



Community Fire Refuges

Policy

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Working in conjunction
with Communities,
Government, Agencies
and Business.

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Background

This policy was developed in response to recommendations of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission. It was originally published in October 2011 and revised to incorporate minor amendments in August 2012 and November 2013. The current version was reviewed in December 2014.

The State Government developed community fire refuges as part of a pilot project undertaken consistent with this policy.

The current version reflects the outputs to date and learnings from the Community Fire Refuges Pilot process conducted by the Fire Services Commissioner (now the Emergency Management Commissioner), which concluded in May 2014.¹

This policy has been revised based on feedback from its application during the pilot program.

Key stakeholders in the application of the policy include:

- Emergency Management Victoria
- Country Fire Authority
- Victoria Police
- Local Government
- Owners/operators of refuge buildings
- Local communities

¹ The document *Community Fire Refuges - Practices and Procedures* has been superseded as a result of the pilot and is no longer current.

Objective

The objective of this policy is to provide the framework for identifying, establishing, managing, operating, maintaining, recording, auditing and decommissioning community fire refuges in areas of extreme risk where other bushfire survival options are limited.

Scope

This policy describes the framework for the provision of community fire refuges (CFR) in Victoria.

Policy Statement

1. Protecting the life and safety of individuals during a bushfire is paramount. Achieving this outcome is a responsibility shared between individuals, communities, State and local governments and the emergency services.
2. Community fire refuges are one of a number of bushfire safety options contained in Victoria's Bushfire Safety Policy Framework. The provision of refuges must be based on a thorough local risk and evidence based assessment. They should be considered in the context of all of the survival options available to a community in a extreme bushfire risk area. Other shelter options include private bushfire shelters and Neighbourhood Safer Places – Place of Last Resort.
3. Community fire refuges will be considered a priority in communities where other safety or shelter options are likely to fail or do not exist. In isolated areas where the safest option (leaving early) is impractical, the provision of community refuges may become a high priority.
4. The Emergency Management Commissioner has overarching responsibility for ensuring that all community fire refuges in Victoria are identified, constructed, operated and maintained consistent with law and policy.
5. Community fire refuges have inherent limitations. They are not a guarantee of safety. Community fire refuges:
 - a. will have a finite and specified capacity, determined by reference to the reasonably expected number of persons that may use the community fire refuge
 - b. may, if used by persons seeking refuge from a fire front, expose such persons to risk of injury or death, especially if such persons travel through fire-affected areas to reach the refuge
 - c. will not allow entry to pets or livestock
 - d. will have limited vehicle parking
 - e. will not always be attended or protected by emergency services
 - f. provide basic, short-term shelter only – food and medical services will not be provided
 - g. are not designed to be a place of shelter from emergencies other than fires (e.g. to escape rising floodwaters or as a shelter from severe weather events).
 - h. can only be safely accessed before the main fire front impacts the community fire refuge site.
6. A community fire refuge must have the following attributes:
 - a. it has been purpose-built or modified by a State department or public body in accordance with Ministerial Direction No.4 issued under the *Project Development and Construction Management Act 1994*;
 - b. it has been endorsed as appropriate for use as a community fire refuge by the Emergency Management Commissioner (EMC); and
 - c. it has been prescribed as a community fire refuge in the *Country Fire Authority (Community Fire Refuges) Regulations 2014*.
7. A community fire refuge may be a multi-use facility or part of such a facility provided it has been purpose-built or modified for the specific purpose of a community fire refuge, and has

