

Bushfires 2019-20 Community Newsletter 7 February – Edition 15



Personal protective equipment kits

Personal protective equipment kits are available for residents returning to inspect their property when it is safe to do so. The kits include:

- Disposable coveralls
- A disposable P2 mask
- Sturdy gloves
- A plastic garbage bag to dispose of the used protective equipment
- Information sheets about returning home safely and using your personal protective kit

Extra P2 masks will be available to go with each kit as it is likely more than one mask will be needed.

The kits are to be used strictly for fossicking for keepsakes, they are not for asbestos removal or for asbestos clean-up.

Kits will be available at community meetings and from the Bushfire Recovery Centre.

Important information on rates

We are mindful that with the recent fires there may be many ratepayers who have been impacted. There is important information below that may be relevant to you.

Full payment: People who have chosen to pay their rates in one lump sum are reminded that full payment is due by **Saturday 15 February 2020**.

Interest charges: We will not apply penalty interest to late payment of the 2019-20 rates as long as rates are paid in full by Sunday 31 May 2020. Interest penalties will be applied to rates that remain

unpaid after this date. Interest will be applied to any previous year's rates still unpaid.

Payment arrangement: Anyone experiencing difficulties in making payment should contact us as early as possible to make a suitable payment arrangement.

Financial hardship: If you are experiencing financial hardship you may apply for assistance under our Hardship Policy.

Property valuations: If your property has been impacted by the recent fires, your property valuation may need to be adjusted. If your valuations are adjusted, you will be sent an amended valuation and rate notice before 31 May 2020 that you can use for payment purposes.

Original valuation and rate notice: Notices were issued in August 2019. If you did not receive, or have misplaced, your original notice, contact us for details of the rates due.

Anyone wishing to discuss property valuations, rates payments or financial hardship assistance is encouraged to contact us as soon as possible.

Waste – your questions answered

We appreciate residents are eager to start removing debris from their properties; however, we are restricted in what can be accepted at our waste sites.

Consultation is taking place with expert waste removal agencies - including Bushfire Recovery Victoria, Grocon and Environment Protection Authority - and residents will be updated as soon as arrangements are confirmed.

For those eligible, Grocon is the best option for the clean-up of fire debris. To register with Grocon you can phone 1800 560 760 or visit www.brvc.vic.gov.au

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A solution for specific waste items, such as fencing, are being worked on with Bushfire Recovery Victoria and an update will be communicated shortly.

Why our waste sites are currently unable to receive bushfire debris:

- The Bairnsdale Landfill has a new cell for receiving waste but is not ready for rubble – a layer of domestic waste is required to protect the liner from being pierced and potential leaks.
- No other landfill or transfer station in the municipality has the correct license for receiving bushfire debris due to contamination risks. Two additional sites are being assessed as possible disposal locations.
- The impending increase in waste at the Bairnsdale landfill has the potential to put council's day-to-day waste management and kerbside collection services at risk.

Grocon meeting with residents

Grocon, the contractor appointed by the Victorian Government to lead the clean-up, has started meeting with community members this week and was in Buchan and Sarsfield yesterday (Tuesday).

The Grocon representative/s will attend community meetings in Cann River and Mallacoota on Friday.

The focus this week is for residents to register with Grocon by calling 1800 560 760 or visiting www.br.vic.gov.au.

Next week's focus is for Grocon to visit properties, with clean-up work likely to start the week after.

The clean-up program covers the demolition and disposal of all buildings destroyed or damaged beyond repair by the bushfires. This includes:

- Homes
- Sheds and other out-buildings

- Commercial buildings
- Public buildings

It may also include the removal of fencing, trees and vehicles, but only where it is necessary for the safe clean-up of destroyed buildings.

The Victorian Government has contracted Grocon to conduct the clean-up. This program is voluntary and free for eligible property owners. You do not need to be insured.

Contractors who want to work with Grocon on the clean-up, register at victorianbushfirerecovery@grocon.com.au or phone 03 9631 8833.

Mobile Recovery Service

Representatives from council and other organisations are travelling to fire-affected communities to provide recovery information. The upcoming schedule is:

Today

Genoa – community hall, 10.30am to 12.30pm

Mallacoota – community hall, 2pm to 4pm

Monday

Goongerah – community hall, 11am to 2pm

Tuesday

Wairewa – community hall, 11am to 2pm

Wednesday

Ensay – community hall, 10am to 12pm

Swifts Creek – community hall, 1pm to 3pm

Thursday

Wulgulmerang – recreation reserve, 11am to 2pm

Friday

Clifton Creek – community hall, 6pm to 7.30pm

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Bushfire Recovery Centre

24 Service Street, Bairnsdale. Open daily from 8.30am to 5pm

A one-stop-shop for bushfire-related enquiries. Agencies include council, Insurance Council, Victorian Council of Churches, Disaster Legal Help, Rural Financial Counselling Service, Agriculture Victoria and others.

