A guide to building in Victoria after the bushfires

In response to Victoria’s devastating bushfires, the Victorian Government has introduced a new residential building standard. This means people can now start rebuilding their homes and communities without compromising safety.

The new residential building standard, combined with new planning measures, came into effect in March 2009 as an amendment to the Victorian Building Regulations 2006.

Do I need a planning permit?

Rebuilding homes damaged or destroyed by the recent fires

The Victorian Government is streamlining the process for rebuilding homes destroyed by bushfire by removing the need for a planning permit where possible. Where a house is being replaced on the same site in a Wildfire Management Overlay area (WMO), a planning permit will not be needed. A planning permit will still be needed if there is a specific overlay for matters such as heritage, landslip or flooding. You should check with your local council if any of these apply. In some cases, an alternative site may be a safer option. You can get advice from the CFA and your council about how to choose the safest site on your block.

The State Government and your local Council are making sure that if you require them, the planning permit approvals for your rebuilding work are issued quickly. Fees are also being waived in most circumstances. Ask your local Council about the special arrangements in place for properties that have been affected by bushfire.

If a planning permit is required you need to obtain this first before a building permit can be issued. Refer to the building process on page 5. For more information on the planning permit process, contact your local Council or visit www.dpcd.vic.gov/planning

Temporary dwellings

The Victorian Government is committed to reducing red-tape so the process of returning to your property can happen quickly and safely.

A recent change to all planning schemes has removed the need for a planning permit for activities directly associated with recovery from the 2009 bushfires, including demolishing buildings, cleaning up and making your property safe, and constructing temporary accommodation.

To meet these provisions, your temporary accommodation must be built by 31 March 2010.

Recognising that the purpose of your temporary housing is to allow you to rebuild all or part of your home, you can live in it until March 2011.

Many areas will have community villages built by the State Government. Ask your local council where these areas are and how they will be allocated.

Before you construct and place your temporary accommodation on your property, it’s important to consider the safest place for it to be. The Country Fire Authority has information about the design and siting of buildings to help reduce bushfire risk at www.cfa.vic.gov.au

There are some circumstances where you will need written approval from your local Council before you can construct your temporary home. You can find out if this applies to your site by asking your local Council.

Some local Councils may also have other requirements regarding the placement and allowable time period for temporary buildings, so talk to your local Council about your intentions.

For general information, download the Building and Plumbing Commission brochure What you need to know about temporary homes and buildings in bushfire affected areas at www.buildingcommission.com.au

Bushfire Building Advice Line 1300 360 320

Building Commission (8am – 5pm Monday to Friday)
Nothing will be quite the same again

The February 2009 fires in Victoria have re-written the rules about bushfires. Many of the fires registered heat above 1,200 degrees Celsius and wind speeds of more than 120 kmph, leaving very little in their wake. This is unprecedented.

As a community we have quickly responded to the needs of the many thousands of people who have been displaced by this ordeal. The Victorian Government understands the strong desire for bushfire affected people to start the rebuilding process, to move back into their communities and re-assemble their lives.

A major part of this is around your home.

The Victorian Government has announced a rebuild that’s smarter and safer, through the early implementation of the new residential building standard.

The move to implement this new Australian building standard has not compromised safety or quality of the decision-making process. Extensive research, expertise from fire and building authorities, public consultation around Australia have all been part of this new standard, to ensure that homes are built to a higher degree of fire safety.

The Royal Commission announced by the Victorian Government will consider longer term issues including building methods and materials. However, the Victorian Government felt it was imperative to improve residential building standards immediately, so that homes are better protected in bushfire prone areas.

This Guide explains the new residential building standard and what it will mean to you and your community. It explains how the re-build process will work and it will help you converse with your builder and local Council as you prepare to rebuild.

As with the previous standard, the costs of building will depend on the type of construction and your property’s level of bushfire risk. However, with a more finely tuned risk assessment, the new residential building standard focuses on construction requirements to address the level of exposure that a building could face under bushfire attack. It provides homeowners with considerable choice in the type of design, construction and location of their homes and takes into account popular construction materials and methods.

While the new residential building standard will improve protection for new homes, as well as alterations and additions built in Victoria’s bushfire prone areas, it is important to note that it does not guarantee a building will survive a fire due to the unpredictable and often devastating nature of bushfires.

