



Planning SA
Department of Transport
and Urban Planning

FACT SHEET JUNE 2003

Building a home in a Bushfire Prone Area

After the 1983 Ash Wednesday bushfires, the State Government consulted with a number of local councils and declared a large part of the Mt Lofty Ranges—from the Fleurieu Peninsula to the Barossa Valley—as a 'Bushfire Prone Area'.

The risk of bushfires is high in South Australia's hot and dry climate—particularly in the areas declared as Bushfire Prone. That's why all homes built in South Australia's Bushfire Prone Areas must be designed and built using planning and construction principles that help protect them from bushfires. When properly implemented, these design principles will not only help to protect the home from fire damage, but will also provide the occupant and members of the Country Fire Service (CFS) with the means to fight bushfires if they threaten the home.

The requirements for new homes in Bushfire Prone Areas are included in council Development Plans, the Building Code of Australia (BCA) and the South Australian Housing Code (SAHC).

Why a Fact Sheet?

This fact sheet provides an overview of the requirements that apply to all new homes and accommodation facilities built in South Australia's designated Bushfire Prone Areas.

How do I get approval to build in a Bushfire Prone Area?

Under the *Development Act 1993*, development approval is required from the relevant council for all building work. To secure this approval in a Bushfire Prone Area, new homes must comply with the bushfire requirements in the appropriate Development Plan as well as those in the BCA or SAHC.



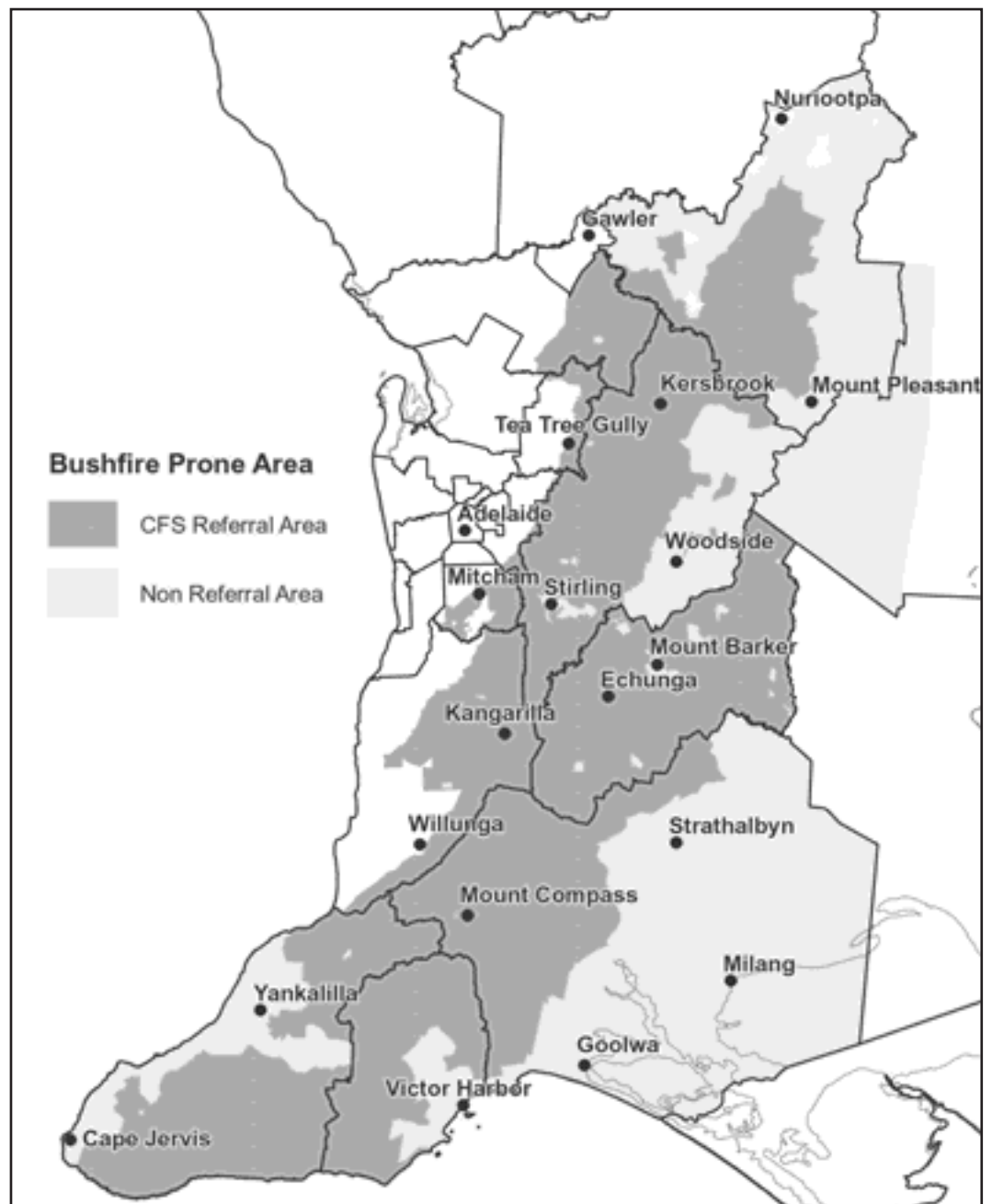
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Which councils have designated Bushfire Prone Areas?

