



# Protecting your property from bushfire

## Assessing your surrounding for fire hazards

---

### FUEL AND THREAT

All vegetation is potential fuel, however it must be accepted that many people will want to have some vegetation close to their dwellings.

Fuels will have different values to different people. One person's fire hazard could be their neighbour's assets, such as a crop of wheat, stock feed or a pine plantation. Other values are also important to be considered, the hazard may be a bushland reserve, bandicoot habitat, a water catchment, a wind break, a privacy screen or even just provide a nice view.

**The existence of a hazard itself is not sufficient justification to warrant its removal.**

Most bushfires are infrequent events, occurring on a day every few years, if not decades. Many of the things we value about our properties occur continuously all year round. People are therefore unlikely to want the way their land is managed to be dominated by something that is relatively rare, so how do we assess the RISK?

To assess the level of threat associated with the fuel, the following things need to be considered:

#### 1: WHAT SORT OF FUEL IS IT?

Is it a weed, exotic vegetation or native vegetation? Is it dry or full of moisture?

#### FLAMMABILITY OF COMMON VEGETATION TYPES:

Low- Agricultural land, urban and exotic vegetation, rainforest.

Medium - Wet eucalypt forest.

High – Weed infestation, dry eucalypt forest, grassland.

Fine fuels such as grass, leaves, bark and twigs less than 6mm in diameter ignite readily, burn rapidly and are a big contributor to the rapid spread of a fire. Heavy fuel such as dead woody material, fallen trees and branches greater than 25mm in diameter burn more slowly but at a higher temperature.

#### 2: HOW MUCH FUEL IS THERE?

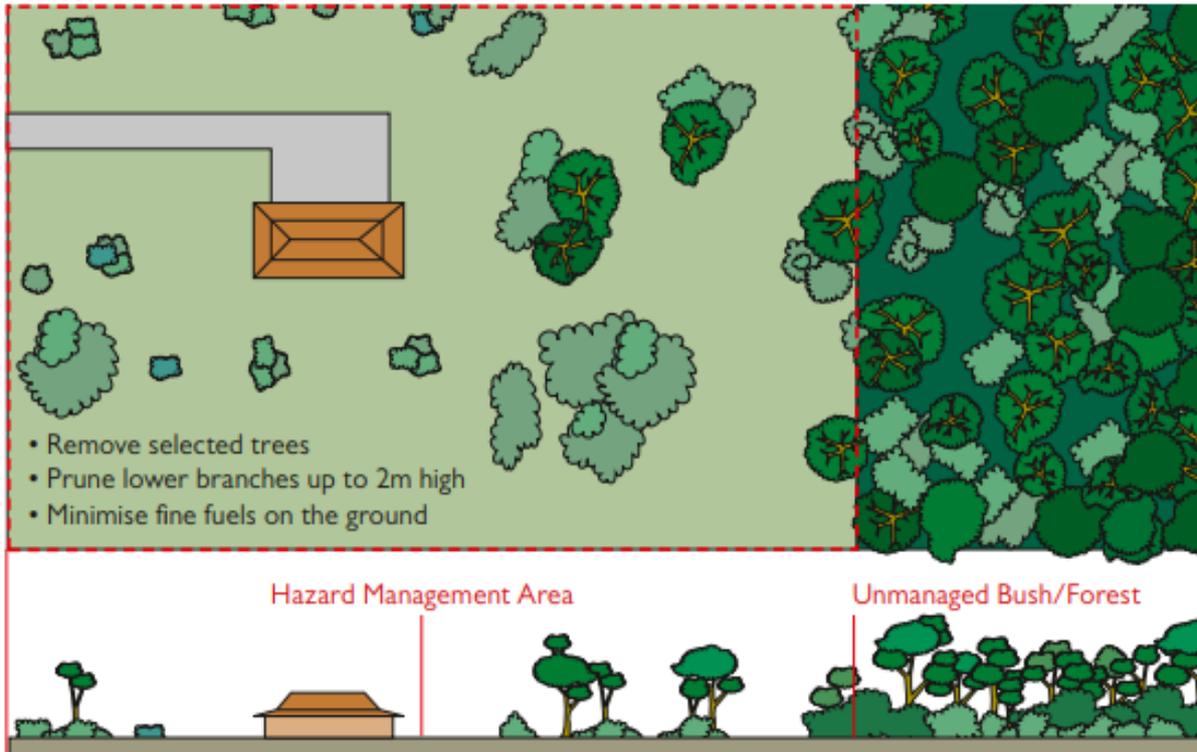
The quantity of the fuel plays a key role in determining the rate of spread and intensity of a bushfire, as well as the maximum potential fire run, which is the distance that a fire could potentially move unimpeded through the landscape. i.e. Is the fuel an isolated pocket of vegetation or is it connected to other bushfire prone vegetation within the greater landscape?

