

Bushfire building impact assessments

Information for residents

Returning home

What happens if my home or buildings have been damaged in the fire?

NSW Rural Fire Service, Fire and Rescue NSW, Public Works Advisory and the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) conduct assessments of the fire impacted properties to identify hazards you need to be aware of so you can take the proper action to protect yourself.

What we look for

Houses, sheds and other buildings damaged in a bushfire can leave potential health and safety hazards in the remaining debris and ash.

Hazardous household materials that may be present

- Asbestos
- Chemicals – household, cleaning, garden and farm chemicals
- Ash from timbers treated with chemicals (e.g. copper-chrome-arsenate)
- Solar panels
- Damaged gas bottles
- Ash and dust
- Unsafe building structures
- Electrical hazards or live wires
- Missing fencing panels around pools

How is a building impact assessment undertaken?

First, the **Rural Fire Service** does an initial assessment to record the level of damage to houses, sheds and other outbuildings. This information is used to understand the impact of the fire and is provided to councils and recovery agencies.

Next, a **multi-agency team** that includes Fire and Rescue NSW, Public Works Advisory and the EPA, councils and other relevant agencies makes a second assessment of destroyed and damaged buildings. This team looks for potential hazards such as asbestos contaminated materials.

If asbestos is suspected or identified, a licensed asbestos assessor takes samples for testing to confirm if asbestos is present. If there is a risk of airborne fibres, the site is sprayed with a non-toxic, coloured glue. This provides a temporary seal to reduce the risk. You can check asbestos sampling results with Laing O'Rourke, the bushfire recovery waste contractor, on 1800 007 539 (operates 24/7). Don't go into areas affected by asbestos. Clean-up and removal must be undertaken by a licensed asbestos removalist.

If an assessment team identifies potential hazards it will leave a **Hazard Identification Notice** at the property.

Other information collected at this stage includes the types of waste (metal, green waste, etc) present. This is given to government agencies involved in recovery activities.

Building impact assessments are undertaken to help protect you, your family and neighbours

When will my buildings be assessed?

NSW Rural Fire Service teams conduct initial assessments immediately after the fire, as soon as it is safe to do so. Multi-agency teams conduct detailed assessments as soon as possible in the following weeks. Because many properties must be assessed, yours may not be done immediately.

When can I return home?

Access to your street or property may be restricted until emergency services and other agencies address safety issues such as power lines and fallen trees.



You can find out the status of your property by contacting Service NSW on 13 77 88.

When you return to your property, be aware there may be hazards present, even if there is no Hazard Identification Notice.

Starting the clean-up process

When returning to your property after a bushfire, be aware of these factors to protect your health:

- Clean-up cannot start until all hazards on a site have been managed.
- If asbestos is suspected, it is recommended you do not enter the property.
- Wear a P2 face mask and protective clothing.
- Electrical hazards such as live power lines down or active solar panels.
- Buildings and other structures may be unstable to enter or walk over.
- Sewerage services may be disrupted, causing health risks.
- Hot, smouldering coals and other hazardous materials may be hidden under rubble.
- Building rubble must not be buried as it may contain hazardous materials.
- Do not spread ash around your property, particularly where asbestos materials are present, or copper-chrome-arsenate-treated timber was burnt.
- Moisten ash with water to minimise dust but don't use high-pressure water sprays.

Who will do the clean-up?

The NSW Government and the Commonwealth are jointly covering the clean-up cost of insured and uninsured residential and eligible commercial (small business and primary production) properties destroyed in the NSW bushfires since 1 July 2019.

Work will include

- removal of known hazardous materials, including asbestos
- removal of materials destroyed by bushfire and hazardous trees near the destroyed or damaged primary residence or place of business
- removal of damaged driveways that could impact on the safety of the clean-up
- removal of concrete slab foundations (with consent of building owners).



Register for clean-up

To register for the bushfire recovery clean-up program call Service NSW on 13 77 88 or go to www.service.nsw.gov.au.

It is not advisable to do any major clean-up works yourself as professional contractors will be engaged to do this work.

All waste should be transported and disposed of according to the NSW legal requirements, of which professional contractors are aware.

If you are undertaking minor clean-up works yourself, please check with your council or the EPA about the waste you are moving, and ensure you are taking all recommended health precautions.

Key contacts

Service NSW – to register for the bushfire recovery clean-up program call 13 77 88 or go to www.service.nsw.gov.au. Service NSW also has other useful information.

Asbestos – safe handling and removal www.safework.nsw.gov.au.

Waste disposal – information about transport and disposal of hazardous materials www.epa.nsw.gov.au.

Recovery – your local council will lead the recovery effort. See its website for information.

NSW Environment Protection Authority

Email: info@epa.nsw.gov.au

Website: www.epa.nsw.gov.au

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