

# NSW Bushfire Recovery Operations

## Frequently Asked Questions – 16 Dec 2019

This document provides key information to assist council and other staff responding to queries about the recovery activities for the NSW Bushfires 2019 affecting: **HUNTER, GREATER SYDNEY and SOUTH EAST REGIONS.**

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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 [uem.communications@justice.nsw.gov.au](mailto:uem.communications@justice.nsw.gov.au)

# Disaster relief for individuals

## 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](http://legalaid.nsw.gov.au)

## Telstra disaster relief

Telstra customers who have suffered severe damage or loss of their premises can access:

- Free call diversion from the customer's Telstra fixed phone service to another Australian fixed or mobile service of their choice, regardless of the carrier. This offer is applicable for a maximum period of 6 months from the date of the fire.
  - In addition, Telstra will apply a one off credit to the value of \$500 inc. GST to the customer's Telstra fixed phone account to help cover the costs of the following, if required:
    - Connection of a Telstra fixed phone service at one temporary residence
    - Re-connection of a Telstra fixed phone service at the customer's original permanent premises.
- Call Telstra on 132 203 to register for assistance.

# Disaster relief for landholders

## 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](http://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.

## Title searches and plan images

NSW Land Registry Services (NSW LRS) is helping landholders affected by the recent NSW bushfires by providing title searches and plan images of their property free of charge.

Property searches and plans can assist landholders with insurance claims and development applications to council, as well as provide peace of mind regarding land ownership following natural disasters.

- Call NSW LRS on 1300 396 076 or (02) 8776 3575.

## Fire-damaged fences

NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) offers assistance under certain conditions to repair or replace fences bordering national parks in accordance with the NPWS boundary fencing policy.

This is of particular relevance to landholders who immediately border national parks and nature reserves affected by the recent fires.

NPWS is offering to purchase and supply an agreed quantity of fencing materials to reconstruct boundary fences.

This offer applies to the replacement or repair of pre-existing boundary fences only.

- Call the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment on 1300 361 967.

## Small business support

### 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](https://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](https://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](https://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**.

## 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.

## Asbestos

Asbestos dust and fibres have the potential to present a health risk during and after a fire if not properly managed.

Asbestos clean-up and removal by a licensed asbestos removalist.

Asbestos waste, including fibro, should be disposed of as soon as possible.

The materials should be kept damp until they can be double wrapped in heavy duty (0.2mm) plastic, sealed with tape and labelled as asbestos waste.

- For information about the safe handling and removal of asbestos, visit [safework.nsw.gov.au](http://safework.nsw.gov.au).
- For information about transport and disposal of hazardous materials, visit [epa.nsw.gov.au](http://epa.nsw.gov.au).

## 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).

## 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).

## Privacy considerations

Following disasters, councils will often receive requests from a range organisations and groups seeking data on the impact on individuals and communities.

Organisations may claim they need personal information so they can distribute money, goods or services to impacted people.

If approached for this information by organisations operating outside of these arrangements, please consider the following:



- Privacy obligations are applied when there is personal Information that will identify a person.
- Personal information that identifies an individual should not be shared to the organisation unless consent of the individual has been given.
- Any information that is shared without permission should be de-identified.