

FIRE

PREVENTION

COUNCIL'S ROLE IN FIRE PREVENTION

Under the Country Fire Authority Act, a municipality in country Victoria has responsibilities to help prevent fires initiating, to encourage and carry out works in advance, and to help to contain or steer a fire if and when it does start.

A lot of the actions are done in a cooperative manner with the respective fire agencies.

The decisions on the extent of fire prevention works is in relation to the level of human occupation in the area, and the significance of the natural and built environment.

THE MUNICIPAL FIRE PREVENTION OFFICER

The Council appoints a Municipal Fire Prevention Officer (MFPO) who has responsibilities under the Act to help implement fire prevention on privately owned land. This is separate to Crown Land, where fire prevention is the responsibility of the respective state government agency.

Some of the specifics the MFPO and their assistant/s undertake to help landowners on their properties are:

Inspections of properties

- At the start of or just before the start of the fire season inspect all the nominated category of privately owned (freehold) properties, and give a time based direction notice to the land owner or occupier whose property is determined as a potential risk of fire initiation, or ease of spread.
- Re-inspect to see if the directed actions have been undertaken and give another notice if necessary.
- Follow up on the properties that have not complied and instigate the required actions. Follow up on full cost recovery from the land owner for same. Issue a fine for non-compliance.

Issuing permits to burn

- Issue conditional permits to burn to CFA Fire Brigades for their planned burns at the start of the fire season.
- Issue conditional permits to burn to individuals at the start of the fire season for small properties who need to do so for clean-up purposes.
- At the end of the season issue conditional permits to burn to farmers to undertake stubble burns and similar.

The permits to burn under this Act are for the fire season as declared by the CFA.

The CFA makes an assessment at the start of the season and may declare a fire season starting at any time in October to December, depending on the grass and plant moisture levels, the temperatures, atmospheric moisture levels, and the level of human activity. The season usually lasts until April.

During the declared fire season it is illegal to light a fire, or allow a fire to remain alight, without a permit.

LOW DENSITY RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES

Out of the fire season, this Council has controls in place all year round (through one of its Local Government Act local laws) to prohibit burning, and issues permits to burn, to low density residential properties, such as in Haven.

COUNCIL PROPERTIES

Council undertakes fire prevention works on the land that it manages. This includes:

- Slashing roadsides beside sealed roads in advance of the fire season.
- Block clearing on properties it has control over.

YOUR PROPERTY AND THE UPCOMING FIRE SEASON

Horsham Rural City Council is again preparing for the coming fire season and will be starting property inspections in towns across the municipality in October.

This document provides important information to help all landowners minimise the threat to life and property from fire, and thus helping to keep the whole community safe.

Steps for making your property fire safe...

- Mowing up to fence and building lines – grass down to less than 100 mm.
- Trimming trees and hedges.
- Removing accumulated rubbish (especially around old vehicles and machinery).
- Removing flammable materials such as tyres.
- Rural properties adjacent to town boundaries can also assist by removing rubbish and creating fire breaks within their property boundary.

Fire hazard inspections...

- Commencing in October.
- Cover all properties in a township area.
- Fire Prevention Notices are issued to the owner of any property considered to be a risk.

Fire Prevention Notices include...

- Details of the work to be done to remove the fire risk.
- The date at which the property will be re-inspected to assess compliance.

Re-inspections are usually scheduled at least four weeks after the date of the issue of the Fire Prevention Notice.

If you are issued with a Fire Prevention Notice...

- As the property owner it is your responsibility to undertake the work or engage a contractor to do it for you.
- The work undertaken must comply with the works detailed in the Fire Prevention Notice.

What happens if I don't comply with a Fire Prevention Notice?

- We will engage a contractor to undertake the work and recover costs from you including an administration fee for organising the contractor.
- We may also issue an Official Warning or a Fire Infringement Notice.

Council is authorised under Victorian Government Legislation to issue Fire Infringement Notices. Fines are set by the Victorian Government at 10 penalty units which is a minimum fine of \$1,586.

Failure to pay an infringement may result in the matter being taken to Court.

What to do now...

The two photos below will assist property owners in making an assessment as to whether their property is in a safe condition.



If your property is already in a “fire safe” condition, thank you for your cooperation in trying to keep our community safe.

If you need to do work to bring your property up to a safe standard then you need to act quickly. Wet weather experienced over the winter months is expected to result in a vigorous spring growing season.

You will need to keep an eye on your property to ensure that it is maintained in a safe condition.

If you have any questions about fire prevention, you can contact Council’s Municipal Fire Prevention staff on 5382 9777.