It will be important to ensure that the Victorian building industry is also fully aware of the new residential building standard. The Building Commission will be running free industry and consumer seminars from March 2009 throughout Victoria to explain the changes. Details will appear in daily and local papers, or ring the Bushfire Building Advice Line on 1300 360 320 for seminar dates in your area.
Building in Victoria after the bushfires

Greater protection across the State

The new residential building standard covers all new buildings, alterations and additions in the State of Victoria, from homes on the fringes of the metropolitan area to those adjacent to our state forests, to communities devastated by the February 2009 fires.

We have recently experienced fires burning close to built up areas, like Upwey and Belgrave. Homes were lost in Narre Warren South, and the Maiden Gully fires were within five kilometres of the centre of Bendigo. All would require assessment under the new residential building standard.

The threat of intense heat fires, coupled with vegetation in close proximity to homes and other factors outlined in this guide means that all homes will now require bushfire attack assessment. Local Councils may provide guidance in relation to areas that may have a zoned assessment.

As an example, inner suburban homes that abut a maintained park are excluded and automatically assessed as a low fire risk.

How the new building standard came about

After the Canberra bushfires in 2003, the Australian Standard relating to building was extensively reviewed with the intention of introducing a new Australian Standard (AS 3959) nationally. In the wake of the devastating February 2009 bushfires, the Victorian Government decided to act immediately to ensure that new homes, alterations and additions in Victoria are designed, constructed and located with greater bushfire protection.

While its introduction is an immediate response by the Victorian Government, this standard is the culmination of a lengthy process of expert research and consultation to ensure better fire protection of homes at risk from bushfire.

It has been through a formal Regulatory Impact Statement process, which involved industry and public scrutiny of, and input to, the standard. There has been a full public consultation process, with submissions from industry, as well as high levels of home fire safety and scientific research, with extensive review by bushfire experts including the Country Fire Authority and the Australasian Fire Authorities Council. All public submissions on the amendments supported revising the previous standard.

The decision to introduce the new Australian building standard has followed a thorough process, which was important in getting the right outcome to ensure homes and people are better protected from bushfires in the future.

Under the previous standard, there were four levels of risk assessment. The new standard assessment adopts six levels of risk. The more scientific risk assessment contained in the new standard determines the likely levels of heat exposure and then stipulates the appropriate construction method to improve the ability of a building to withstand bushfire attack, and importantly, protect occupants and the building.

The building process

Step 1: the design phase

If you intend to rebuild, renovate or significantly repair a home in an area subject to bushfire threat the process will be no different to any other standard but you will need to take the new building standard into consideration.

Your building designer, architect or builder can advise you on how best to achieve this. They will consider your design by looking at the appropriate bushfire attack level (BAL) and then apply the construction methods most appropriate to meet your needs. The BAL and construction methods are explained on pages 10 and 11.

Some sites will be assessed on paper, while other, high risk sites will require a site visit. The Building Commission may also be involved in the verification of the site assessment process at the higher risk levels.

If you want to owner-build you should contact your building surveyor for advice, or phone the owner-builder section of the Building Commission.

When the design plans are complete, the next step is to appoint a builder.

Step 2: appointing a builder

One of the most important steps is ensuring your builder is a Registered Building Practitioner (RBP). This information is available at www.buildingcommission.com.au by clicking on the RBP section or you can phone the Building Practitioners Board on 1300 360 320.

For most building or renovating work you will talk directly to the builder. Whatever the case, you must be able to deal with the same person for the duration of the project, so make sure you’re satisfied and take the following precautions:

- Obtain at least three quotes
- Check examples of the builder’s work and ask for references
- Before you sign the building contract, read it thoroughly and ensure that you understand it
- Check that the builder has an insurance policy covering the building work – it will be listed in the contract
- Importantly, ask if your builder has obtained advice on the new building standard.

Finding a Registered Building Practitioner

To find a Registered Building Practitioner, including a Building Surveyor, go to the ‘Find an RBP’ section of the Building Commission website, www.buildingcommission.com.au or call the Building Practitioners Board on 1300 360 320.
Step 3: determine whether a building permit is needed

Once you have appointed your builder you will need to determine whether the work requires a building permit.

Most building work requires a building permit to be issued before work can commence, however some minor structures such as sheds less than 10 m² are exempt.