#### 3: WHERE IS THE FUEL IN RELATION TO YOUR DWELLING AND SURROUNDINGS?

The intensity and spread of fire increases when travelling up a slope and decreases when travelling down a slope, so fuel downhill of your house is more of a threat than fuel above you. The direction a slope faces will also strongly influence the fuel types and moisture conditions. A slope with northerly aspect receives more sunlight and generally will have drier fuels than other aspects.

#### 4: IS THE FUEL WITHIN YOUR HAZARD MANAGEMENT AREA OR YOUR NEIGHBOURS HAZARD MANAGEMENT AREA?

A hazard management area is an area of defensible space between a building and the bushfire-prone fuel, which provides access to a fire front for firefighting. It should be maintained in a minimal fuel condition in which there are no other hazards present which will significantly contribute to the spread of a bushfire. Retention of some trees within your hazard management area will help trap embers and reduce wind speeds around your building. The size of a hazard management



Example of a Hazard Management Area from TFS Planning and Building in Bushfire-Prone Areas for Owners and Builders.

area will vary based on your individual risk factors but on average is about 20 – 30m of defensible space around your dwelling.

**Maintenance activities within a hazard management area may include:**

1. Removing fallen limbs, sticks, leaf and bark litter.
2. Cutting lawns short and maintaining at less than a 100mm height.
3. Removing pine bark and other flammable mulch from around buildings and decks.
4. Thinning out understory vegetation to provide horizontal separation between fuels.
5. Pruning low-hanging tree branches 2m from the ground to provide vertical separation between fuel layers.
6. Pruning larger trees to maintain horizontal separation between canopies.
7. Minimize the storage of flammable materials such as firewood near your dwelling.
8. Maintain vegetation clearance around vehicular access and water supply points.

**The actions landowners take for fuel management around their buildings, within their hazard management area underpins the value of any additional community, state or local government bushfire fuel management programs.**

If you want to review or develop a Bushfire Hazard Management Plan for your property, there are accredited Bushfire Hazard Practitioners who are trained to prepare and certify Bushfire Hazard Management Plans. They can work with you to better understand the bushfire risk associated with your site. A current list of Accredited Bushfire Hazard Practitioners is available online at the TFS website: [www.fire.tas.gov.au](http://www.fire.tas.gov.au)

**LAND CLEARING AND THE LAW**

It is Important to understand the law when undertaking ANY vegetation removal. Most people will be able to get permission for planned vegetation removal that is for genuine fire hazard reduction and Council and TFS officers can assist with advice and support. Whatever your chosen method is, including burning, all laws and TFS requirement will need to be met. Council will not support people who clear land and then try to hide behind hazard reduction.

Legislation to be aware of:

Land Use Planning and Approvals Act 1993  
Fire Service Act 1979  
Threatened Species Protection Act 1995  
Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999  
Environmental Management and Pollution Control (Smoke) Regulations 2019  
Forest Practices Regulations 2007  
Nature Conservation Act 2002  
Crown Lands Act 1976

## **METHODS OF REMOVAL**

Fuel removal can be done in many ways, either singly or in combination. The list below covers the most common methods and their pros and cons. It is important to plan how you will remove fuel this year and then again in the future.

We encourage you to look at your property and develop a fire informed landscape and maintenance plan. Imagine what your defensible space will need to look like and then work out how to achieve it.

### **Slashing**

Advantages: Keeps soil covered, can be used on steep slopes, slows regrowth and weeds.

Disadvantages: Fuel volume generally remains the same, but is lowered in height and compacted, slow mulching if not removed.

### **Mowing**

Advantages: Most fuel removed (if caught or raked) fast mulching, increases soil humus.

Disadvantages: Slope and roughness limited, disadvantages natives.

### **Grazing**

Advantages: Very effective.

Disadvantages: Compacts soils, encourages weeds, required animal husbandry skills and fencing or containment.

### **Ploughing/Discing**

Advantages: Great for existing cultivated land.

Disadvantages: Not suitable for most situations, prone to soil erosion, expensive.

### **Trittering/Mulching**

Advantages: Great for most situations, inhibits weeds, encourages rotting down.

Disadvantages: Fuels remain onsite for some time, expensive in planning and machine hire.

### **Poisoning**

Advantages: Can reduce future maintenance.

Disadvantages: Unpopular, expensive, fuel availability increases, pollution danger, should only be used as part of an integrated strategy.

### **Steam/Heat Torch**

Advantages: Safer alternative to poison, doesn't require same safety measures as poison.

