inclusion.



WATCH VIDEO

Watch Joan's story about how she improved her fire plan through the P-CEP process.

Additional supports

Some people with complex needs may require additional supports as part of their fire safety planning from:

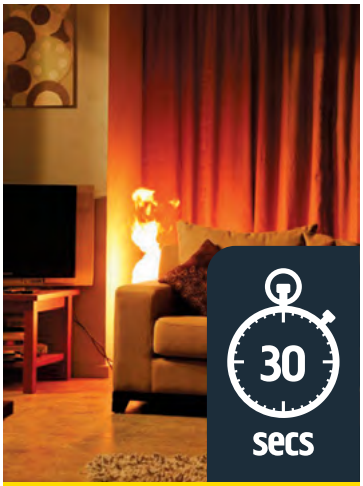
- Family, friends and carers
- Case Manager
- Occupational Therapist
- Behaviour support practitioner
- Fire Services
- Emergency Services

CFA and FRV do not develop emergency evacuation plans for a site or premise, such as a SIL facility. However, advice and support for individual fire and emergency plans can be provided.

Home fire escape planning

Home fires are fast; they can engulf a room within minutes.

For some people, escaping within 3 minutes is not possible. In this case, their home escape plan should consider what they can do in different scenarios, and how they can reduce their risks as much as possible.



By now, smoke alarms should have detected the fire and alerted your family.



The fire will take hold and grow quickly. Poisonous smoke will start to develop, which is often the deadliest part of a fire.



The fire has reached in excess of **800 degrees Celsius**. All of the contents in the room will be on fire and it will have spread to other rooms in the house.

Having a Home Fire Escape Plan means everyone in the home knows what to do and where to go if there is a fire.

People should be able escape from their home to a safe location and call for help within 3 minutes.

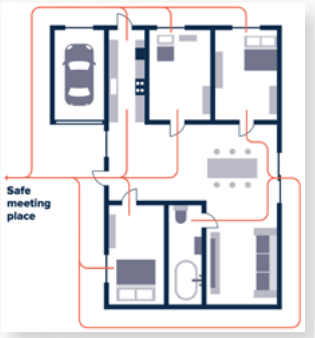
People unable to escape

To mitigate this risk people can:

- ☑ have a personal alarm linked to their smoke alarm
- ☑ have a smoke alarm in their bedroom, preferably interconnected to the rest of their smoke alarms
- ☑ keep their phone close by and ensure it is always charged
- ☑ relocate their bedroom closer to an exit to help firefighters find me more easily
- ☑ have an exit out of the bedroom to the outside. For example, some people have changed a window to a sliding door
- ☑ complete the Home Fire Escape Plan for People at Higher Risk with the client.

A written Home Fire Escape Plan should include:

- ☑ the location of smoke alarms
- ☑ all exits that the residents can use to escape the home
- ☑ a safe meeting place where all residents can meet once they escape, such as the letter box or front gate
- ☑ how residents will call Triple Zero (000)
- ☑ other additional considerations.




HOME FIRE ESCAPE PLAN
FOR PEOPLE AT HIGHER RISK

DATE COMPLETED: DATE FOR REVIEW:

A fire in your home can happen at any time. The smoke, heat and flames can be deadly. Victoria's fire services recommend that older people and people with a disability should not try to fight a fire. You should get out, stay out, and call Triple Zero (000) for help.

This plan will help you work out exactly what you and others in your home will do if a fire starts.

There are three parts to your Home Fire Escape Plan:

Complete this plan yourself or with help from a family member, friend, support worker, or a health professional that visits you at home.

If you live in an apartment building or other type of large building, you can ask your Building Manager or Owners Corporation representative for information or help where needed.

1 Me and My Home
2 My Smoke Alarm Action Plan
3 My Home Escape Action Plan

ME AND MY HOME

Name of support person | My notes

My name:

My home address:

People who can support me to:
- Complete my plan
- Practise my plan
- Install, test and maintain my smoke alarms

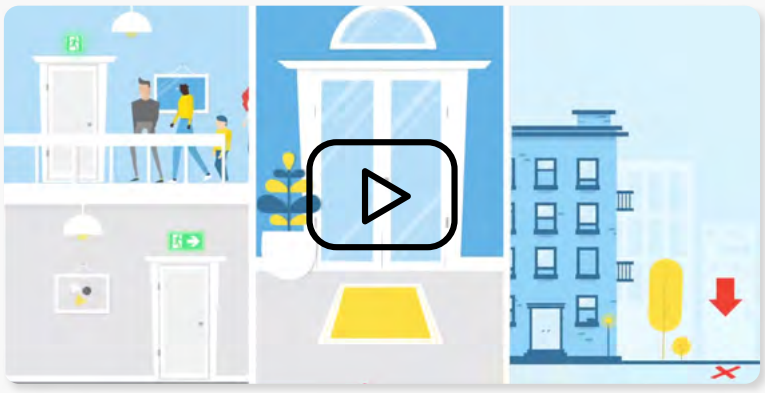
Use the Home Fire Escape Plan for People at Higher Risk template

ℹ Available versions:
Large print | Word version

High-rise and apartments

If you support clients in an apartment there are some important factors to consider:

- Only apartment buildings that are four storeys high or more are required to have sprinklers.
- A sprinklered building is much safer in a fire as the sprinklers will contain the fire.
- The apartment building may have a fire escape plan with an emergency assembly area. Make sure workers and clients understand the plan.
- The smoke alarms in an apartment building, particularly a high rise may be connected to a fire alarm panel. This means if a smoke alarm is activated the entire building will be alerted.
- In a fire you cannot use the lifts in an apartment building. If you support someone that cannot use the stairs, they will need a plan of what to do in a fire. Depending on the building's fire protection systems and where the fire is, the individual may be able to stay in the fire rated stairwell and wait for assistance or remain in their apartment and wait for assistance.
- More information about high-rise fire safety.



WATCH VIDEO

Watch about fire safety in apartments.

Practising home fire escape plans

Practise escape plans with clients and workers every 6 months and review periodically.



Home fire escape practice scenario

It's 2am and everyone is asleep when the smoke alarm activates. It is dark and smoky.

Can everyone get from "in bed" to their safe meeting place within three minutes?

Once at their safe meeting place, can they call Triple Zero (000)?

Practise this scenario with workers and clients. Set a timer so you can check how you went. Can you improve the time with more practise? What needs to change to be able to evacuate faster?

Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP)

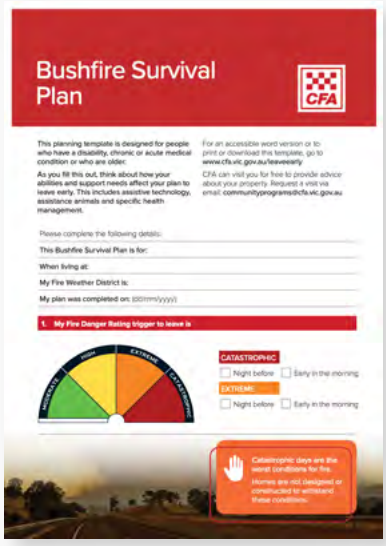
A PEEP is a planning document for an individual in the event of an emergency, where that person requires additional or specific assistance to evacuate. Use these for clients who have extra mobility challenges.

The Home Fire Escape Plan for People at Higher Risk planning template discussed on page 47 of this document is a helpful conversational and planning tool that can be used to help develop a PEEP or as an alternative to it, depending on organisational preferences.

Bushfire planning – 6 key questions

Support clients with a person-centred conversation to decide:

1. When will they leave?
2. Where will they go?
3. How will they get there?
4. What will they need to take?
5. Who are their support people?
6. How will your client know it's safe to come home?



Clients can complete a Bushfire Survival Plan themselves or with a family member or person of trust. In some cases, clients will need assistance from their provider.

ℹ Available versions:
Large print | Completed sample



WATCH VIDEO

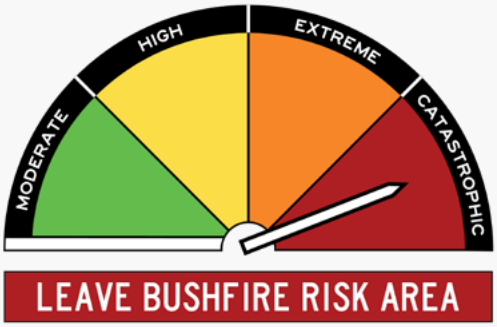
Bianca shares her experience of evacuating the township of Lakes Entrance during the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires. She describes the extra considerations for people with disability, what lessons she learnt and what she would do differently next time.

When to leave is the most important decision to make

Leaving early means being away from high-risk areas before there are any signs of fire.

It does not mean waiting for a warning or a siren. It does not mean waiting to see or smell smoke. And it certainly does not mean waiting for a knock on the door.

Use the Fire Danger Ratings to support clients with their decision to leave.



CFA and FRV recommend people with disability and people who are older leave early on Extreme and Catastrophic days.

Where to go

In supporting clients to plan where to go:

- Emergency Relief Centres usually only open when there is a fire. They may not be accessible or meet the needs of the individual, as they are often noisy, busy and full of people, without much privacy.
- Consider a family or friend's home in a low-risk regional or urban centre.
- Consider the need for air conditioning and effects of heat in the open.
- A local air-conditioned and serviced centre such as a Senior Citizens club, library, shopping centre or Place of Worship may be an option for the daytime.
- A respite centre or care facility away from high-risk areas could be another option.

There are resources and training for workers to support bushfire planning with their clients. These are found at www.cfa.vic.gov.au/atrisk.

Emergency Relief Centres (ERC)

These centres are managed by local Councils. They are opened when there is an emergency to provide basic shelter, first aid, information and catering. Your client may need to consider Relief Centres in adjoining Council areas.

To find if an ERC has been opened, please visit the VicEmergency website, whey they are listed when open.



WATCH VIDEO

Delwyn tells her experience of leaving her home when bushfires threatened the Lakes Entrance area in January 2020, and Disability Advocate Denise Lamble discusses the challenges people can face when leaving and why planning is so important.

Grassfire risk

Grassfires are fires burning through grass. They are not as intensely hot as a bushfire, but they can travel extremely fast and can be very frightening and dangerous.

The advice about what to do in a grassfire depends on whether the fire is in a rural area OR is near suburbs and towns. It is important to understand this difference.

- Grassfires near cities and towns
- Grassfires in rural areas

Additional considerations for paid supports

People with disability and/or who are older will also have to consider what support needs they may have, and how these are coordinated with a service provider in a bushfire.

Considerations:

- What do they need to safely evacuate?
- How will they notify a service provider if/when they need to evacuate?
- How will evacuation impact service provision?
- Do they have additional requirements that need to be met at the Emergency Relief Centre? e.g. access to a hoist or specific medical equipment or supplies.

Planned reliance

If a client plans to rely on someone else for their bushfire safety, this needs to be planned for and communicated. If a client relies on specialised equipment and assistive technology, this needs to be included in their bushfire plan.

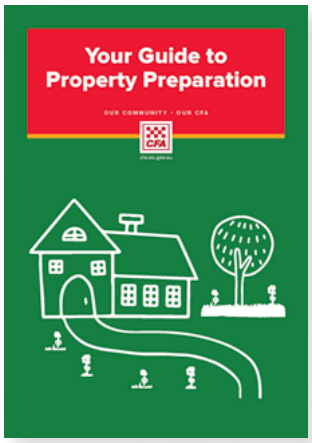
A bushfire plan is much more likely to be effective if this planned reliance is built in and meets the needs of the individual.

Property preparation

CFA and FRV recommend that people manage the vegetation around their home, to reduce the impact of fire. Support clients to manage vegetation. If the property is in a Bushfire Management Overlay, they will not need a permit to clear:

- any vegetation, including trees, within 10 metres of the house,
- any vegetation, excluding trees, within 50 metres of the house.

Follow CFA's Your Guide to Property Preparedness to support clients.



CFA can conduct a free property visit. Make sure workers are aware of this service. Use the Bushfire Planning Referral Pathway in Appendix 1.

Ensure workers have access to resources to support clients

Providers need to make sure people can access fire safety information that they can understand and is accessible to them.

Accessible resources

Easy English and Easy Read
Information in an accessible format that uses images, everyday words and simple sentences to help readers understand the information. For clients with low literacy or intellectual disabilities.
ⓘ Available versions: PDF.

Fire Safety Translations
Translated information including Auslan.
ⓘ Available versions: videos, audio files, and publications.

Deaf and hard of hearing
Resources and messages designed for people who are Deaf or hard of hearing.
ⓘ Available resources: Auslan videos, publications.

Accessible Bushfire Resources fact sheet
Contains links to accessible bushfire resources on the one document.

Bushfire planning resources



Bushfire Survival Plan template
This planning template is designed for people who have a disability, chronic or acute medical condition or who are older.
ℹ Available versions:
Large print | Completed sample

The P-CEP Workbook can be utilised for emergency planning.

Information and resources to support clients with bushfire planning

Home fire planning resources



Home Fire Escape Plan
This planning template is designed for people who have a disability, chronic or acute medical condition or who are older.
ℹ Available versions: Large print | Word version



Home fire checklist for people at higher risk
For workers to complete with clients.
ℹ Available versions: Word version

Information and resources to support clients with home fire planning

Online learning modules

Bushfire Planning – You and the person you care for
Online learning module developed with Carers Victoria to support people who are caring for others living in high bushfire risk areas. It is relevant to anyone who provides unpaid care or support to family members and/or friends with a disability, mental illness, chronic health issue or age-related condition.
ℹ Available version: Online learning module.

