

NSW Bushfire Recovery Operations

Frequently Asked Questions – 29 November 2019

This document provides key information to assist council and other staff responding to queries about the recovery activities for the NSW Bushfires 2019.

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This document has been developed by the NSW Office of Emergency Management, Department of Communities and Justice. It will be updated regularly as new information is available.

If you have information that you would like to amend or include in this document, please contact oem.communications@justice.nsw.gov.au

Disaster relief for individuals

Australian Government - Disaster Recovery Allowance

This allowance provides a short term support payment to assist people whose income has been affected as a direct result of the bushfires.

- Call 180 22 66 or visit humanservices.gov.au

Australian Government - Disaster Recovery Payment

If your home has been damaged by smoke - including your clothes, furniture or carpets - you may be eligible for this payment.

- Call 180 2266 or visit disasterassist.gov.au

NSW Government - Disaster Relief Grants

Grants are available for eligible individuals and families whose homes and essential household contents have been damaged or destroyed by a natural disaster.

To be eligible for this grant you must:

- be a low-income earner and meet an income assets test
 - demonstrate that the affected home is your principal place of residence
 - not be covered by insurance
 - demonstrate that the damage was caused by the disaster
 - lodge the application within four months of the disaster occurring
- Contact the Disaster Welfare Assistance Line on 1800 018 444.

Replacing personal documents

Service NSW can help replace many of your personal documents free of charge if they were damaged or destroyed.

This includes birth certificates, marriage certificates, licences and number plates.

- Visit your nearest Service NSW centre or call 13 77 88.

Legal assistance

Legal Aid NSW can provide free legal advice and minor assistance to people affected by disasters on a range of issues, including insurance, tenancy, credit and debt problems.

- Call 1800 801 529 or visit legalaid.nsw.gov.au

Disaster relief for landholders

Primary Producer Grants

Grants of up to \$15,000 are available for bushfire affected primary producers. Eligibility criteria apply. Applications can be made to the Rural Assistance Authority.

- Call the Rural Assistance Authority on 1800 678 593.
- Find out more at www.raa.nsw.gov.au/disaster-assistance/disaster-recovery-grants

Animal welfare

Local Land Services can assist with:

- Emergency fodder
- Stock water
- Assessment of animals impacted by the fire.

Landholders are also encouraged report damage to property, including any stock losses.

- Call the Agriculture and Animal Services Hotline on 1800 814 647.
- Visit www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/rrp

NSW Rural Assistance Authority

Disaster relief low interest loans of up to \$130,000 are available to eligible primary producers and small businesses, and transport subsidies of up to 50% of the cost to transport livestock or fodder, to eligible primary producers.

- Call the Rural Assistance Authority on 1800 678 593.

Small business support

Small Business Grants

Grants of up to \$15,000 are available if your business has been directly affected by bushfire. Eligibility criteria apply. Applications can be made to the Rural Assistance Authority (RAA).

- Call the Rural Assistance Authority on 1800 678 593 or visit www.raa.nsw.gov.au

Business Connect

A free mobile advisory service is available to small businesses. A local advisor can meet you at a convenient place and discuss your business needs. Advice is offered about managing cash flow, planning the next steps, accessing financial support schemes and connecting to additional support.

- Call 1300 134 359 or register at industry.nsw.gov.au/businessconnect

Dispute Resolution Service

A confidential and free dispute resolution service has been set up to help small businesses needing assistance to work through problems with other businesses or government.

- Call 1300 795 534 or visit smallbusiness.nsw.gov.au/dispute-resolution

General information for Regional NSW

Information, advice and assistance is available for people managing a business, including business tools to analyse profitability and prepare for export.

- Call (02) 6760 2670 or visit nsw.gov.au/improving-nsw/regional-nsw

Safety advice

- People should avoid areas where bushfires are occurring. Stay off the road, don't travel unless you need to.
- Report unattended fires or suspicious activity immediately to Triple Zero (000) and follow the advice of authorities.
- Residents need to read all warnings in full to ensure they stay up-to-date with the latest information – this includes evacuation routes and evacuation centres.
- Areas closed off due to the bushfire emergency will reopen when it is safe to do so.
- Bushfires can topple trees and power lines and leave debris strewn across the landscape, posing a significant health and safety risk.
- People returning home need to be mindful of hazards even after a bushfire has been extinguished.

Health

General advice

- When smoky, avoid vigorous exercise outside, especially if you have asthma, diabetes, heart disease or a breathing related condition.
- If you have an air conditioner at home, turn it on and use it in a recirculate mode.
- If you are experiencing any adverse reactions to the dust or smoke, such as shortness of breath, prolonged coughing or wheezing, seek medical advice.
- Tank water could have become contaminated from debris, retardant, ash or dead animals. If the water tastes, looks or smells unusual, do not drink it or give it to animals.
- All foods that have been fire-damaged or affected by heat should be thrown out.

Mental health

It's completely normal to experience a range of emotions after a fire, including anxiety, forgetfulness, sleep disturbance and more.

Having someone to listen to and support you through this is very important.

Check in on your friends and neighbours, and if you or someone you know needs help, reach out.