Disadvantages: More expensive than poison, can start fires.

### **Hand Clearing**

Advantages: Accurate removal for particular fuel elements.

Disadvantages: Very expensive in time and labour, rarely successful for large areas.

### **Machine Clearing**

Advantages: Relatively efficient in removal of large fuel elements.

Disadvantages: Soil compaction and erosion, weed encouragement, not suitable for small sites.

### **Burning**

Advantages: Cheap to user, good against many weeds, no soil compaction or disturbance, ranges from burning of small hand raked heaps through to broad area burning off.

Disadvantages: Weather dependent, limited by skill levels of users, smoke can be a nuisance, encourages some weeds (especially gorse).



# Fire Hazard Abatement

## Frequently Asked Questions

---

### What is on a Fire Hazard Abatement Notice?

All Fire Hazard Abatement Notices will comply with the requirements of section 200 of the *Local Government Act 1993*.

A notice will state:

- The nature of the nuisance.
- The action required to abate (resolve) the nuisance.
- The timeframe within which the action is to be completed.
- The person or persons responsible for ensuring the action is completed.
- That Council may act under section 201 of the Act if the abatement notice is not complied with.

### Why do councils issue fire hazard abatement notices?

Under the *Local Government Act 1993* (the Act) one of Council's functions is to provide for the health, safety and welfare of the community. Under the Act Council is required to take action to abate nuisances, which includes anything that is, or is likely to be, a fire risk.

Fire Risk is defined as anything that an Authorised Council Officer is satisfied may pose, or is likely to pose, a risk of causing or exacerbating the effects of a fire. This may include (but is not limited to) overgrown grass, vegetation, weeds or scrub, the presence of rubbish or flammable material on a property or the proximity of a property to bushland.

### How does Council assess a fire hazard?

Authorised Council Officers will inspect all properties where community concerns of potential fire risks are raised.

Considerations when assessing fire risk may include:

- The amount, density and type of vegetation, and whether or not it has been maintained.
- The amount and type of other materials stored on the property, which may serve as fuel for a fire.
- The location of the property and the characteristics of surrounding properties, including the level of risk posed to surrounding properties and life.
- Past weather conditions, future weather predictions and current soil moisture content.
- Topography, access and accessibility of the property.

Council will issue a Fire Hazard Abatement Notice to the owners of any property on which it is satisfied a fire risk exists.

### It is my property, why can't I decide what is a fire risk and what isn't?

Property owners may determine for themselves how to manage their properties up to the point where it becomes a fire risk to their neighbours. Authorised Council Officers are trained by the TFS on how to recognise and abate fire hazards.

### I think there is a fire hazard on someone else's property – what do I do?

If you are concerned there may be a fire hazard on a property that presents an immediate risk to life or property, please let Council know by completing a fire hazard inspection request on our website, emailing [hvc@huonvalley.tas.gov.au](mailto:hvc@huonvalley.tas.gov.au), calling (03) 6264 0300, or in person at our Customer Service Centre at 40 Main Street, Huonville.

### **What if an Abatement Notice is not complied with?**

Where a property owner fails to comply with a Fire Hazard Abatement Notice within the specified timeframe Council will undertake the works.

If Council acts to rectify the Abatement Notice the property owner will be charged an administration fee, plus the cost of the contractor and may be issued with an infringement notice for failing to comply with an abatement notice.

### **I received a Notice and I'm not sure what it requires me to do?**

Phone the Huon Valley Council on (03) 6264 0300 for advice.

### **Can Council recommend anyone to do the work for me?**

Council can provide you with a list of suitable private contractors for hazard clearing works in your area.

### **I'm not going to be able to fix my hazard in time – what do I do?**

You will need to contact Council before the deadline on the abatement notice and request an extension of time. Each case will be assessed according to the circumstances.

### **What can I do to help?**

1. Create a Bushfire Plan and talk about bushfire preparedness with your family, friends and neighbours.  
<https://bushfire.tas.gov.au/>
2. Prepare your property. Know your bushfire risk and proactively maintain a fire hazard management area around your house.  
<https://www.bushfirereadyneighbourhoods.tas.gov.au/bushfire-ready-property>
3. Form a Bushfire-Ready Neighbourhood Group and know your Community Protection Plan. Talk with your neighbours and community to establish a telephone tree/email list, organise community working bees, work together to plan a shared response to bushfire threat and share information and resources.  
<https://www.bushfirereadyneighbourhoods.tas.gov.au/bushfire-ready-neighbourhood-groups>
4. Visit the TFS website [www.fire.tas.gov.au](http://www.fire.tas.gov.au) for more information on community and bushfire safety.