Building permits are issued by your Council’s Municipal Building Surveyor or a Private Building Surveyor, who ensures your plans comply with the new building standard.

Step 4: applying for a building permit

Applying for a building permit is easy. Simply:

• Apply for the building permit through your Council’s Municipal Building Surveyor or a Private Building Surveyor
• Check the competency and experience of the building surveyor and the fees applicable for issuing the permit and carrying out the inspections
• Then pay the appropriate fee, and submit at least 3 copies of drawings, specifications, and allotment plans with a completed application form.

There are some minor types of building work that are exempt from the issuing of a building permit, such as:

• Pergolas associated with houses with unroofed post and beam structures
• Garden sheds with a floor area of less than 10 square metres
• Repair work done for maintenance purposes, for example replacing rotted weatherboards.

Not all minor work is exempt from a building permit, so do your research and contact your local Council’s Municipal Building Surveyor or a Private Building Surveyor.

Step 5: the rebuild process

Your builder (or architect if you have appointed one) will oversee the entire building process with the information listed to comply on your building permit. The building permit will also specify a period of time in which building work must commence and finish.

As part of the process, the building surveyor who issued the building permit must carry out the building inspections and issue an occupancy permit or a certificate of final inspection on completion of work.

Throughout the building process, there are things you can do to ensure it is rewarding:

• Establish a good working relationship with your builder
• Understand the costs involved and those for any subsequent variations
• Make sure variations are documented, understood and signed before work starts
• Familiarise yourself with and understand the schedule of progress payments.

Step 6: occupancy permits

Your building permit will state whether you require an occupancy permit or a certificate of final inspection prior to you moving into your home.

The occupancy permit is issued by the building surveyor overseeing your building work, ensuring it complies with the new building standard.

An occupancy permit is issued when a building is ‘suitable to occupy’ from a safety point of view. It is issued when every item that can affect safety is in place and fully operational, such as the power, water and gas supply; smoke alarms; handrails and balustrades. It will signify that your home now meets the new building standard and is designed, constructed and located with greater fire protection.

Important Information

Property assessment of existing structures after the bushfires

You will need to have the state of your property assessed, taking into consideration the professional advice about what needs to be done to existing structures. While existing structures may appear to be habitable, an inspection report may need to be carried out by your Council’s Municipal Building Surveyor or Building Inspector.

Also, if you were insured, check with your insurance provider if it is OK for you to proceed with the building process.

Retrofitting

The new building standard does not include mandatory retrofitting. This will be a decision that you will need to make. It will be wise to take into consideration recent events, your home’s current level of protection, your location and home site.

Routine maintenance is an important part of bushfire protection, for your home, out-buildings and garden. For example, if a metal shutter is fitted, it needs to work at the time of bushfire threat.

The information contained within this brochure and available through the Building Commission and building practitioners will help you decide whether you retrofit your existing home and to what extent. You should consult with experts in this field, use Registered Building Practitioners and Licensed and Registered Plumbing Practitioners (where required) and obtain three quotes.
Greater protection for people and buildings

The aim of the new building standard is to improve the ability of buildings to withstand a bushfire attack. This will provide greater protection for the occupants who may be sheltering in it while the fire front passes and it also increases the chances of the building surviving.

A great deal of scientific modelling has gone into the new building standard. The chart below outlines how the baseline data, which is defined as a Bushfire Attack Level (BAL) determines the type of construction required.

**Bushfire Attack Levels and corresponding construction sections within the new building standard**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bushfire Attack level (BAL)</th>
<th>Description of predicted bushfire attack and levels of exposure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BAL – LOW</td>
<td>There is insufficient risk to warrant specific construction requirements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAL – 12.5</td>
<td>Ember attack</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAL – 19</td>
<td>Increasing levels of ember attack and burning debris ignited by windborne embers together with increasing heat flux between 12.5 and 19 kW m²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAL – 29</td>
<td>Increasing levels of ember attack and burning debris ignited by windborne embers together with increasing heat flux between 19 and 29 kW m²</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAL – 40</td>
<td>Increasing levels of ember attack and burning debris ignited by windborne embers together with increasing heat flux with the increased likelihood of exposure to flames</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BAL – FZ</td>
<td>Direct exposure to flames from fire front in addition to heat flux and ember attack</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The BAL takes into consideration a number of factors including the Fire Danger Index, the slope of the land, types of surrounding vegetation and its proximity to any building.

