



NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE



REBUILDING AFTER BUSH FIRE

PREPARE.

ACT.

SURVIVE.

> GETTING STARTED



Rebuilding after bush fire

This guide has been created to assist people who have been affected by recent bush fires. Over the following pages you will find the steps to rebuilding and how to get started.

Please remember there are a range of services to help you with the various decisions, thoughts and questions you may be facing right now.

Getting started

When rebuilding or repairing your home, there are three main parts to keep in mind:

Part one: your level of risk

Your level of bush fire risk affects your development requirements – the higher the risk, the more protection you need. We use the term ‘bush fire attack level’, or BAL, to quantify this risk.

Part two: your approval pathway

There are two pathways for approvals:

1. **Development application** – this is the usual process through council

OR

2. **Complying development** – a fast-track process available for homes with lower level bush fire risk.
-

Part three: your protection measures

Any home built in a bush fire prone area needs protection from bush fire through:

- > access
- > water and utilities
- > a cleared space around the home, known as an asset protection zone (APZ)
- > design and construction
- > landscaping.

> PART ONE: YOUR LEVEL OF RISK

Your level of risk



Your level of bush fire risk affects your development requirements – the higher the risk, the more protection you need. We use the term ‘bush fire attack level’, or BAL, to quantify this risk.

Your level of bush fire risk is affected by the area you live, the vegetation, the distance from the vegetation to your home, and the slope.

As part of your rebuild process, you will need to confirm your BAL in a written report. The NSW RFS can help with this step.

Alternatively, many people complete this step with a bush fire consultant. You can find an accredited Bush Fire Consultant at www.fpaa.com.au. You can also do a bush fire attack level risk assessment yourself, but you could possibly slow the process down if there are requests for more information from council. For more information on how to complete an assessment yourself, visit www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/bal

There are six bush fire attack levels (see table below). BAL-Low is the lowest bush fire risk and BAL-Flame Zone is the highest risk.

BAL Levels

BAL Level	Description of risk
BAL - LOW	Lowest risk from a potential fire.
BAL - 12.5	Risk is primarily from potential embers during a fire.
BAL - 19	Moderate risk, particularly from embers and burning debris.
BAL - 29	High risk, particularly from embers, debris and heat.
BAL - 40	Very high risk. Likely to be impacted by embers, debris, heat and potentially flames.
BAL - FZ	Extreme risk. Directly exposed to the flames of a potential fire front.



The closer your house is to the potential heat of a fire, the higher your BAL. If you have enough space, consider moving your house location to reduce your BAL and decrease construction costs.

> PART TWO: YOUR APPROVAL PATHWAY

Your approval pathway

Development application

Before you start...

Have you spoken to:

- > your insurance company?
- > your bank?
- > your council?

Each of these organisations will be able to provide advice on the best way to proceed and may have special processes in place for you.



1. Establish your level of risk

Your first step is to establish your level of risk. This is known as your bush fire attack level, or BAL.

Speak to a NSW RFS officer about help obtaining your BAL.

You may be able to reduce your level of risk through changing the site location of your home. You can ask for professional advice on this.



2. Design your home

You will need to prepare detailed plans to progress your development application.

You will need to think about the kind of house you want, as well as the bush fire protection measures for your home. You can prepare these plans yourself but many people find it easier to work with an architect or builder.

This process usually takes a considerable amount of time and involves a lot of detail.



3. Finalise your documents

Your council will have a checklist on what documentation you need to submit for a development application. You will need to include your BAL from Step One.

We also recommend you prepare paperwork to lodge your construction certificate at this stage. You will need this before you can start building.



4. Submit your documents

Lodge the development application with council.



5. Get approval

The approval process may take some time. Council may have questions you will need to answer before approval is granted – this is normal.



6. Start building

Once you have an approved development application and construction certificate you can begin the construction process.



7. Maintain your property

Once you have finished construction and have moved in, you will need to maintain your home to help protect it from bush fire.

This includes regular landscaping and garden maintenance. You can find helpful information on planning and preparing for bush fire at www.rfs.nsw.gov.au.

