

Hundreds of thousands of trees have been damaged or destroyed in the 2019/20 Victorian Bushfires. Many damaged trees remain standing that can potentially cause serious injury or death. Tree hazards are a risk at all stages of operations.

What is a hazardous tree?

A hazardous tree is typically defined by one or more of the following characteristics

- Dead and/or decaying tree or major branches
- Suspected loose or broken branches
- Significant lean with recent cause or indicators of failure
- Evidence of longitudinal cracking
- Evidence of roots lifting, or an undercut or disturbed root system
- Other indicators of serious weakness based on local knowledge.

What is government doing with hazardous trees on public land?

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) is responsible for the removal of hazardous trees on public or Crown land that are damaged by bushfires and pose an immediate safety risk along roads, tracks and public sites.

DELWP is currently undertaking considerable hazardous tree assessment and removal on public land areas and roads in order to provide a safe working environment for staff and adjoining landholders and for public visitation and use.

Who is managing hazardous trees on roads?

Regional Recovery Teams are coordinating and prioritising the assessment and removal of hazardous trees on roads managed by Regional Roads Victoria, councils and DELWP. As there are hundreds of kilometres of fire affected roads, assessment and removal of hazardous trees on minor roads will take months.

There are hazardous trees on my property - who can I contact to remove them?

You can contact your local council who will arrange for an inspection and treatment of the trees.

What about hazardous trees on my property?

Managing hazardous trees on your property is your responsibility. Be aware of the condition of trees before you or people working on your property work near them. Large trees that have been burnt by fires are likely to have some level of impact that may put them into a hazardous category. An arborist or qualified tree assessor is someone who can help you assess the risk posed by trees as a result of fire damage.

As part of the 2020 Clean-Up Program, Grocon (the program contractor) will assess, manage and remove hazardous trees where it is necessary for the safe clean up of destroyed buildings.

Additional support may be available to assist in the removal of hazardous trees if they are within the residential component of a rural property, or within the area immediately surrounding the main access to the house (i.e. the driveways), or where it could potentially present a health and safety threat to residents living in the house. For rural properties, the residential component is the area clearly identifiable as residential and not used for farming purposes (i.e. residential premises and immediate surroundings).

Do I need a planning permit to remove hazardous trees from my property?

A planning permit is not required to remove any native vegetation (including trees) that presents an immediate risk of personal injury or damage to property (including internal and boundary fences). The risk is only considered immediate when management of the risk can only be achieved by the removal of the native vegetation within a shorter timeframe than it would take to apply for and be issued with a permit for removal.

Where practical, a qualified arborist should assess whether the native vegetation presents an immediate risk of limb or trunk failure. Where other means exist to address the risk, the exemption should not be relied on. If future injury or damage from native vegetation is a concern, a planning permit can be sought to remove it.

When should I use an arborist or hazard tree assessor?

Landholders should consider engaging an arborist or a hazard tree assessor if trees have incurred severe damage by recent fire and appear very unstable, or if the tree has been impacted by some other factor and appears likely to fail if works are undertaken within the tree fall zone.

Where can I find an arborist?

An arborist is a trained technician for trees. Arborists are often employed by, or own tree care services. An arborist's training enables them to assess the health and stability of a tree and to safely prune, fell and remove trees. You can search online for arborists who can service your area.

Can I collect wood from hazardous trees that have been felled by roadsides or on public land?

For safety reasons, VicRoads and councils do not permit the removal of fallen timber from roadsides. There may be local programs to harvest the timber and make it available to the community. For information on whether there are local programs, contact:

- Gippsland.recovery@delwp.vic.gov.au
- Hume.recovery@delwp.vic.gov.au

Timber cannot be removed from public land unless a permit or gazettal is issued. Where feasible, DELWP will consider options to make timber from hazardous tree works available to local communities. Depending on the quantity, quality and use of the timber, royalties may be applicable.

Who do I contact if I have concerns about hazardous trees on public land adjoining my property?

You can contact DELWP's Customer Contact centre direct on 136 186 to connect with the appropriate DELWP staff in your region. Alternatively, you can email –

- Gippsland.recovery@delwp.vic.gov.au
- Hume.recovery@delwp.vic.gov.au