The Fire Danger Index is a measure of the associated fire weather and the probability of a bushfire starting. It also includes its rate of spread, intensity and difficulty of suppression according to various combinations of temperature, relative humidity, wind speed and estimate of fuel state, all of which is influenced by daily rainfall and the time elapsed since the last rainfall.

The Fire Danger Index for Victoria is 100, making it one of the highest in Australia. In the Alpine areas of the state it sits at 50. The Fire Danger Index for the Northern Territory and Queensland is only 40.

Ember attack and the temperature (radiant heat) of a bushfire not just threatens buildings and properties but are often unstoppable.

Bushfires burn at very high temperatures and the February 2009 fires had the highest the nation had ever experienced. This has meant a revisit of the baseline data around radiant heat levels.

817 degrees Celsius or 1090 kelvin is the assumed flame temperature under the new standard approved by the Australian Building Codes Board. Kelvin is a unit of temperature.

The Country Fire Authority and the Australasian Fire Authorities support the temperature standard of 1090 kelvin.

Importantly, in Victoria our new residential building standard will improve the ability of a building to withstand a bushfire attack at higher temperature levels, providing greater protection to Victorians.

The new building standard will attract a lower additional cost in the medium zones and a higher cost in the higher zones. Here is an example of the additional costs in relation to a solid brick single level home, built under the new standard.
# Building in Victoria after the bushfires