While a number of South Australian councils have bushfire protection planning principles contained in their Development Plans, only the councils below have designated Bushfire Prone Areas:

- Adelaide Hills Council
- Alexandrina Council
- The Barossa Council
- City of Burnside
- City of Campbelltown
- Mid Murray Council
- City of Mitcham
- Mount Barker District Council
- City of Onkaparinga
- City of Playford
- City of Tea Tree Gully
- City of Victor Harbor
- Yankalilla District Council

Maps of these areas can be found in the relevant council planning guideline documents (known as Development Plans). Anyone that suspects their property may be located in a Bushfire Prone Area can contact their local council for confirmation, or they can visit the Planning SA website at www.planning.sa.gov.au and access the bushfire maps in the relevant Development Plan.



What is a 'CFS Referral Area'?

Since the initial declaration of Bushfire Prone Areas, each affected local council and the CFS have assessed the land within these areas and have declared them as either 'CFS Referral Areas', 'Non-Referral Areas' or 'Areas Excluded from Bushfire Planning Provisions'. These classifications have been incorporated into the Bushfire Prone Area maps in Development Plans.

In a 'CFS Referral Area', the council will refer any development applications for this land to the CFS for comment on those matters within the council's Development Plan relating to bushfire protection.

Where a new home is in a 'Non-Referral Area', councils can make the necessary planning decision without referral to the CFS. Areas declared as 'Excluded from Bushfire Planning Provisions' have generally been excluded because of the existence of adequate infrastructure (such as water supply and access roads) as well as limited natural vegetation. Homes built in a 'CFS Referral Area', 'Non-Referral Area' or area designated as 'Excluded from Bushfire Planning Provisions' must still comply with the construction requirements for buildings in Bushfire Prone Areas.

What are the bushfire requirements in a Development Plan?

Planning policies in Development Plans are known as 'objectives and principles'. Those relating to bushfires include:

- siting of the home so that it minimises the risk from bushfires
- ensuring the CFS has adequate and proper access to the home for the purpose of fire fighting
- requiring a home to have an adequate supply of water dedicated to fire fighting purposes
- landscaping that addresses both natural vegetation issues and the reduction of fire risk.

What is a 'risk classification', and how does it affect the level of bushfire protection I will need?

To determine a site's risk of bushfire, the applicant must undertake a site hazard assessment prior to or early in the design stage. Australian Standard AS 3959 – 1999 Construction of buildings in bushfire prone areas provides an acceptable method for determining a site hazard assessment and the proximity of the building to neighbouring vegetation, the type of vegetation and the slope of the land are considered when the hazard assessment is undertaken. The level of bushfire risk is then classified as 'low', 'medium', 'high' or 'extreme'. This classification determines the level of construction needed to provide the necessary bushfire protection. The identification of the site hazard assessment should be considered prior to the purchase of land as the cost of the home will increase as the site hazard becomes greater.