Prevent Detect Escape – Home Fire Safety for people at higher risk
Online learning module for workers, carers and individuals. Workers can assist clients by working through the module together.
ℹ Available version: Online learning module.

Guide for community workers

Fire Ready Guide for Community Workers
A booklet targeted to workers to support clients with bushfire safety.
ℹ Available versions: PDF / Hard copies from CFA.

Additional support

Information and resources to support clients with bushfire planning

Information and resources to support clients with home fire planning



SECTION 6

Safety for workers

Safety for workers

Home fire safety considerations for workers

Organisations should consider fire safety risks for workers conducting duties within home environments. Many organisations assess the environment of a home during the intake process and can also consider the following:

- working smoke alarms that are fit for purpose in the home.
- escape/evacuation plans for the home that are understood by the client and all workers entering the home.

These safety measures are the same for alternative accommodation types such as caravans, granny flats and sheds.

Residual Current Devices

Service providers can also consider providing direct frontline staff (such as support workers) with a portable residual current device (RCD), or safety switch. RCD switches can protect the person using electrical equipment from electrocution and provide some protection against electrical fires.

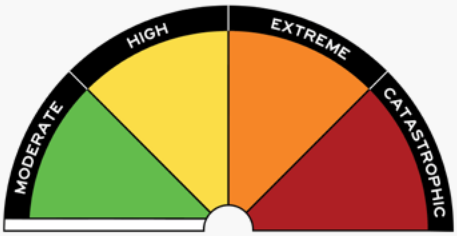
Bushfire safety considerations for workers

If staff travel into bushfire risk areas to conduct in-home support activities, there should be policies and procedures to improve staff safety during elevated bushfire danger days.

There are several factors to consider:

Decide when it is unsafe to send workers to bushfire prone locations

Use the Fire Danger Rating system to define what services will and will not be delivered on days of heightened risk. The client and the services will need to have agreed on what actions will be taken and have a plan if support cannot be provided.



MODERATE
Plan and prepare

HIGH
Be ready to act

EXTREME
Take action now to protect life and property

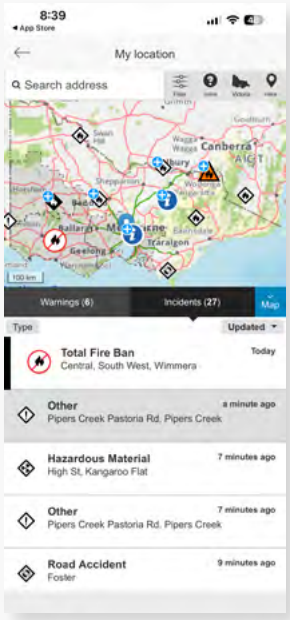
CATASTROPHIC
For your survival, **leave bushfire risk areas**

VIC EMERGENCY

If there is a fire, follow the advice of the warning messages through the VicEmergency App and website.

Monitor conditions throughout summer

- Monitor bushfire warnings and local conditions during summer.
- The VicEmergency App can set up watch zone/s to cover the locations staff travel to. Make sure notifications are switched on.
- ABC and local radio may also provide timely and accurate information about local bushfire conditions.
- Download the VicEmergency App on your phone now and set up notifications.



Maintain contact

- Plan how to maintain contact with staff travelling in bushfire areas of Victoria during summer. This will be important if the location has poor phone service or is in an isolated area. For example you could have a check-in two hourly or when the worker leaves or arrives at a clients residence.

Plan to survive

- If staff must travel into bushfire risk areas on days of Extreme or Catastrophic fire danger, ensure they travel early in the morning and they have the equipment and knowledge they need if they become trapped in their car or at a client's home.
- CFA and FRV advise that workers should not travel into bushfire risk areas on Extreme or Catastrophic days. Catastrophic days are the worst days, there should be clear guidance about worker safety on these days.



CFA's Bushfire Safety for Workers online module provides critical bushfire safety advice to support maintaining a safe workplace.

CFA recommends that anyone who works in high bushfire risk areas completes this online module. Employers should consider making it mandatory for workers.



Days of elevated fire danger

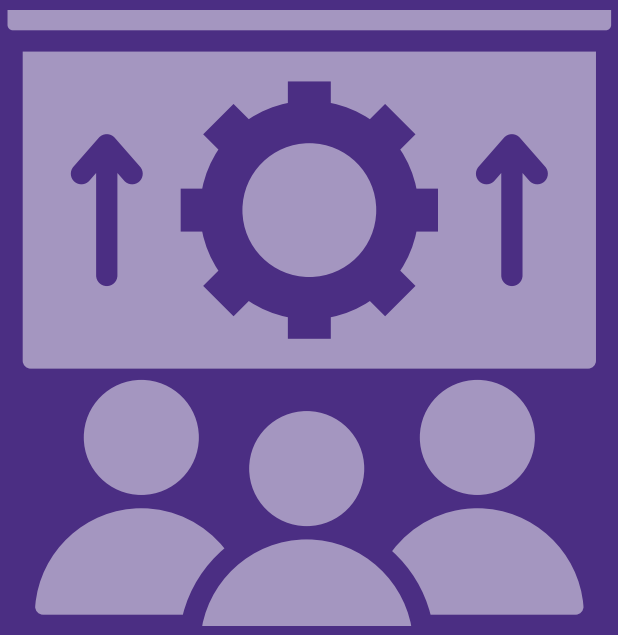
Service providers should consider and plan for alternative options to avoid travel to or through bushfire prone areas on days of Extreme or Catastrophic fire danger:

Consider if it is viable to:

- Reschedule appointments to another day.
- Meet the client in a non-bushfire risk area.
- Meet online or over the phone.
- Only if urgent, travel early in the morning before 11am, if there are no bushfires in the area.

The location of a client's property may be a factor in decision making and can include:

- Phone reception/service. Low phone reception may mean warnings and emergency information are missed.
- The types of roads and if there are several routes to get out or only one road in or out. A single road out may be inaccessible or blocked in a fire.
- Whether the property is directly next to or within a dense forest.
- If the property is very isolated with neighbours quite a distance away.