> PART TWO: YOUR APPROVAL PATHWAY

Your approval pathway (continued)

Complying development

Complying development is a fast-track approval process for straight forward residential, commercial and industrial development. As long as the application meets specific criteria, it can be determined by either council or an accredited certifier – without the need for a full development application.

You can only choose this option for development on lower risk bush fire prone land (what's known as BAL Low, 12.5, 19 or 29). Higher risk areas (known as BAL 40 or BAL Flame Zone) will need to go through the development application process.

Before you start...

Have you spoken to:

- > your insurance company?
- > your bank?
- > your council?

Each of these organisations will be able to provide advice on the best way to proceed and may have special processes in place for you.



1. Establish your level of risk

Your first step is establishing your level of risk. This is known as your bush fire attack level, or BAL.

Speak to a NSW RFS officer about help obtaining your BAL.

You may be able to reduce your level of risk through changing the site location of your home. You can ask for professional advice on this.



2. Design your home

You will need to create plans for your house that comply with relevant policies and codes.

You will need to think about the kind of house you want, as well as the bush fire protection measures for your home. You can prepare these plans yourself but many people find it easier to work with an architect or builder.



3. Finalise your documents

The key document you need is a BAL risk assessment certificate. You can get this from council or from an accredited bush fire consultant.

Include paperwork for engineering details at this stage. You will need this for this type of approval.



4. Submit your documents

You can lodge your complying development certificate application to council or a private certifier.



5. Get approval

You will need confirmation from the council or private certifier that your designs comply with the relevant requirements.

If the design doesn't comply, you can still go through the development application process.



6. Start building

Once you have approval you can begin the construction process.



7. Maintain your property

Once you have finished construction and have moved in, you will need to maintain your home to help protect it from bush fire.

This includes regular landscaping and garden maintenance. You can find helpful information on planning and preparing for bush fire at www.rfs.nsw.gov.au.

Your protection measures

FIVE things you need to consider:



1. Access

We need to ensure that emergency service vehicles can access your property, at the same time that you might be leaving the area. Are the roads wide enough? Is there enough room for a truck to turn around?



2. Water

Your home needs a water supply, like a tank, pool or dam, for firefighting purposes. A pump will help.



3. APZ

A buffer between your home and the vegetation helps protect it. You can still have a garden around your home.



4. Design and construction

You can help protect your home through the design of your home and the types of materials you use. This includes parts of your house like walls, floors, windows and decks.



5. Landscaping

There are simple things you can do to maintain the landscape around your home, like keeping the grass low.

The provisions for each of these are detailed in the NSW RFS document *Planning for Bush Fire Protection*.

Further details on design and construction can be found in the Australian Standards (AS 3959 - *Construction of buildings in bushfire-prone areas*).

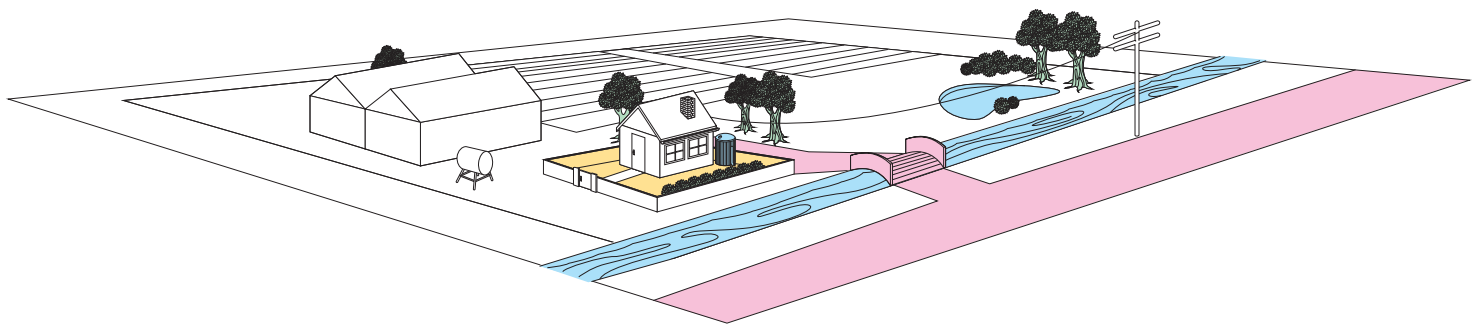
> PART THREE: YOUR PROTECTION MEASURES

 Access

 Water

 APZ

 Landscaping



Design and construction

You can help protect your home through the design of your home and the types of materials you use. This includes parts of your house like walls, floors, windows and decks. These specific requirements will be different depending on your level of risk.