Please bring identification such as Medicare card, rates notice, etc and bank details for assistance payments, if applicable, to the mobile recovery service and the Bushfire Recovery Centre.

Waterholes Road Bridge coming along



The fire-destroyed Waterholes Road Bridge, north of Clifton Creek, is currently being replaced and is expected to be open to traffic this week.

Princes Highway open

The Princes Highway is now open all the way to the New South Wales border!

People travelling in the area should be aware that many roads off the Princes Highway remain closed and are unsafe for travel. This includes smaller local roads, and parks and forest tracks where hazardous tree assessments have not yet been completed.

The Genoa to Mallacoota Road remains open to residents and essential services only with a permit, as hazardous tree work continues as we work

towards opening the road to the public soon. Permits are available from DELWP's Orbost office.

There is still smoke in the area, reducing visibility. Drivers should use their headlights on low-beam and keep a safe braking condition.

Works are still ongoing along some areas of the highway in East Gippsland and drivers are asked to obey traffic management and speed restrictions. Police will be patrolling and enforcing the speed restrictions. Also be aware of increased presence and movement of wildlife.

Get the latest road closure information on the Vic Traffic app or website,

<https://traffic.vicroads.vic.gov.au/>

Mallacoota Road is open

Working alongside the Australian Defence Force, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning and other agencies, the link between Genoa and Mallacoota is now open. Holidaymakers can now retrieve their vehicles and belongings.

While the road is open, drivers should refrain from stopping and exiting vehicles along the road. Plan ahead and drive to the conditions as speed reductions will be in place.

Follow VicTraffic for updates on other bushfire affected roads reopening.

Australian Defence Force presentation

A Mallacoota and district community barbecue and Australian Defence Force presentation will be held on Saturday 8 February.

The Australian Defence Force will present a token of appreciation for the welcoming and support the Mallacoota, Genoa and district community has shown them.

Presentation to take place at 12.30pm at Croajingolong Centre garden, followed by a performance from the Australian Navy Band.

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Afterwards there will be a free community barbecue provided by the ADF and cooked by Mallacoota Lions Club.

Mallacoota Foreshore Holiday Park

The park is now taking bookings for visitors holidaying from 1 April onwards.

While the park is still closed, we understand people are interested in booking for Wild Harvest (3-5 April), the school holidays and Easter.

At this stage, the park is closed until Sunday 1 March. Customers can choose between a credit transfer for a future booking or a refund.

Keep up-to-date through this newsletter and on Facebook for the park's re-opening.

We also encourage people wishing to visit Mallacoota to consider supporting private accommodation and holiday park operators.

For more information, visit www.eastgippsland.vic.gov.au/mfhp

What you can do

Bushfire Case Support Program

The free Bushfire Case Support Program provides practical support for bushfire affected people.

Case support coordinators can help you with:

- Discussing your needs and the next steps you could take
- Information and support to access recovery and mental health services
- Completing paperwork
- Financial counselling and help with insurance
- Advice for business owners
- Small amount of financial support to help with immediate needs.

Support can be provided face to face, over the phone or at a location that suits you.

To access this program or find out more call 1800 560 760 - 8am to 6pm weekdays and 9am to 5pm on weekends

Email: bushfirerecovery@windermere.org.au

Financial assistance

This information is divided into support available for: individuals and property owners, businesses and agricultural properties.

Individuals/families and property owners

Register for clean-up: Homes destroyed by bushfires will be cleaned up under a state and federal program that prioritises local contractors. The clean-up applies to insured and uninsured residents and there will be no cost to property owners. Register at www.vic.gov.au/bushfire-recovery-victoria or by phoning 1800 560 760

School student support: \$2.5 million support package already announced to help school students from bushfire-affected areas with the cost of items such as uniforms, books and stationery.

Back to school help: for families, children, and teachers; applicable to government and non-government students.

What's been announced:

- Support package to help school students from bushfire-affected areas with the cost of items such as uniforms, books and stationery
- Extension of the Camps, Sports and Excursions Fund to all eligible primary and secondary school students
- Additional psychologists and social workers
- Establishment a Trauma Recovery Team to provide the trauma response support to affected schools and kindergarten services.