SECTION 7

Increase worker capability to identify, assess and respond to fire risks

7

Increase worker capability to identify, assess and respond to fire risks

Victorian fire services recommend that frontline workers:

1. Work with clients in a person-centred way to identify and reduce fire risks and support them to build their own fire safety knowledge and preparedness.
2. Support the creation of fire plans and communicate with others about the plan.
3. Practise and refine Home Fire Escape Plans/PEEPS/Bushfire Survival Plans with clients.
4. Know when a risk/situation is dangerous and needs to be referred to the fire services.
   Tip: Use the Elevated Fire Risk Checklist in Appendix 2.
5. Keep themselves, their colleagues and their clients safe.

Workplace Fire Safety Training

There are a range of providers that offer workplace fire safety training for a fee, including:

- Development of site-specific emergency plans and procedures
- Fire drill and evacuation management training
- Fire warden training
- Training in the use of fire extinguishers and fire blankets.

CFA and FRV offer fire equipment maintenance services and may deliver worker training in your area:

Fire Equipment Maintenance – CFA

Fire Equipment Services – FRV

If you are unsure which fire service to contact it doesn't matter as you will be referred to the appropriate fire service to help you.

Practise and drills

Service providers should develop their own emergency management and fire safety training drills. Running regular drills, discussing, and practising different scenarios **will increase worker capabilities to prepare for and respond to an emergency**. It is better practice to run drills every 6 months.

Consider practical drills/scenarios including:

- Testing smoke alarms are working
- Doing a home fire safety risk assessment/identifying fire risks
- Calling 000 and practising what to say
- Talking with clients about fires and emergencies
- Developing a Home Fire Escape Plan, personal emergency evacuation plan (PEEP), and/or bushfire plan alongside clients
- Receiving and acting on bushfire warnings.

CFA and FRV training

Three non-accredited online learning fire safety modules are housed on CFA's learning management system. Users complete a registration process to enrol, save their progress, and can download a certificate on completion.

CFA

www.cfa.vic.gov.au/atrisk

FIRE RESCUE VICTORIA

www.frv.vic.gov.au/atrisk

Module 1: Prevent Detect Escape – Home Fire Safety for people at higher risk



This module is for support workers and clients and will help them understand home fire risks and how to reduce those risks. It provides referral pathways for hoarding and smoke alarm installation, plus other resources.
Completion time: 45–60 minutes



WATCH VIDEO
Watch Jeanette's story about learning about home fire safety

Module 2: Bushfire Safety for Workers



This module provides important OHS and duty of care (maintaining a safe workplace) information. It ensures workers know what do to if caught out in a bushfire and how to stay safe. It also provides information about how to be safer when travelling through or working in a bushfire-prone area.
Completion time: 45–60 minutes

Module 3: Bushfire Planning- How to support your clients



This module guides support workers and service providers to engage with clients, to raise their awareness of the need for a bushfire survival plan and prompts them to complete a plan. Module 2 should be completed before Module 3.
Completion time: 45–60 minutes.

If the e-learning modules do not meet your learning requirements contact the fire services for more advice.

Better practice: The Australian Vietnamese Women's Association

The Australian Vietnamese Women's Association (AVWA) deliver in home care and support particularly to ageing Vietnamese women. A group of 60 support workers attended a home fire safety education session delivered by FRV in December 2023.

After this session a large percentage of this workforce (over 50 employees) completed the Prevent Detect Escape e-learning module. AVWA have mandated this course for all their workers. The fire services have also been invited to expos hosted by AVWA across Melbourne. This has provided FRV with an opportunity to speak one-on-one to support workers, individuals, and their support networks to build their knowledge of fire safe practices.

Fire safety for the care sector

The CFA Engage page Fire Safety for the Care Sector offers resources, links, events and information designed to empower service providers and support workers in enhancing home fire and bushfire safety for the people they care for.

Basic Home Fire Safety Training Materials

The Basic Home Fire Safety Training Materials are accredited units of competency embedded in a range of diploma and certificate qualifications.

P-CEP training

Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP) Education is offered through The University of Sydney as a self-paced, online short course. Co-designed and tested with people with disability, P-CEP enables people to self-assess their preparedness, capabilities and support needs and develop a personal emergency plan for how they will:

- manage their support needs in emergencies; and
- act together with their support network before, during, and after an emergency.

P-CEP emphasises the capabilities of people with disability and the roles of multiple stakeholders in reducing emergency risks, consistent with Australia's National Emergency Management and Disability Strategies.



SECTION 8

Understand and apply home safety measures and recommendations

8

Understand and apply home safety measures and recommendations

Smoke alarms

Correctly positioned, working smoke alarms are the most important tool in home fire safety.

Victorian fire services recommend smoke alarms in all hallways, bedrooms and living areas, and anywhere an individual sleeps.

A home without working smoke alarms is unsafe for residents and for workers.

Who is responsible for ensuring smoke alarms in private homes

Private homes
Individuals are responsible for ensuring smoke alarms are installed and working.

Privately rented properties
Rental providers must ensure their rental property is appropriately fitted with smoke alarms. Tenants are allowed to add extra smoke alarms. Learn more about privately rented properties.

Public and community housing
The housing provider is responsible for smoke alarms and other fire safety systems. Problems can be reported to the housing officer or at 131 172.

What service providers can do

Installation

- Ensure the home has sufficient smoke alarms. Battery-only smoke alarms can be installed by anyone.
- Information about smoke alarms and placement.
- In special instances CFA or FRV may be able to assist – see the Smoke Alarm Referral Pathway in Appendix 1.

Maintenance

- Check that smoke alarms are less than 10 years old, test they are working monthly, and dust and replace battery yearly. Only replace the battery if it has a 9 volt replaceable battery. Smoke alarms with a 10-year long-life battery will not need replacing every year.

Utilise specialised smoke alarms

- Smoke Alarms can be connected to Personal Alarms such as MePACS.
- Specialised smoke alarms for the Deaf and hard of hearing may be funded from a client's package or through the Victorian Smoke Alarm Subsidy scheme, managed by Expression Australia.

Specialised smoke alarms and devices



It is important that residents can hear and respond to their smoke alarm.

Reasons someone may be unable to hear or respond include:

- They are Deaf or hard of hearing. People who use hearing aids may remove them at night when they sleep, meaning they may not hear a smoke alarm.
- They find it difficult to wake up (e.g. they take medications that cause drowsiness).
- They may become confused or not know what to do if a smoke alarm activates (e.g. due to dementia).
- They have trouble processing information or responding to change (e.g. because of a developmental condition like autism spectrum disorders).
- Both the FRV and CFA websites have information for people who are Deaf of hard of hearing.

Fire Services smoke alarm recommendations

Install smoke alarms in all bedrooms and living areas

Why it's important: These areas account for 72% of fire fatalities. Closed doors or distance can delay detection.

Actions: Residents can install additional smoke alarms – see Appendix 1 – Smoke Alarm Referral Pathway

Replace smoke alarms every 10 years

Why it's important: Sensors degrade over time, even if the test button works.