The following are free services available 24 hours a day, seven days a week:

- Mental Health Line – 1800 011 511
- Lifeline – 13 11 14
- Mensline – 1300 789 978
- Kids Helpline – 1800 55 1800
- Beyondblue – 1300 22 4636

If you or someone you know is in **immediate danger call 000**.

The following free services are available to people impacted by fires and drought.
No GP referral is needed.

- Hunter / New England Healthwise on 1800 931 540
- Northern NSW - Connect to Wellbeing on 1300 160 339

Housing assistance

Department of Communities and Justice (DCJ) Housing can offer temporary accommodation, as well as interest-free bond loans and advance rent to eligible fire-impacted residents.

- Call the Housing Contact Centre on 1800 422 322 (available 24/7) for more information.

Insurance

Insured

If you are insured talk to your insurance company as soon as possible about how to make a claim.

Take photos or video of damage to your property and possessions as evidence for your claim.

If you have clearance from your insurer and evidence for your claim, you can start cleaning up.

- The Insurance Council of Australia can be contacted with any questions, complaints or concerns about insurance on 1800 734 621.
- Legal Aid NSW can provide free legal advice and minor assistance to people affected by disasters on a range of issues, including insurance, on 1800 801 529.

Uninsured

NSW Government Disaster Relief Grants are available for eligible individuals and families whose homes and essential household contents have been damaged or destroyed by a natural disaster.

Further eligibility information can be found on page 2.

- Contact the Disaster Welfare Assistance Line on 1800 018 444.

Clean up

General advice

- Do not enter your property until you are advised that it is safe to do so by emergency services, utilities companies or local council.
- Electrical hazards could exist such as live power lines that may be 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.
- Be aware that hot, smouldering coals and other potentially hazardous materials may be hidden under the rubble.
- Building rubble should not be buried as it may contain hazardous materials.
- Don't spread ash around your property, particularly if asbestos materials were used in your home or other structures, or CCA-treated timber was burnt.
- Moisten the ash with water to minimise dust and keep damp but do not use high pressure water sprays.

Hazard identification notices

A hazard identification notice indicates dangers like electrical risks, falling branches or asbestos may have been identified at your property.

Only return home when you have been given approval. When you do, even if there is no sign, there may still be hazards on your property.

Please ensure you wear a P2 face mask, which can filter out very fine particles from the air.

If the Hazard Identification Notice indicates asbestos is suspected on your property, you can get further information from the Public Works Advisory.

- Call the Public Works Advisory on 1800 88 55 39.

Clean up assistance

If your property is insured, please contact your insurer about clean-up.

More information on Insurance can be found on page 6.

If you are uninsured and your home has been damaged or destroyed, Public Works Advisory will arrange for the clean-up of your residence and immediately adjacent outbuildings, including the removal of concrete slabs.

- Contact Public Works Advisory on 1800 88 55 39.

Notes on local waste disposal arrangements are on page 8.

Other local waste disposal arrangements

Council to provide local information.

If this information is not yet available, you may wish to consider a statement such as: “*Council is currently working on a waste management strategy and will make this information publically available as soon as possible*”.

Further waste related information can be found in the following sections:

- **Insurance on page 6**
- **Clean up on page 7.**

Water

Domestic water assistance

If your potable water has been used by a fire fighting agency to fight the fire, you may be eligible to have it replaced. This assistance is for residential properties in rural areas.

- Call the Disaster Welfare Assistance Line on 1800 018 444.

Fire retardant contamination

Retardants dropped from the air to suppress / slow fires may have landed on some properties. This type of retardant is basically a fertiliser (a mix of ammonium and diammonium sulphate and ammonium phosphate). Coloured foam will need to be flushed from roofs and water sources.

To prevent any retardant or ash getting into water tanks, residents should disconnect their downpipe/s from water tank/s, so that the first flush (either rain or washing) does not wash anything from the roof into tanks.

- Contact the Disaster Welfare Assistance Line on 1800 018 444.

Using rainwater after a fire

It's important for residents in fire affected areas, or in areas where ash may have fallen on roofs, to ensure rainwater from the first full rainfall event is not collected as it may be contaminated by ash.

If you think that your rainwater tank has been contaminated you can still use the water to fight fires, flush toilets and wash clothes (provided it will not stain them).

Smoke damage

If your home has been damaged by smoke - including your clothes, furniture or carpets - you may be eligible for the Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment.

- Call 180 22 66 or visit disasterassist.gov.au

Donations

NSW Government agencies along with charity partners and local community organisations are helping to provide emergency shelter, food and water.

The best way to help our impacted communities is to donate money to one of the many charities or appeals that have been established. Money gives people the choice to buy things they need and support local businesses that have also been impacted.

Please do not donate physical goods such as toys, furniture and clothes at this time. They are usually not needed and fill up community spaces, while taking volunteers away from other important tasks. If you have unwanted physical goods please consider selling them and donating the proceeds instead.

- [The Salvation Army](#) 13 72 58
- [Vinnies](#) 13 18 12
- [The Red Cross](#) 1800 733 276

Other questions that may come up

Councils to seek information from their Local Emergency Management Officer, who is involved in the local Emergency Operations Centre and will be able to source information on the following:

- school closures
- road and rail closures
- passenger transport interruptions
- maritime warnings (for example, reduced visibility).