More information: education.vic.gov.au.

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Kindergarten: fee subsidies have been announced to help families access free or low-cost four-year-old kindergarten. This will apply to families of children who are residents of or attending a funded kindergarten service in East Gippsland, Alpine or Towong shires.

Emergency water assistance: if you need emergency water assistance contact South East Water on 131 851. Eligible permanent residents in the declared bushfire affected areas of East Gippsland will be provided a tank water flush and top-up of 5,000 litres.

Electricity: Contact AusNet Services if you are trying to reconnect, understand outage lengths and to keep up to date with changing issues around electricity:

- Bushfire Support line: 1300 561 171
- www.ausnetservices.com.au/Misc-Pages/Bushfire-Support

Red Cross: People can now apply for three kinds of immediate assistance at <https://www.redcross.org.au/grants> or 1800 RED CROSS (1800 733 276).

- An additional \$10,000 payment to support people whose homes were destroyed extending the total amount available to \$20,000 per household
- \$7,500 for people who were hospitalised for more than two days as a result of the fires, with grants helping to cover out of pocket medical and other related expenses
- \$5,000 for homeowners whose homes have been structurally damaged and require repairs to make them safe for people to live in.

Red Cross is also contacting the senior next of kin of people who have died in the fires to provide a bereavement payment of \$20,000.

Emergency re-establishment assistance: is available if your primary place of residence is uninhabitable for more than seven days because of an emergency. It provides up to \$42,250 per eligible household experiencing financial hardship. The grants will be available for clean-up, emergency accommodation, repairs, rebuilding (a principal place of residence), and replacing some damaged contents.

Re-establishment assistance is available to individuals or families who do not have building insurance or contents insurance.

If you think you may be eligible, call 1800 961 054.

DHHS Personal Hardship Assistance Program: call 1800 961 054 to discuss eligibility and where to go for assessment. The information line is open 9am to 5pm daily.

Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment: To receive this payment, you need to have been adversely affected by the fire. For example, your principal place of residence has been destroyed or must be demolished, or the interior has sustained major damage.

The fastest way to claim is over the phone. Call 180 22 66, or visit

www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/victorian-bushfires-december-2019-australian-government-disaster-recovery-payment#a4

Disaster Recovery Allowance: Support for people who can show they have lost income as a direct result of the bushfires. You have until 30 June 2020 to make a claim. For more information, visit the DHS website or call 180 22 66.

www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/victorian-bushfires-december-2019-disaster-recovery-allowance

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Businesses

Bushfire Case Support Program: A free program provides practical support for bushfire affected people. Case support coordinators can help with advice for business owners.

Call: 1800 560 760 - 8am to 6pm weekdays and 9am to 5pm on weekends or email: bushfirerecovery@windermere.org.au

Small business relief package: The Federal Government will provide top-up grants to eligible small businesses and non-profit organisations. The program is uncapped, so businesses and organisations that have sustained damage from the fires can access up to \$50,000 in funding (tax free).

Loans of up to \$500,000 will be offered for businesses that have suffered significant asset loss or a significant loss of revenue. The loan would be for up to 10 years and used for the purposes of restoring or replacing damaged assets and for working capital. The loans will be available with a repayment holiday of up to two years, with no interest accruing during this period.

Businesses can visit www.business.gov.au or call 13 28 46.

Agricultural properties

Looking after your dams

With rain and thunderstorms predicted this weekend, farmers are being encouraged to consider strategies to prevent organic pollution from entering farm dams.

Pasture covers have been left at critically low levels due to the recent bushfires and drought, making it easy for dung and other organic materials find its way into dams.

Tips to prevent organic pollution:

- Remove organic material from water ASAP by skimming the surface of the water
- Improve the palatability of the water by aeration and/or chemical treatments
- Where possible, implement sediment control measures with sediment fences or barriers
- Prioritise water storages and plan for contingencies should water become unavailable
- Maintain an adequate vegetative cover around the dam or protect with netting, corrugated iron or earth banks

For more information visit: agriculture.vic.gov.au/agriculture/farm-management/managing-dams/organic-pollution-in-farm-dams

Farm fencing

Note: funding for these programs cannot be provided retrospectively.

The Victorian Government will help upgrade fences to be more fire resistant for landholders repairing damaged or destroyed fences between private land and National Parks, State Parks and State forests.