Actions: Check the manufacture date (usually on the base). If unknown, assess condition by checking if the smoke alarm is yellowing, painted, and has a small test button. These are all signs a smoke alarm could be old and needs replacing.

Install interconnected smoke alarms

Why it's important: Ensures all alarms sound together for maximum alert.

Actions: Can be installed without an electrician if battery-operated and have a wireless connection.

Use alarms with 10-year long life batteries

Why it's important: Reduces maintenance (no need to replace batteries) and prevents battery removal.

Actions: Available at hardware stores. Follow installation instructions.



Choose alarms with large test/hush buttons

Why it's important: Easier monthly testing and false alarm management.

Use specialist alarms for people who are Deaf or hard of hearing

Why it's important: Includes strobe lights and vibrating pads for effective alerting.

Actions: Apply for a subsidy through Expression Australia to reduce cost or access through funding stream.

Smoke alarm resources:

- *Smoke Alarms – CFA*
- *Smoke Alarms – FRV*

In-Home fire sprinklers

Fire sprinklers are the fastest and most effective way to prevent a home fire from spreading. Cost-effective home fire sprinkler systems, designed for a wide range of residential settings, are becoming increasingly accessible.

For individuals at higher risk, such as those who live alone or are unable to self-evacuate, installing a home fire sprinkler system is a valuable safety option to consider.

More information from the Home Fire Sprinkler Coalition Australia.

Access and egress

Individuals need to be able to get out of their home quickly in a home fire. Consider if there are ways to improve access and egress, such as:

- Moving an individual closer to an exit. This may involve changing bedrooms, so the person's bedroom is closer to the exit.
- Having ramps on all exits.
- Adding a door to the outside directly from a bedroom.
- Widening doorways.
- Keeping wheelchairs or other assistive technology accessible in case of an emergency.

Light Electric Vehicles (LEVs) with lithium-ion batteries

LEVs, including mobility scooters, commonly contain lithium-ion batteries. They are lightweight, energy dense and long lasting but can be more volatile than traditional batteries.

Lithium-ion batteries can be a fire risk. If a lithium-ion battery is improperly charged, handled, stored or disposed of, there is a risk of overheating, catching fire or explosion. This also increases the risk of a house fire, garage fire or personal injury.



There are ways to improve safety. Support your clients to be safer by understanding the safety advice – Battery safety

Home oxygen therapy

Home oxygen therapy is when a person is prescribed oxygen therapy via an oxygen concentrator or cylinder. For people using home oxygen therapy, there is a fire risk associated with open flames in the house such as from gas stoves, open fires or if someone smokes.

Some mitigation strategies to discuss with the person to manage this risk can include:

- Do NOT smoke whilst **connected** to the oxygen concentrator or cylinder
- No smoking or vaping near the oxygen concentrator or cylinders.
- No using oxygen equipment near lighters, matches, candles, gas appliances, open flames or near electrical equipment that gets hot or sparks.
- Secure cylinders to prevent them from falling over
- Turn off oxygen therapy equipment when not in use.



SECTION 9

Tools to identify fire risks and referral pathways to the Fire Services

Tools to identify fire risks and referral pathways to the Fire Services

Elevated fire risks

As part of risk assessment processes AND everyday interactions with clients, look for visual indicators of increased fire risk in a home or property. Once identified, support the client with ways to reduce these risks.



Some risk factors are more dangerous for the person than others. These are called elevated fire risks and include:

- There are no working smoke alarms in the home
- A person is unable or slow to evacuate (can be a risk for both bushfire and home fire)
- A person's home is affected by hoarding
- A person engages in unsafe behaviours such as smoking in bed or unsafe cooking/heating
- A person lives in a Bushfire Management Overlay (see Appendix 3) and does not have a Bushfire Survival Plan.



If any elevated risks are identified, do you have a procedure in place to mitigate these?

See Appendix 2 – Elevated Fire Risk Checklist.

Hoarding

Identify the risk

Hoarding is a complex issue that requires long-term support and intervention from appropriate agencies.

Without addressing the underlying causes, the accumulation of materials can increase over time, raising serious fire safety concerns.

Research shows that hoarding significantly increases the risk of fire and reduces the chances of occupants escaping safely. It also poses dangers to firefighters, emergency responders, and neighbouring properties.

The Victorian Fire Services respond to incidents involving hoarding every 4–6 days.

Assessing the risk



To assess the severity of clutter and guide intervention use the Clutter Image Rating Scale (CIRS), a visual tool that helps identify when fire risk is elevated.

Mitigate the fire risk

Fires and other emergencies are more likely to occur in a home where there is hoarding. High fuel loads can increase the size, spread, and severity of a fire. This makes it harder to contain and extinguish.

The fire services recommend that in the first instance you make risk reduction a priority rather than large scale removal. Individuals or agencies assisting those affected by hoarding should:

- Install smoke alarms and test them.
- Unblock exits.
- Widen internal pathways (Approx. 80cm wide).
- Check utilities are connected.
- Prioritise removing clutter from around cooking area and stove tops.
- Ensure clutter is removed from around heaters and electrical items and discourage the use of open flame.



Smoking

Smoking is a leading cause of house fire deaths in Australia, with many fires starting due to unsafe smoking behaviours.

Quitting smoking is the safest option from a health and a fire safety perspective. However, if a person continues to smoke, here are some ways to minimise the fire risk:

- Smoke outside the home in a single location.
- If smoking occurs in the home, there should be a smoke alarm in every room.
- Never smoke in bed. Smoking in bed is the leading cause of smoking-related fire deaths. Smoking in bed is dangerous because of the risk of falling asleep with a lit cigarette, which can easily set fire to bedding.
- Don’t smoke when affected by alcohol, drugs or medications that may cause drowsiness.
- Use heavy, high-sided, non-combustible ashtrays to dispose of cigarette butts. Pour some water on the ash and butts to make sure they’re out.
- “Stick it don’t flick it” – never flick cigarette butts, either inside or outside.
- Never leave a lit cigarette unattended and butt out your cigarette before you walk away.
- Keep matches and cigarette lighters out of reach of children.

Learn more about safe smoking practices.

Know when to contact the fire services

Fire safety is a shared responsibility. Part of your service to your client should include:

- helping them to manage their fire safety
- assisting them with risk assessments
- assisting them with smoke alarms
- assisting them with fire and emergency plans.



When you identify that a client presents with significant levels of fire risk or complex fire-related behaviours, you can reach out to the fire services for advice and assistance.

