

# Bushfire Neighbourhood Safer Places

# CFA

# Assessment Guidelines

**December 2010**

## NEIGHBOURHOOD SAFER PLACES

## PLACES OF LAST RESORT

### INTRODUCTION

***Neighbourhood Safer Place*** means a place that may, as a last resort, provide shelter for people from the immediate life threatening effects of a bushfire.

They are an area or premises that may provide some sanctuary from direct flame contact and radiant heat. It is envisioned it would be an existing space or structure, such as an oval or a building, that may protect a person against fire.

This assessment guideline articulates the process by which qualified/experienced CFA Officers assess the suitability of Neighbourhood Safer Places and is not intended for use by the general public.

### BACKGROUND

Reducing the impact of bushfires is a shared responsibility between government, emergency service organisations and the community. The community has an integral role to take the necessary steps to prepare their property and to implement their bushfire survival plan.

This document sets out criteria for CFA’s assessment of Neighbourhood Safer Places. The criteria provide a framework to assist Municipal Councils to identify Neighbourhood Safer Places to provide a place of last resort for people to gather during the passage of a bushfire front. The primary purpose of a Neighbourhood Safer Place is the protection of human life from a bushfire.

The 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission (VBRC) Final Report stated that the people who left their homes sheltered in a variety of locations for example, other houses or buildings; bunkers, reserves and ovals; pubs; in-ground swimming pools, cars and dams. Some people reported that these were pre-planned alternatives and in some cases, helped people survive. However, the VBRC also heard examples of people dying in very similar locations, which serve to highlight that, these locations do not guarantee safety (VBRC Final Report Vol 2: pg 19).

The VBRC also stated that “many people did not have a well-thought-out plan and were left to make their own decisions without the benefit of assistance from the authorities [and] for these people, the lack of alternatives, the provision of shelters, refuges or evacuation, became critical as a fallback option (VBRC Final Report Summary: pg 5). They also “considered that a revised bushfire safety policy should provide information about places in which to shelter and support for individuals in identifying such places” (VBRC Final Report Vol 2: pg 21). Neighbourhood Safer Places continue to be a part of the shelter options for community members.

### CONCEPT

A Neighbourhood Safer Place is a space that:

* + is a place of last resort for individuals to access and shelter in during the passage of fire through their neighbourhood - without the need to take a high risk journey beyond their neighbourhood;
	+ provides a level of protection from the immediate life threatening effects of a bushfire (direct flame contact and radiant heat); and
	+ is intended to provided relative safety;
	+ but does not guarantee the survival of those who assemble there; and
	+ should only be accessed when personal bushfire survival plans cannot be implemented or have failed.

Neighbourhood Safer Places should be recorded in Township Protection Plans. However, not all townships will have Neighbourhood Safer Places identified in these Plans as they may not meet specific criteria identified in this document and within a council’s Municipal Neighbourhood Safer Places Plan. Some towns may not have the fire risk profile to indicate a need for a Neighbourhood Safer Place.

Neighbourhood Safer Places are not to be confused with Fire Refuges[[1]](#footnote-1), Relief Centres, Recovery Centres, Assembly Areas, or Informal Places of Shelter, each of which have a different and specific purpose.

### LIMITATIONS

* + Neighbourhood Safer Places have a number of limitations, being:
	+ limited capacity;
	+ no guarantee of safety;
	+ they do not cater for animals;
	+ emergency services will not necessarily be present;
	+ they do not provide meals or amenities;
	+ they may not cater for particular special needs (e.g. infants, elderly, ill or disabled);
	+ they may not provide shelter from the elements, particularly flying embers; and
	+ there are risks to people during access, shelter during passage of the fire front and egress from Neighbourhood Safer Places.

## CFA Neighbourhood Safer Places Assessment Criteria

Neighbourhood Safer Places should provide protection to people from lethal levels of radiant heat through an appropriate separation distance between fire hazards, particularly vegetation, and the site of the Neighbourhood Safer Place. Isolated flammable elements may occur within the separation space so long as such elements do not add to a fire’s rate of spread nor significantly contribute to the radiant heat impacting on the Neighbourhood Safer Place.

Fire industry collaboration established criteria to determine the suitability of any site as a Neighbourhood Safer Place. The critical criteria decided upon was radiant heat load with maximum allowable radiant heat loads agreed upon for sites that are open spaces and those that are buildings. It was further agreed that each Neighbourhood Safer Place needs to be assessed on its merits, with radiant heat load calculated using the NSW Rural Fire Service Site Bush Fire Attack Assessment Methodology (Douglas and Tan, 2005) as the assessment tool in these guidelines.