## What my home might look like

The new building standard assessment has six levels of risk based on the Bushfire Attack Level (BAL), with increasing construction requirements ranging from ember protection at the low levels (BAL-12.5) to fire-rated construction at the highest (BAL-FZ [Flame Zone]).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BAL – LOW</th>
<th>BAL – 12.5</th>
<th>BAL – 19</th>
<th>BAL – 29</th>
<th>BAL – 40</th>
<th>BAL – FZ (FLAME ZONE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>SUBFLOOR SUPPORTS</strong></td>
<td>No special construction requirements</td>
<td>No special construction requirements</td>
<td>No special construction requirements</td>
<td>Enclosure by external wall or by steel, bronze or aluminium mesh, non-combustible supports where the subfloor is unenclosed, naturally fire-resistant timber stamps or posts on 75 mm metal strip(s)</td>
<td>Subfloor supports – enclosure by external wall or non-combustible with an FRL of 30/-/- or be tested for bushfire resistance to AS 1530.8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FLOORS</strong></td>
<td>No special construction requirements</td>
<td>No special construction requirements</td>
<td>No special construction requirements</td>
<td>Concrete slab-on-ground, enclosure by external wall, metal mesh as above or flooring less than 400 mm above ground level to be non-combustible, naturally fire-resistant timber or protected on the underside with sailing or mineral wool insulation</td>
<td>Concrete slab on ground or enclosure by external wall or an FRL of 30/30/30 or protection of underway with 30 minutes incipient spread of fire system or be tested for bushfire resistance to AS 1530.8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EXTERNAL WALLS</strong></td>
<td>No special construction requirements</td>
<td>As for BAL-19 except that 4 mm Grade A safety glass can be used in placed 5 mm toughened glass</td>
<td>Protected by bushfire shutter, completely screened with steel, bronze or aluminium mesh or 5 mm toughened glass or glass blocks within 400 mm of ground, deck etc. Openable portion metal screened with frame of metal or metal reinforced PVC-U or bushfire resisting timber</td>
<td>Non-combustible material (masonry, brick veneer, mud brick, aerated concrete, concrete) or timber framed, steel framed walls sealed on the outside and clad with 6 mm fibre cement sheeting or steel sheeting or bushfire resistant timber</td>
<td>Non-combustible material (masonry, brick veneer, mud brick, aerated concrete, concrete) or timber framed or steel framed walls sarked on the outside and clad with 40 mm fibre cement sheeting or steel sheeting or be tested for bushfire resistance to AS 1530.8.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EXTERNAL WINDOWS</strong></td>
<td>As for BAL-19 except that door framing can be naturally fire resistant (High-density timber)</td>
<td>Protected by bushfire shutter, or screened with steel, bronze or aluminium mesh or clad with 5 mm toughened glass, non-combustible or 35 mm solid timber for 400 mm above threshold, metal or bushfire resisting timber framed for 400 mm above ground, cladding, etc., tight-fitting with weather strips at base</td>
<td>Protected by bushfire shutter or completely screened with steel, bronze or aluminium mesh or 5 mm thick glass or with an FRL of 30/-/- or be tested for bushfire resistance to AS 1530.8.1</td>
<td>Protected by bushfire shutter or 5 mm toughened glass. Openable portion screened with steel or bronze mesh</td>
<td>Protected by bushfire shutter or FRL of 30/-/- and operable portion screened with steel or bronze mesh or be tested for bushfire resistance to AS 1530.8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>EXTERNAL DOORS</strong></td>
<td>As for BAL-19 except that door framing can be naturally fire resistant (High-density timber)</td>
<td>Protected by bushfire shutter, or screened with steel, bronze or aluminium mesh or clad with 5 mm toughened glass, non-combustible or 35 mm solid timber for 400 mm above threshold, metal or bushfire resisting timber framed for 400 mm above ground, cladding, etc., tight-fitting with weather strips at base</td>
<td>Protected by bushfire shutter, or screened with steel, bronze or aluminium mesh or non-combustible, or 35 mm solid timber for 400 mm above threshold. Metal or bushfire resisting timber framed tight-fitting with weather strips at base</td>
<td>Protected by bushfire shutter, non-combustible or 35 mm solid timber, metal framed tight-fitting with weather strips at base</td>
<td>Protected by bushfire shutter or tight-fitting with weather strips at base and an FRL of 30/-/-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ROOFS</strong></td>
<td>As for BAL-19</td>
<td>Non-combustible covering. Roof/wall junction sealed. Openings filled with non-combustible ember guards. Roof to be fully seated</td>
<td>Non-combustible covering. Roof/wall junction sealed. Openings fitted with non-combustible ember guards. Roof to be fully seated</td>
<td>Non-combustible covering. Roof/wall junction sealed. Openings fitted with non-combustible ember guards. Roof to be fully seated and non roof-mounted evaporative coolers</td>
<td>Roof with FRL of 30/30/30 or tested for bushfire resistance to AS 1530.8.2. Roof/wall junction sealed. Openings fitted with non-combustible ember guards. No roof mounted evaporative coolers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>VERANDAS DECKS ETC.</strong></td>
<td>As for BAL-19</td>
<td>Enclosed sub-floor space – no special requirement for materials except within 400 mm of ground</td>
<td>Enclosed sub-floor space or non-combustible or bushfire resistant timber supports. Decking to be non-combustible</td>
<td>Enclosed sub-floor space or non-combustible supports. Decking to be non-combustible</td>
<td>Enclosed sub-floor space or non-combustible supports. Decking to have no gaps and be non-combustible</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please note: The information in the table is a summary of the construction requirements in the new standard and not intended as a design guide. You should consult the standard for the full technical details.
Buildings that must comply

The new building standard applies to almost all types of residential new buildings and rebuilding work, including alterations and additions. However, most new homes in Victoria will not require changes as they will be assessed at the lowest risk level.

Buildings to comply with the new building standard include:
- New homes or outbuildings of any construction type including, but not limited to, brick veneer, mudbrick and timber
- Rebuilding of homes or outbuildings of all construction types
- Repairs to a room, or part of a building or outbuilding such as a garage, shed or fireplace
- Additions to homes and outbuildings.

Under the new building standard, the Building Code of Australia applies as it always has.

Building permits are required for all new building, rebuilding and partial reconstruction work, alterations and additions of homes and outbuildings.

When a building permit is issued for an alteration or addition, the building surveyor has the discretion on whether full or partial compliance is needed. The new building standard does not change this requirement.

Note: Structural damage may not always be apparent, so check with your local Council’s Municipal Building Surveyor or a Private Building Surveyor or a Registered Building Practitioner, such as a Structural Engineer, to ensure it is safe.

Aim for the highest level of bushfire protection

In bushfire damaged areas the new building standard should be considered in conjunction with the potential for future vegetation re-growth.

We owe it to the Victorian community to provide the greatest level of protection that we can.