What is the difference between low, medium, high or extreme risk classifications?

If a site is classified as 'low' risk, the risk from a bushfire is considered minimal and not great enough to warrant any additional requirements over and above standard construction methods. 'Medium' risk sites must be fitted with additional spark and ember proofing, while 'high' risk sites must have spark and ember proofing as well as extra protection against radiant heat. 'Extreme' risk sites require the same requirements as 'high' risk sites, but with additional protection against some flame attack.

The construction methods for each site classification are contained in the Building Code of Australia, AS 3959 -1999 and the South Australian Housing Code.



If a fire fighting water supply is required by council, are there any construction requirements for that water supply?

Council Development Plans require homes in Bushfire Prone Areas to have dedicated fire fighting water supplies (normally a minimum of 5 000 litres in a Non-Referral Area and 22 000 litres in a CFS Referral Area). The council may vary these requirements depending on the availability of other fire fighting water supplies such as dams, swimming pools or an adjacent fire main with a guaranteed water supply (normally only accessible in townships).

The provision of a fire fighting water supply must be in conjunction with ready access to that water by the occupant or the CFS and the water supply and fire fighting equipment must comply with *Minister's Specification SA 78-Bushfire fighting equipment and water supply requirements in designated bushfire prone areas*. This Specification requires that:

- the dedicated water supply must be independent of the reticulated mains water that feeds the building
- the dedicated water supply must be able to supply the installed bushfire protection system
- fire fighting hoses must be connected and charged with water from the identified water supply
- water supply tanks must be non-combustible
- appropriate fire service adaptors must be provided
- the water supply shall be pressurised by a pump that is powered by a petrol or diesel engine of at least 3.7 kW
- if a pump is not used the water supply system must operate independently of mains electricity and be capable of pressurising the water for bushfire fighting purposes
- the pump must be protected by a non-combustible cover
- there must be adequate water piping between the tank and the pump
- non-metal water piping must be protected
- fire fighting hoses must be in an appropriate location
- fire fighting hoses must be adequate (in terms of length, diameter, applied pressures, nozzles and general construction of the hoses)
- fire fighting hoses must be readily available.

What if I want to extend my existing home?

Any extensions to existing homes require development approval, including the associated provisional development plan consent and provisional building rules consent. For development plan consent, the site location will determine whether the site is in a CFS Referral Area and the council will assess the new work and decide if a bushfire protection upgrade is necessary.

For building rules consent, extensions must to be protected against bushfire in accordance with the BCA, however there is no requirement to upgrade the existing dwelling. An exception to this rule occurs when an extension or addition increases the floor area of the house by more than 50 percent, in which case the authority responsible for issuing building rules consent may request that the existing house is upgraded to the current requirements.

Who will ensure that a new home complies with bushfire safety requirements?

Under the *Development Act*, development approval is required from the council for all building work to ensure it complies with the requirements in the Development Plan and the BCA. Before this approval is issued, the council will assess the application against the Development Plan and the council or a private certifier will assess the design against the requirements of the BCA or SAHC. This assessment includes checking the site hazard classification and compliance with the bushfire safety requirements.

After development approval has been granted, the council may also inspect the building work to ensure compliance with the approved documents.



Once my home is built, how can I minimise the risk to the property in the event of a bushfire?

The CFS has produced a publication entitled *Your Survival Guide to Wildfire—Plan NOW to Stay or Go*. This document sets out the information needed to help minimize the risk and to survive a bushfire and is available from CFS regional offices or online at www.cfs.org.au

If you have constructed or are about to construct a home in a Bushfire Prone Area, you are encouraged to make yourself familiar with the available CFS bushfire prevention information and to actively prepare both yourself and your property for bushfire.



Further information

For more information about building a home in a Bushfire Prone Area, contact your local council. Information is also available from:

Planning SA

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www.planning.sa.gov.au/building_policy

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