1 Walls

You need to build with materials that help ensure the house is more resistant to fire, and that there are no gaps where embers can get in.

2 Water & gas supplies

Any above-ground pipes need to be made out of metal.

3 Windows

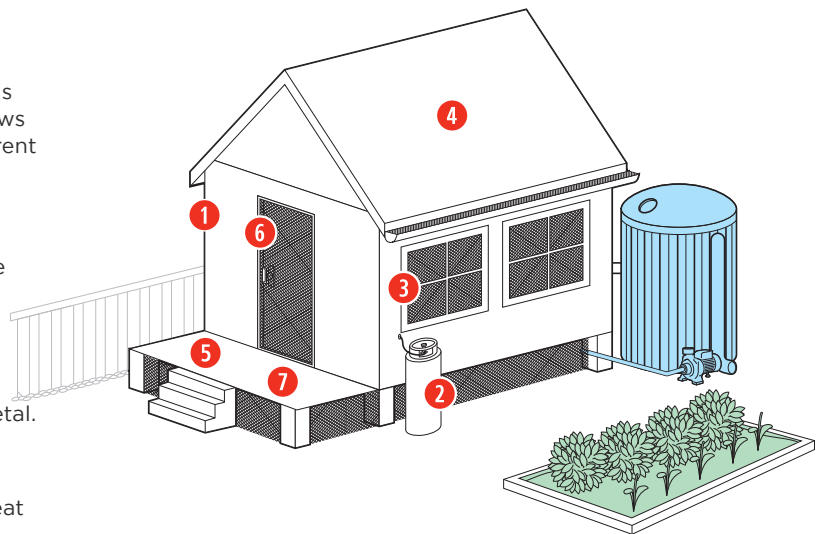
The glass needs to be thick to protect against the heat of a fire, and metallic screening may be required.

4 Roofs

The roof needs to be made out of non-combustible material, with proper sealing.

5 Floors and subfloors

Floors need to be made out of certain materials, unless they are enclosed.



6 External doors

The timber and glazing on doors need to be made out of certain materials and have proper seals.

7 Verandas, decks, steps, ramps and landings

Unenclosed areas like decks and verandas need to be made out of certain materials.

FAQs

Am I allowed to rebuild?

Yes, you will just need to meet the relevant requirements and get appropriate approvals.

How can the NSW RFS help with the development approval process in bush fire prone areas?

The NSW RFS can help with identifying your bush fire attack level and can provide advice on bush fire protection measures. Your council will refer applications for higher risk properties to the NSW RFS for review – this is for homes with a bush fire attack level of BAL-40 or BAL-FZ.

What are the fees from the NSW RFS?

The NSW RFS does not charge any fees for development applications for new single dwellings, sheds, or alterations/additions to existing dwellings.

Where can I get more information?

The key documents for building in a bush fire prone area are the NSW RFS publication *Planning for Bush Fire Protection* and *AS 3959 – Construction of buildings in bushfire-prone areas*.

You can get help and advice from the NSW RFS on **1300 NSW RFS** (1300 679 737).

Do I have to get a report from a bush fire consultant?

No, you do not have to get a report from a bush fire consultant. The NSW RFS can assist in identifying the bush fire attack level (BAL). If you choose to lodge a Complying Development Certificate instead of a Development Application you will need to have a BAL Certificate. This can be obtained from a bush fire consultant or council.

We built recently. Do we still need to get all the approvals again?

Your development consents may still apply to new dwellings on the same site, as long as the building envelope has not changed. Check with council.