This will allow farmers flexibility to upgrade fences to make them fire-resistant with concrete posts and better able to exclude pests such as wild dogs.

The government will pay half the cost of these boundary fencing upgrades up to \$5,000 per kilometre.

An assessment of the property and the fence damage must be completed before works are undertaken or any payments can be made, and landholders will continue to pay labour costs and half the cost of materials. You can call DELWP on 136 186, weekdays from 8am to 6pm.

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Farm fencing burnt by bushfire: Your insurer, or organisations such as BlazeAid, can help cover the cost of these fences either financially or with in-kind assistance. BlazeAid has set up camp in Bruthen and is rebuilding fences. BlazeAid has also met with agencies in Buchan this week to progress its move into that community.

Recovery grants of up to \$75,000 per farmer are available to:

- Help primary producers who have lost most of their farm business assets
- Help remote primary producers with transportation costs

To register your interest in one of these grants, visit ruralfinance.com.au or call **1800 260 425**. Applications close 31 July 2020.

Farm fencing destroyed by firefighting

The Victorian Government will pay the full cost of your fences damaged by fire agencies' machinery or activities.

Farm fencing next to state or national parks

The Victorian Government will meet 50 per cent of the cost of materials to replace or repair fencing between your land and national/state parks, and state forests destroyed or damaged by bushfires.

To lodge a claim for fencing destroyed by firefighting, and/or for fencing that adjoins national or state parks or state forests call **136 186**. You will be asked some questions about your claim and verification will be required.

What we are doing

Council services

Secondary assessments

Council continues to undertake secondary impact assessments of fire affected properties.

We are very fortunate to have the help and support of staff from municipalities from across the state and the Victorian Council of Churches who continue to put their hands up to assist with this important task.

These in-depth assessments look at how a property has been impacted and includes assessing the safety of sites and partly damaged buildings, if septic tank systems have been compromised, emergency orders, and identifying hazards such as asbestos. This work may also assist property owners' insurance claims.

Staff will need to enter private property and will carry identification. We will liaise with owners where possible. Notices may be attached to fence/structures notifying of hazards on site.

House plans of destroyed properties

Residents who have had their home damaged or destroyed by bushfire will be able to access copies of their house plans free of charge. Where possible, please provide photos of the damage when making the application.

Legal assistance is available

Call Disaster Legal Help on 1800 113 432, 8am to 6pm weekdays, or speak to us at the Bushfire Recovery Centre.

Disaster Legal Help Victoria provides free help with bushfire-related issues such as:

- Problems with insurance claims
- Difficulty paying your mortgage, rent, bills or loans
- Tenancy issues and questions
- Lost or destroyed documents, including wills, titles and ID documents
- Family Violence and Intervention Orders (including changes as a result of bushfires)
- Difficulty getting payments from Centrelink

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- Existing legal issues that have been impacted by bushfires, such as custody arrangements and child support

If your small business or farm has been affected and you're struggling financially or your assets have been destroyed, Disaster Legal Help can assist you.

Emergency water access

People affected by the bushfires can access emergency untreated water supplies at:

Swifts Creek Recreation Reserve has a connection point for people to fill up a water cube. You need a male 50mm Camlock fitting and pump. Limit use to 1,000 litres each so resources are not depleted.

Goose Gully, 90 Balfours Road, Lucknow has a standpipe. Use is capped at 4,000 litres per person per day. 7am to 7pm daily.

For more information visit www.srw.com.au/east-gippsland-fires/ or phone (03) 5139 3100.

Lions Club restores beach access



Mallacoota Lions Club with support from local tradespeople and Council are completing a project to restore beach access at Bastion Point.

Building the temporary structure will quickly restore beach access at Bastion Point following damage to

assets during the bushfire. This will allow Council and the community to collaboratively plan and implement a permanent outcome for the site.

Thank you to the Mallacoota Lions Club for delivering this project to a very high standard.

The work is progressing at great speed (*see image below*) and the community can expect access within the next few days.



Library loans renewal

As some roads are still closed and some communities still isolated, all library loans have been renewed until 2 March.

The mobile library bus is visiting Cann River, Marlo, Newmerella and Bemm River every second Tuesday; the yellow week on the mobile library schedule.

Stay in touch with us

In addition to this newsletter, we also produce daily video updates, which are available on:

- Facebook @EastGippyShire
- YouTube channel, EastGippyTV

Phone: 03 5153 9500

Website: www.eastgippsland.vic.gov.au