- satisfied the requirements of a community fire refuge under Ministerial Direction No.4 (MD4) issued under the *Project Development and Construction Management Act 1994*.
8. To ensure the performance requirements under MD4 are achieved, the EMC will as necessary convene and chair a Bushfire Construction Advisory Panel and Joint Agency Project Team. Roles and responsibilities are detailed within *MD4 Construction and Project Management Guidelines for Community Fire Refuges*.
 9. Community education and engagement of all aspects of operational planning including its purpose, opening and closure is an integral part of the operation of a CFR.
 10. A list of all community fire refuges will be maintained and published by the CFA on its website. The CFA is required, under the CFA Act, to publish a list of all prescribed community fire refuges and to notify persons listed in the Act.
 11. Community fire refuges will be clearly identified by road signs and signs at the community fire refuge itself.
 12. The decision to activate community fire refuges will rest with the fire services through the State Response Controller, Regional Controller or Incident Controller, in accordance with local operating procedures. The activation and operation of a community fire refuge is described in the Operational Procedures Manual template maintained by Emergency Management Victoria.
 13. The EMC is responsible for recommending the decommissioning of community fire refuges, in the event that they are no longer suitable or are unable to meet performance requirements.
 14. Community fire refuges will have no planned role in the recovery or relief arrangements subsequent to bushfire events.
 15. Community fire refuges may have a role in effecting specific evacuations recommended by a Regional or Incident Controller.
 16. Prior to each Fire Danger Period, each community fire refuge must be inspected and audited by EMV or authorised person or agency to ensure it remains fit for purpose and continues to meet the performance requirements.
 17. Prior to each Fire Danger Period, CFA or local municipality in partnership with other relevant agencies should conduct community engagement activities. These should outline the use and limitations of community fire refuges in the context of broader bushfire survival options. In communities which have a refuge, a community exercise should be conducted periodically as determined jointly by CFA and Municipality.
 18. Where a local municipality does not have the necessary capacity, resources or expertise to take a lead role in conducting community education and/or engagement, responsibility will default to CFA.
 19. Roadside vegetation management along key access roads identified by CFA, Council and Vic Roads must be undertaken and included in each respective Municipal Fire Management Plan.
 20. Essential Safety Measures and other community fire refuge systems and equipment will be tested and maintained in accordance with Australian Standards, the Building Code and agreements made between the Building owner and EMV.
 21. Readiness checks must be undertaken regularly during the Fire Danger Period as determined within the Operational Procedures Manual to ensure the community fire refuge remains fit for purpose.
 22. Municipal Emergency Management Plans must include community fire refuges within their municipal district. The municipal emergency management committee must consider the community fire refuge during their emergency management planning and exercising.

Related Policies and Guidelines

Bushfire Safety Policy Framework

Victoria's *Bushfire Safety Policy Framework* is designed to offer people living in high-risk bushfire areas a range of survival options. Community fire refuges are one of a number of contingency shelter options (such as private bushfire shelters, defending a well-prepared property and Neighbourhood Safer Places – Places of Last Resort) which may offer some protection during a bushfire event, but do not guarantee safety. Not every survival option will be appropriate or effective in every high-risk area. The provision of community fire refuges may not be appropriate in all communities, especially those where other shelter or safety options will be more effective, e.g. evacuation.

The Framework stresses that people living in high bushfire risk areas must prepare and plan for bushfire based on their own personal circumstances, including preparing and practising their own bushfire survival plans. A community fire refuge does not take the place of such plans, but may be an appropriate contingency shelter option to include in a plan.

The Framework is available at www.emv.vic.gov.au.

Community Fire Refuge Signage Manual

This manual outlines the signage requirements of a Community Fire Refuge.

Community Fire Refuge Operational Procedures Manual (Site specific)

This Manual outlines the operational procedures for the preparation, activation, opening and operation of a Community Fire Refuge during a fire event.

Design and Construction of Community Bushfire Refuges Handbook (2014)

The Australian Building Codes Board and the Fire Services Commissioner (now the EMC) developed this non-mandatory handbook to provide guidance in the design and construction of community bushfire refuges. The role of the Handbook is to promote informed decision making by professional practitioners undertaking the design of a refuge at the National level. It has been developed to ensure that a refuge built in accordance with the Handbook provides a reasonable degree of protection to occupants.