Referral pathways

CFA and FRV have four referral pathways (see Appendix 1):

- **Hoarding referral pathway** – Hoarding is a fire risk of concern as people affected by hoarding are more likely to have a fire and less likely to be able to escape from their home if a fire occurs.
- **Smoke alarm referral pathway** – A fatal fire is 4 times more likely to occur where there is no working smoke alarm installed. Install smoke alarms with a 10 year-long-life battery. Smoke alarms are compulsory under Victorian law in all residential buildings.
- **Reduce the risks of home fire referral pathway** – Around 3,000 house fires occur in Victoria each year. Most could be prevented by taking simple precautions. Fatal fires often begin in bedrooms or lounge areas, commonly caused by unsafe use of electrical appliances or heating. Having a clear plan and being prepared greatly increases the chance of escaping safely and staying calm.
- **Bushfire planning referral pathway** – All Victorians need to be ready to act if bushfire threatens, but some people require support to prepare their plan and leave early. On an Extreme or Catastrophic rated day, the safest option for people living in a high-risk bushfire area is to leave early – especially if they have a physical disability, are older, or have difficulty thinking clearly or acting quickly under stress.

Contacting CFA and FRV

Service providers can contact Victoria's fire services, CFA or FRV, for advice and support.

For a confidential discussion, contact:

- CFA – communityprograms@cfa.vic.gov.au
- FRV – submit an enquiry to Fire Rescue Victoria.

Vulnerable Persons Register (VPR)

CFA and FRV do not manage or have access to the VPR.

CFA and FRV may get access during an emergency, but access is otherwise restricted.

The VPR is part of the Victorian Vulnerable People in Emergencies policy.

Service providers can place a client on the VPR if they meet a strict eligibility criterion for a risk to bushfire or flood within certain municipalities across the State. If a client is listed on the VPR, it's sole purpose is to evacuate them during a bushfire or flood emergency.

Victoria Police are the agency that can access this list in an emergency and respond by evacuating the registered people.
Learn more about the Victorian Vulnerable Persons Register.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Referral pathways

Hoarding referral pathway

Hoarding is the persistent accumulation of and lack of ability to relinquish large numbers of objects or living animals. It results in extreme clutter, compromising the intended use of premises.

Hoarding is a fire risk of concern as people affected by hoarding are more likely to have a fire and less likely to be able to escape from their home if a fire occurs.

I am concerned about hoarding in the home of one of my clients

Discuss the fire danger of hoarding with your client and support them to:

- make sure they have working smoke alarms
- write a Home Fire Escape plan
- reduce the clutter in their home at a pace they are comfortable with, focusing on clearing exits, pathways and the areas around cooking and heating appliances.

ℹ *Refer back to your own organisation to see if there is any additional support that the person can access.*



My client doesn't recognise their level of risk or does not want to reduce the clutter in their home

Send a referral when the Clutter Image Rating Scale (CIRS) **scores 5 or above in any room** and when smoke alarms are missing or non-functional.

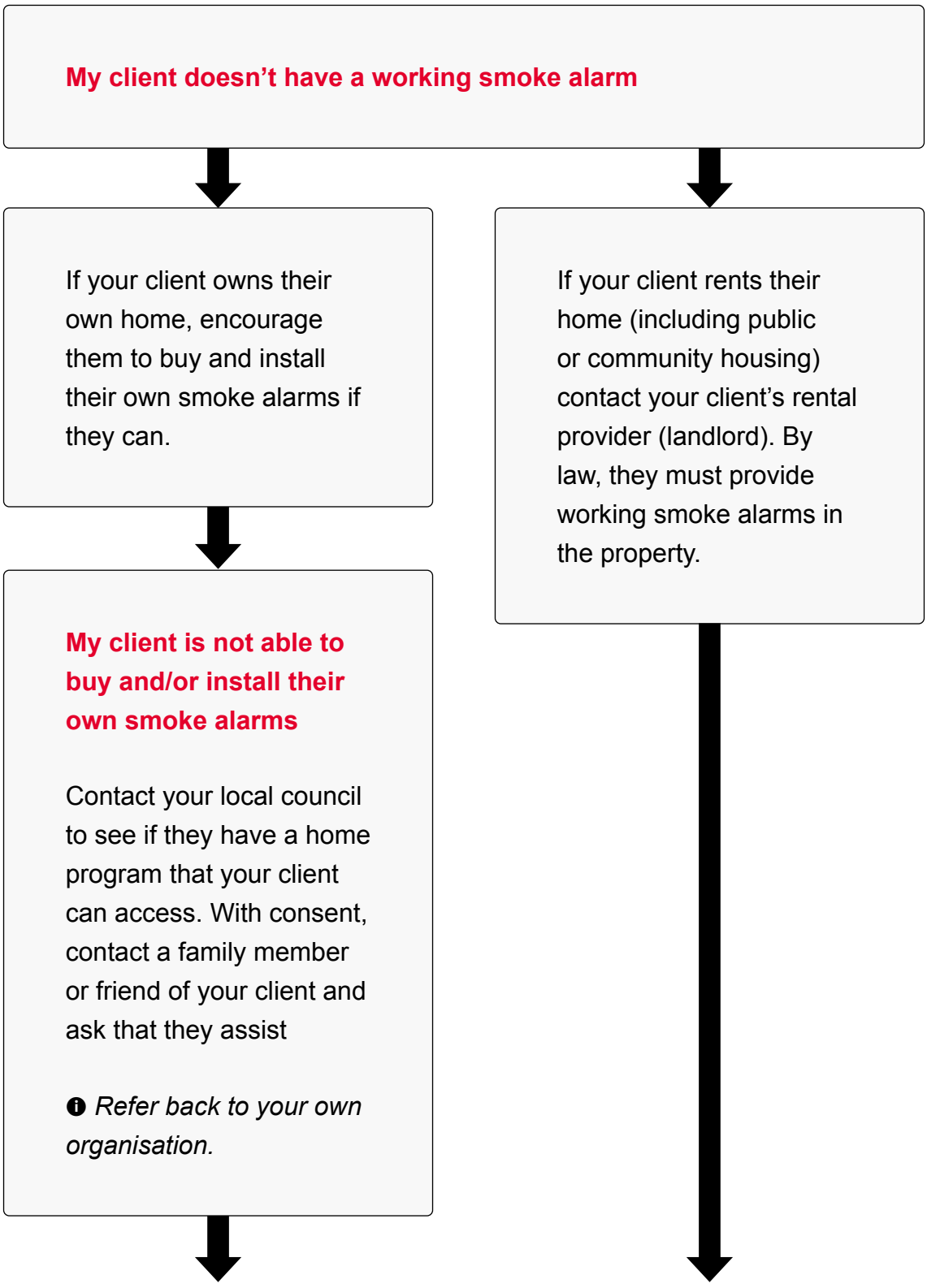
You can do this without your client's consent.