What is the average cost of construction for each bush fire attack level (BAL)?

The higher your risk, the more protection you need. Generally speaking, there are higher construction costs for a higher level of protection from bush fires. Your construction costs will also depend on the size, siting and design of the building. Many people find that speaking to an architect, builder or insurance company can help identify estimated costs and possible ways to reduce these. If there is enough space on your land, consider moving your house location further away from the hazard to reduce your BAL and therefore decrease construction costs.

How can I reduce my construction costs or my bush fire attack level?

If you have enough space on your land, consider moving the location of your home away from the hazard. This is the best way to reduce your bush fire attack level. We recommend you seek advice on the most appropriate location on your land.

We are altering existing buildings, not rebuilding. Do we need to comply with the same process as new buildings?

Yes, any alterations or additions need to comply with the same process as new buildings to ensure the appropriate level of bush fire protection is provided. In particular, if the proposed alterations or additions are equivalent to 50% or more of the existing dwelling, the building may need to be upgraded for ember protection.

What approvals do I need for sheds, fences and swimming pools?

These types of features are considered ancillary development. If they are located more than 6 metres away from the house, there are no construction requirements for bush fire protection. If they are located within 6 metres of the house, they need to meet the same construction requirements as the bush fire attack level as the house. For example, sheds might need to be made out of particular materials.

We are rebuilding more than one house or adding a granny flat. Do we need to do anything additional?

If your property has a higher level of bush fire risk, such as BAL-40 or BAL-FZ, it is probably too dangerous to put additional development near the hazard.

If there is enough space on your land, consider moving both houses further away from the hazard. This may mean that you are able to rebuild both dwellings provided that they are a BAL-29 or lower and meet council's requirements.

How do I maintain my property to protect it from bush fire? Am I allowed to have a garden?

You can definitely have a garden. It just needs to be well maintained. There are simple things you can do like:

- > keep grass low
- > ensure there are no overhanging tree branches over the house
- > prune low branches on trees
- > keep trees separate – the tops (or crowns) should be two to five metres away from each other
- > keep garden beds and trees away from windows.

How do I choose the right plants?

Your property will be better protected if you avoid the build-up of fine fuels around your home. You can do this through regular and simple maintenance, and through selecting certain types of plants. Select plants based on:

- > their attributes like their moisture content, canopy height, and density of foliage
- > their location, for example, avoid placing garden beds under windows as this lowers your protection from bush fire.

We recommend you speak to a landscaping consultant or arborist, as they will be able to help you choose the best types of plants.

Apart from the bush fire protection measures that are outlined in this kit, what else can I do to protect my home from bush fire?

Some additional measures you should consider are:

- > position a sign on your property so that firefighters can easily see that you have a water source – this sign is called a Static Water Supply marker
- > make sure your water supply is easily accessible to firefighters – for example, underground tanks need an access hole of 200mm, and dams need a hardened ground surface that trucks can access.
- > Make sure you have a Bush Fire Survival Plan <https://www.myfireplan.com.au>.



Key contacts and support

Help is available.

For help with rebuilding in a bush fire prone area:

1. You can talk to your local council about:

- > Whether you can proceed under complying development – the fast track alternative to the DA process
- > What will need to be submitted in a development application

2. You can talk to the NSW RFS about building in a bush fire prone area.

- > Visit the NSW RFS website or speak to an officer on 1300 NSW RFS (1300 679 737).

3. You could also engage an accredited bush fire consultant.

- > See the full list at www.fpaa.com.au

There may be a recovery centre which has arrangements in place to assist you – check with council if you're not sure. If there is a recovery centre, check with them for what arrangements have been made to assist in rebuilding.

For help with other parts of your recovery

There are services available to help you.

- > If you feel you need to speak with someone about your experience, you can call Lifeline on 13 11 14, beyondblue on 1300 22 4636 or speak to your GP.
- > For financial assistance, talk to Disaster Welfare Services or Centrelink.
- > For agricultural assistance, talk to the NSW Department of Primary Industries or the Local Land Services.