### Radiant Heat and Setback Measurements

To provide initial direction to CFA staff and others in assessing the suitability of potential Neighbourhood Safer Places, the following guidance is provided:

Neighbourhood Safer Places must meet the following criteria for radiant heat load:

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| * + 1. If a Neighbourhood Safer Place is an open space the maximum potential radiant heat impacting on the site must be no more than 2kw/m².
		2. If a Neighbourhood Safer Place is a building, the maximum potential radiant heat impacting on the building must be no more than 10kw/m².
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| By way of example, Neighbourhood Safer Places adjoining extreme fuel hazards, this equates to a separation distance from the fire hazard of:* + greater than **310** metres from the outer edge of the NSP for an open space; and
	+ greater than **140** metres from the outer edge of a building to the fire hazard.

It is acknowledged that for NSPs abutting less than extreme fuel hazards this separation distance may be reduced so long as the criteria for maximum radiant heat impact are met.  |

### Additional Management for Neighbourhood Safer Places in Grassland Areas

Grasslands have a distinct place in the Neighbourhood Safer Places framework, due to:

* the potential for rapid growth in conditions of adequate warmth and moisture; and
* the requirement under section 50J of the CFA Act for councils to review their NSPs by 31 August each year.

Councils may identify a suitable Neighbourhood Safer Place site in a grassland area that can only meet the assessment criteria with active management of the site over the fire danger period, with treatments including slashing, mowing or grazing.

In these circumstances CFA may certify the site as meeting the assessment criteria provided that appropriate, specified and prescribed treatments are in place throughout the fire danger period. This must include prescriptions for management of the grassland secured by agreed terms entered into by the landholder. The landholder may be the council, a public authority, an agency or a private person.

The identified treatment of the grassland must be included within the MFPP or MFMP (whichever is relevant). Council has the role of facilitation and, if required, enforcement of the treatment(s) during the fire danger period. Fire Prevention Notices would not ordinarily be an appropriate method for achievement of management prescriptions in NSPs. Their use would only be an option of last resort that councils may use where a private landholder has reneged on their agreed conditions **and** the grassland condition constitutes or may constitute a danger to life or property from the threat of fire.

## NEIGHBOURHOOD SAFER PLACES –

## Places of Last ResortCFA ASSESSMENT CRITERIA REPORT

**Neighbourhood Safer Place Site Name and Address:**

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**The site is assessed as:**

**a) Meeting the CFA assessment criteria on the day of assessment; or**

**b) Not meeting the CFA assessment criteria on the day of assessment; or**

**c) Meeting the assessment criteria provided that prescriptions of management of the grassland over the fire danger period are secured by agreed terms entered into by the landholder (see below)**

**Criteria**

**1). Setback distances and Radiant Heat Measures**

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| Neighbourhood Safer Places should provide protection to people from lethal levels of radiant heat by providing an appropriate separation distance between fire hazards, particularly vegetation and the site of the Neighbourhood Safer Place.If a Neighbourhood Safer Place is an open space, the appropriate separation distance should be greater than 310 metres from the outer edge of the NSP to the fire hazard, or should be prescribed to ensure a maximum potential heat impacting on the site of no more than 2kw/m². If a Neighbourhood Safer Place is a building, the appropriate separation distance greater than 140 metres from the outer edge of the building to the fire hazard or should be prescribed to ensure that the maximum potential heat impacting on the building is no more than 10kw/m². |
|
|  | **North Aspect** | **East Aspect** | **South Aspect** | **West Aspect** |
| **Setback distance (m)** |  |  |  |  |
| **Radiant Heat (kw/m²)** |  |  |  |  |

2) The following is only to be completed if grassland areas require further and specified management over the fire danger period

| **Recommendation** | **Y/N** |
| --- | --- |
| There must be prescriptions for management of the grassland over the fire danger period, secured by agreed terms entered into by the landholder. |  |
| The identified treatment of the grassland be included within the MFPP or MFMP (whichever is relevant) and is the responsibility of Council to facilitate and if required enforce the treatment during the fire danger period. |  |
| Treatments and Prescriptions: | (FSOs - Recommend the most appropriate treatments and prescriptions at the time of assessment). E.g.: Slashing, Grazing or Mowing to inner zone conditions for WMO for xx metres. |
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**SIGNATURE ……………………………………..**

**DATE……………………....**

**PRINT CFA OFFICER NAME …………………………...................................................**

**POSITION………………………………………………………………………………………**

1. Fire refuges have been described in the OESC Fire Refuges in Victoria – Policy and Practice (2005). However, these guidelines are currently undergoing a review with the OESC and because the issues associated with fire refuges are being considered separately, they will not be considered further in this document. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)