FRV and CFA can provide hoarding risk reduction advice. A referral to FRV and CFA's hoarding notification system will ensure firefighters are aware of the fire risk.
Contact the fire services by submitting an enquiry to Fire Rescue Victoria.

ℹ *Refer back to your own organisation for any additional support.*

Smoke alarm referral pathway

A fatal fire is 4 times more likely where there is no working smoke alarm installed. Install smoke alarms with a 10 year-long-life battery. Smoke alarms are compulsory under Victorian law in all residential buildings.



I have been unable to implement a solution, what should I do?

With their permission, refer your client to the fire services by submitting an enquiry to Fire Rescue Victoria.

My client refuses to have a smoke alarm installed in their property

ℹ *Refer back to your own organisation. Document the refusal.*

Contact fire services for further advice and support by submitting an enquiry to Fire Rescue Victoria.

Home fire risk reduction referral pathway

Around 3,000 house fires occur in Victoria each year. Most could be prevented by taking simple precautions. Fatal fires often begin in bedrooms or lounge areas, commonly caused by unsafe use of electrical appliances or heating. Having a clear plan and being prepared greatly increases the chance of escaping safely and staying calm.

My client has fire risks and I am very concerned

Complete the online learning module, Prevent Detect Escape – Home Fire Safety for people at higher risk.

Encourage your client to write their own Home Fire Escape Plan and support them to reduce the risks in their home.

↓

My client is unwilling to write a Home Fire Escape Plan, does not recognise their risks or refuses to reduce fire the risks in their home

ℹ *Refer back to your own organisation to a suitably trained staff member.*

↓

My organisation cannot help any further

If you consider the level of fire risk to pose a life safety threat to themselves or others contact fire services for further advice and support by submitting an enquiry to Fire Rescue Victoria. You can do this without your client's consent.

Bushfire planning referral pathway

All Victorians need to be ready to act if bushfire threatens, but some people require support to prepare their plan and leave early. On an Extreme or Catastrophic rated day, the safest option for people living in a high-risk bushfire area is to leave early – especially if they have a physical disability, are older, or have difficulty thinking clearly or acting quickly under stress.

My client does not have an adequate Bushfire Survival Plan and/ or lives in a Bushfire Management Overlay (BMO)

ℹ *Refer back to your own organisation to a suitably trained staff member.*

My organisation does not have anyone else to help

Contact a family member to tell them about your concern and ask that they assist the client.

My client has no family or the family cannot help. What should I do?

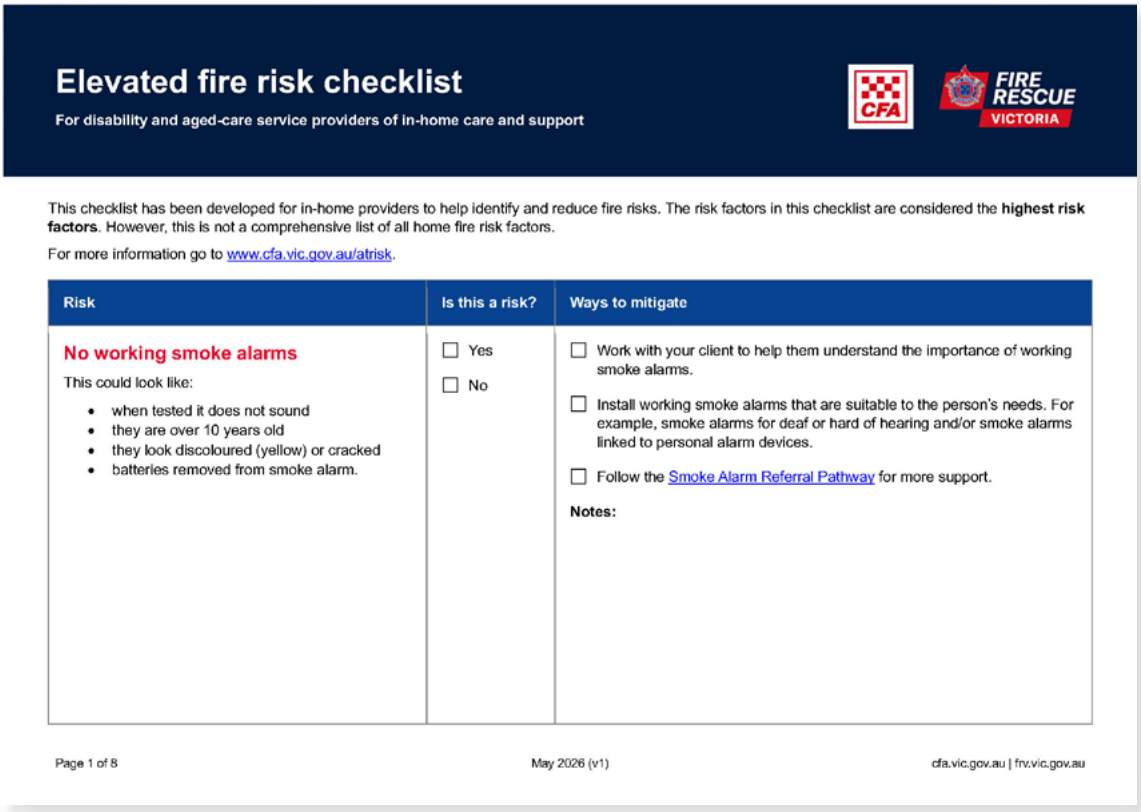
With their permission, refer your client to CFA by emailing communityprograms@cfa.vic.gov.au. CFA can provide your client with free bushfire advice and conduct a property visit if needed.

As a service provider you can add your client to the Vulnerable Persons Register if they meet the criteria. Your client will need to consent to being listed. If the resident does not meet the criteria for the Register you can reach out to CFA for advice and support.

Appendix 2. Elevated fire risk checklist

An **Elevated fire risk checklist** has been developed for in-home providers to help identify and reduce fire risks.

It is available as a Word document and fillable PDF at www.cfa.vic.gov.au/atrisk.



Elevated fire risk checklist

For disability and aged-care service providers of in-home care and support

This checklist has been developed for in-home providers to help identify and reduce fire risks. The risk factors in this checklist are considered the **highest risk factors**. However, this is not a comprehensive list of all home fire risk factors.

For more information go to www.cfa.vic.gov.au/atrisk.