Ministerial Direction 4 and Construction and Project Management Guidelines for Community Fire Refuge

Ministerial Direction No. 4, Construction for a Community Fire Refuge and *Construction and Project Management Guidelines for a Community Fire Refuge* (MD4) issued under section 30 of the *Project Development and Construction Management Act 1994* detail the performance requirements and construction and project management steps, including the end-to-end process using the learnings from the pilot program to assist with project managing new CFRs. The guidelines also provide advice on achieving legislative and policy requirements for compliance with Ministerial Direction No. 4 (MD4) to achieve EMC endorsement and then prescription in CFA regulations as a CFR.

Should any conflict exist between this Policy or the ABCB National Handbook and MD4, the latter will prevail.

Definitions

Community Fire Refuge (CFR) is defined in the CFA Act as a place prescribed by the regulations to be a place that is available for use by the public for short-term shelter from a fire front during a bushfire. Prior to such a place being prescribed as a community fire refuge, it is not a community fire refuge within the meaning of the CFA Act.

Bushfire Construction Advisory Panel means the panel established pursuant to Ministerial Direction No.4.

CFA means the Country Fire Authority established under section 6 of the CFA Act.

CFA Act means the *Country Fire Authority Act 1958* (Vic).

Emergency Management Commissioner (EMC) means the successor in law to the Fire Services Commissioner under section 24 of the EM Act 2013.

EMV means Emergency Management Victoria, established under section 14 of the EM Act 2013.

Essential Safety Measures means the essential safety measures set out in the occupancy permit as required under the *Building Act 1993*.

Fire Danger Period means the fire danger period declared under section 4 of the *Country Fire Authority Act 1958* by the CFA for the municipality in which the community fire refuge is located.

Incident Controller means the individual designated by the Control Agency or appointed by the State Response Controller to have overall management of an incident..

Joint Agency Project Team (JAPT) means the panel established pursuant to Ministerial Direction 4.

Ministerial Direction No.4 (MD4) means the Ministerial Direction No. 4 'Construction for a Community Fire Refuge' issued under section 30 of the *Project Development and Construction Management Act 1994*, with such changes as are necessary to reflect the appointment of the Emergency Management Commissioner and learning's from the pilot program.

Operational Procedures Manual means the operational procedures manual, including requirements for Readiness Checks and the Readiness Checklist, for each Community Fire Refuge, as amended from time to time by the EMC.

Readiness Checks means the readiness checks that are required in accordance with the relevant Operational Procedures Manual.

Readiness Checklist means, as a minimum, the readiness checklist in the relevant Operational Procedures Manual.

Regional Controller means the person appointed to this role in accordance with the State Emergency Response Plan. This person has overall control of the preparation for and response to bushfire within a Victorian Government Region.

State Response Controller means person appointed by the Emergency Management Commissioner in accordance with section 37 of the *Emergency Management Act 2013*.

Location of community fire refuges

The location of community fire refuges is published at www.cfa.vic.gov.au.

Review

Emergency Management Victoria will review this policy upon the promulgation of a national standard for the construction of community fire refuges. The policy will also be subject to review as part of the annual review of the Bushfire Safety Policy Framework.

Document information

Document details

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Version control

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1	31.3.2015	Amended January 2015.	
2	1.6.2015	Amended June 2015	

Document approval

This document requires the following approval:

Name	Title	Organisation
Craig Lapsley	Emergency Management Commissioner	Emergency Management Victoria
Neil Robertson	Chief Executive	

Reference material

Related documents	
<i>Country Fire Authority Act 1958</i> (www.legislation.vic.gov.au) <i>Emergency Management Act 1986</i> (www.legislation.vic.gov.au) <i>Emergency Management Act 2013</i> (www.legislation.vic.gov.au) Ministerial Direction No.4 and Guide (www.dtf.vic.gov.au)	

Acronyms	Description
EMV	Emergency Management Victoria