Local Council Contact number

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local Council</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alpine Shire Council</td>
<td>(03) 5755 0555</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baw Baw Shire Council</td>
<td>(03) 5624 2411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Benalla Rural City Council</td>
<td>(03) 5760 2600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Greater Bendigo Council</td>
<td>(03) 5434 6000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cardinia Shire Council</td>
<td>1300 787 624</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Casey Council</td>
<td>(03) 9705 5200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corangamite Shire Council</td>
<td>(03) 5593 7100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindmarsh Shire Council</td>
<td>(03) 5391 1811</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Horsham City Rural Council</td>
<td>(03) 5382 9794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigo Shire Council</td>
<td>(03) 5728 8000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knox City Council</td>
<td>(03) 9298 8000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latrobe City Council</td>
<td>1300 367 700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Macedon Ranges Shire Council</td>
<td>(03) 5422 0333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mansfield Shire Council</td>
<td>(03) 5775 8555</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mitchell Shire Council</td>
<td>(03) 5734 6200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mount Alexander Shire Council</td>
<td>(03) 5471 1700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murrindindi Shire Council</td>
<td>(03) 5772 0333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nillumbik Shire Council</td>
<td>(03) 9433 3111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Shepparton City Council</td>
<td>(03) 5832 9700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern Grampians Shire Council</td>
<td>(03) 5573 0444</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Towong Shire Council</td>
<td>(02) 6071 5100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural City of Wangaratta Council</td>
<td>(03) 5722 0888</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellington Shire Council</td>
<td>1300 366 244</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City of Whittlesea Council</td>
<td>(03) 9217 2170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yarra Ranges Shire Council</td>
<td>1300 368 333</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For numbers not listed here please go to: www.mav.asn.au
Q. What is the difference between the new building standard and the previous standard?

A. The new building standard has six risk levels whereas the previous standard had four. There are increasing construction requirements that range from ember protection at the lower levels to direct flame contact protection at the highest.

The more scientific risk assessment of the new building standard determines the likely levels of heat exposure and then stipulates the appropriate construction method to improve a building’s ability to withstand bushfire attack and, importantly, protect occupants, while the fire front passes.

Q. What are the key aspects of the new building standard?

A. The new building standard increases the construction requirements on residential buildings so they are better bushfire protected. This ranges from construction measures that provide ember protection at the low levels to direct flame protection at the highest.

Under the new building standard, new homes at risk of bushfire may be required to have:

- Roofs, verandas and decking made from non-combustible material
- Wall and roof joints sealed against ember attacks
- Windows protected by non-combustible shutters or made using 4 to 5 mm toughened glass
- Door frames made from fire resistant timber and tightly fitted, with a weather strip at the base.

Q. Does the new building standard focus on materials used rather than the design?

A. The new building standard sets out suitable materials and construction methods appropriate to the bushfire risk – it does not prevent good design being used that is appropriate for the specific location.

Q. Will this new building standard save me and my home if a bushfire hits?

A. The new building standard will improve protection for new buildings in Victoria. However, it does not guarantee that a building or its occupants will survive a bushfire due to the unpredictable nature of bushfires.

Q. Will I still be able to design a home the way I want it?

A. Design decisions will continue to be made by property owners and their architects, designers and builders.

The new building standard stipulates construction methods and materials to better protect homes from bushfires but it does not specify design requirements.

Q. Will the new building standard be applied to all of Victoria or just declared Bushfire Prone Areas?

A. The new building standard will apply to all of Victoria. However, the majority of homes in Victoria will be assessed at the lowest risk level and therefore will not be subject to any specific conditions.

Q. How does the new building standard work in relation to building regulations?

A. In March 2009, the new building standard will be included in the Victorian Building Regulations 2006.

Q. Will it cost me more to rebuild my home under the new building standard than under the previous standard?

A. As with the previous standard, the costs of building depend on the type of construction and the property’s level of bushfire risk. However, with more finely tuned risk assessment, the new building standard allows for flexibility in regard to construction costs.

In 2008, 80 per cent of the building permits issued for new homes in Victoria would be assessed as BAL-LOW (requiring no specific construction requirements).

Q. Will I have to use specific building products to meet the new building standard?

A. No specific products are specified in the new building standard though a range of new products may be included in the design process and some materials will require a fire test to AS1530.8.

Q. Will I be allowed to clear trees around my property?

A. The new building standard considers the existing vegetation on the site and the distance between buildings and vegetation. The removal of vegetation is being reviewed by the State Government. It is recommended that you check with your local Council.