Risk	Is this a risk?	Ways to mitigate
No working smoke alarms This could look like: • when tested it does not sound • they are over 10 years old • they look discoloured (yellow) or cracked • batteries removed from smoke alarm.	☐ Yes ☐ No	☐ Work with your client to help them understand the importance of working smoke alarms. ☐ Install working smoke alarms that are suitable to the person's needs. For example, smoke alarms for deaf or hard of hearing and/or smoke alarms linked to personal alarm devices. ☐ Follow the Smoke Alarm Referral Pathway for more support. **Notes:**

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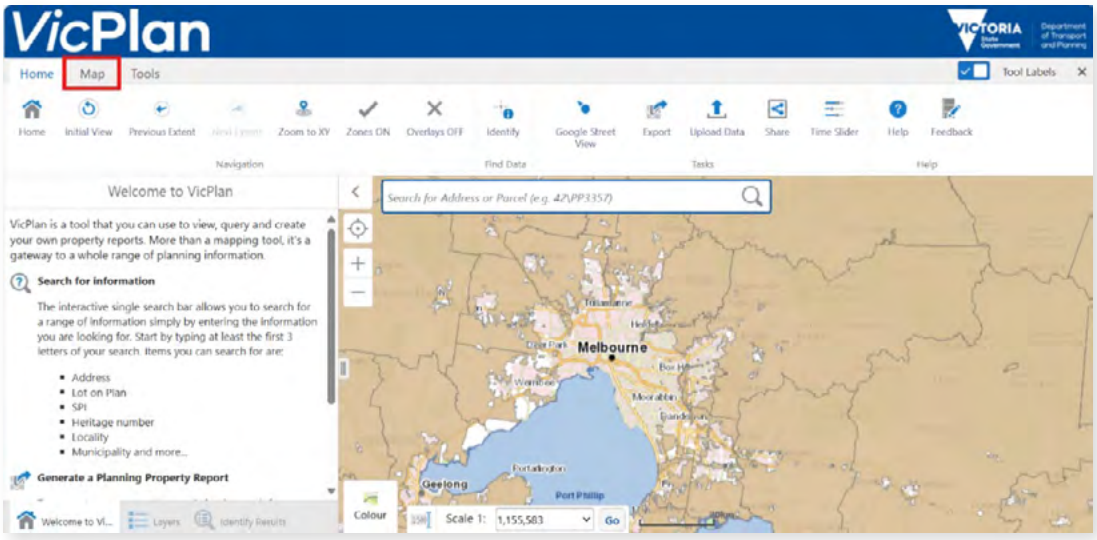
Appendix 3. Bushfire Management Overlay (BMO) identification

You are looking for the Bushfire Management Overlay (BMO) to find those at higher risk. NOT the Bushfire Prone Areas of the State.

Website: VicPlan

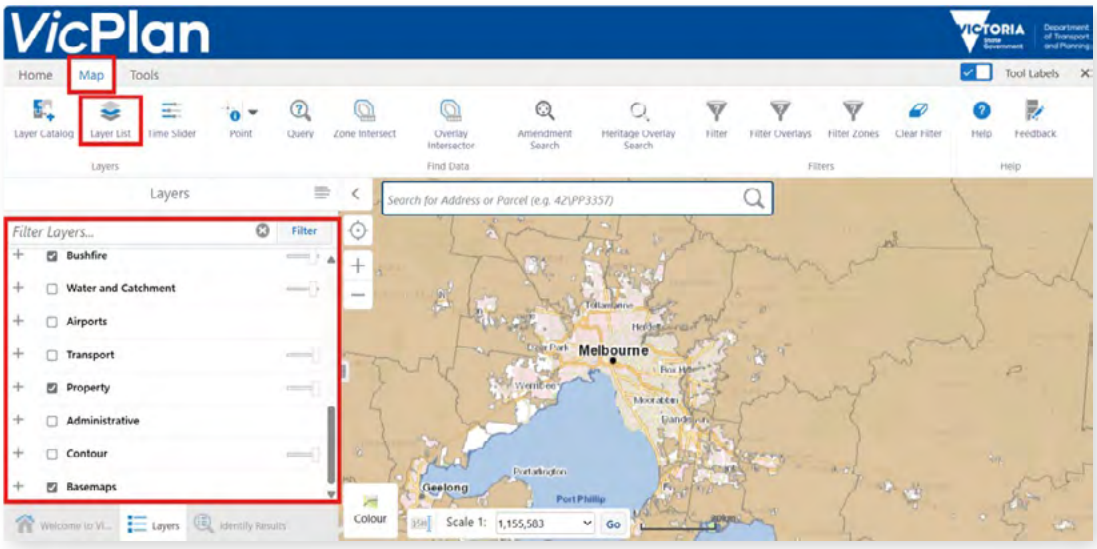
Step 1: On the Home page:

- From the Home page, navigate to the “Map” tab at the top right of the screen.



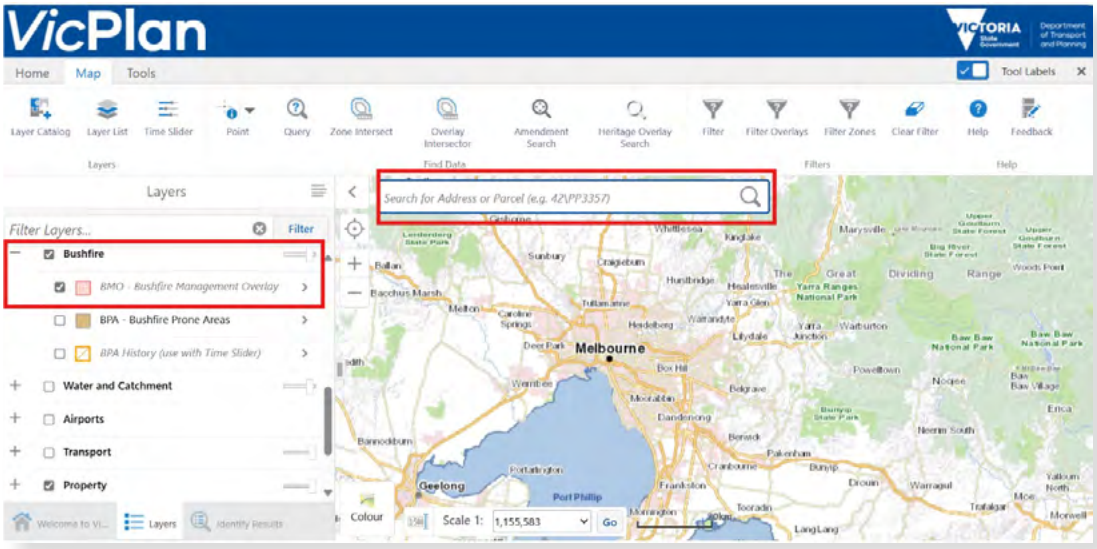
Step 2: On the Map tab:

- Look at the **Layers** bar on the left-hand side of the screen.
- Unselect **Zones**
- Select **Bushfire**, **Property**, and **Basemaps**



Step 3: On the Layers bar

- Expand the Bushfire tab by clicking the + sign
- Select the BMO box only
- Search the address



November 2026

(Ver 2026-11-16)