

What you need to know before removing vegetation for fire prevention



Under the new Clause 52.43 of the Victoria Planning Provisions, no permits are required for the removal of trees around a building used for accommodation within 10 metres for fire prevention purposes.

In addition no permit is required to clear any vegetation except trees for up to 30 metres around a building used for accommodation for fire prevention purposes. This is regardless of whether there are any overlays in place.

There are some cases where other controls on vegetation removal do still apply, such as a Section 173 agreement or a Conservation Covenant. This information can be found on the title particulars and residents should check this prior to removing vegetation. To check your title particulars residents can contact Land Registration Services or www.land.vic.gov.au.

What matters should be considered before removing trees and vegetation?

There are a number of factors that influence bushfire risk and the removal of trees and vegetation may be one of many actions to improve safety when preparing for a bushfire.

Before removing vegetation, you need to consider the type and extent of vegetation on your property and surrounding land, how close you are to forests, grasslands or scrub and what is the topography of the land where you live.

Do the trees and vegetation provide another value such as shading or screening, will something need to be replanted, will the removal cause problems with land slip or erosion?

Research shows that fine fuels enhance fire intensity so it may be more worthwhile to concentrate on cleaning up long dry grass, fallen leaves and twigs before deciding on whether to remove trees or vegetation.

In certain circumstances trees and other vegetation can slow the wind, cut down radiant heat and catch flying embers and sparks from a bushfire. However vegetation does burn and excessive vegetation close to a house is not recommended.

Totally removing leaf litter can lead to changes in the soil structure which could cause plants to die or shed leaves leading to increased fuel loads while large breaks in vegetation can leave land vulnerable to weeds which again can add to fuel loads.

Vegetation, particularly native vegetation, has many important roles. In addition to biodiversity and habitat, vegetation is an important component of the amenity and character of our towns, suburbs and rural landscape.

Vegetation management is one aspect of preparing a property for bushfire

In addition to managing the vegetation around your home you need to be aware of other measures for fire prevention. Embers – often bark, twigs or leaves – can cause new fires and these are most likely to get into a house through gaps in or around roofs, windows, doors and decks.

The CFA provides information and advice on other important actions that should form part of preparing a property for bushfire. This advice can be found on www.cfa.vic.gov.au.

What vegetation should be part of a bushfire plan?

Fires need fuel to burn. This can be plants, shrubs, trees, garden waste or woodpiles. Landowners and residents need to prepare their properties and land before the fire season to reduce the fuel load.

Research shows that fine fuels (thinner than a finger) can enhance fire intensity so concentrating efforts on the removal of long dry grass, fallen leaves and twigs is important. Fine fuels do not include larger logs, branches and trees.

Am I at risk of land slip?

Nillumbik has areas that are prone to land slip. The risk of landslip can be made worse by removing vegetation and particularly long lasting deep rooted trees and plants. If you need advice about whether you live in a landslip area please contact Council.

You are advised to be cautious or take further advice from a Geotechnical Engineer, Land Management Consultant or Arborist prior to removing vegetation, particularly trees on slopes above 25 degrees.

Are there any penalties for removing trees and vegetation beyond the 10 and 30 metre limits?

There are penalties for removing trees and vegetation beyond the 10 and 30 metres limits. Council may issue an infringement notice which carries a minimum fine of \$554 for an individual or \$1,168 for a company.

The infringement may apply to each tree removed. Alternatively if Council takes legal action through the Victorian Magistrates Court a fine of up to 1200 penalty units may result (up to \$140,000).



What about safety?

It is very important to consider your safety and those of others around you when removing vegetation, particularly trees. Fatalities and serious injuries associated with removing trees occur every year.

Damage to buildings and other property is also a possibility and you should ensure that whoever undertakes the work has the skills and knowledge to do so. You are advised to seek professional assistance when removing vegetation, particularly trees.

Why was Nillumbik included in these exemptions?

The State Government decided which municipalities would need to apply the exemptions based on fire risk. For residents and landowners at risk from bushfire, the interim provision will enable them to implement their bushfire plan before the next declared fire danger period. The exemptions do not apply to 20 other metropolitan councils including Banyule.

Are these exemptions permanent?

Clause 52.43 has recently been extended to 1 March 2012. The Clause will be reassessed as part of the implementation of the recommendations of the Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission. For further advice please refer to www.dse.vic.gov.au.

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