

Fire Bunkers: Interim Regulations Released

On 11 November the Planning Minister of Victoria announced that all Bushfire Bunkers & Shelters sold and constructed in the State of Victoria will now need a Building Permit and potentially a Planning Permit as well under new interim regulations.

The new performance requirements relate to things such as accessing and exiting the shelter, structural stability and other fire safety measures.

The Fire Protection Association Australia (FPA Australia) supports the interim regulations and the development of a national standard that will become part of the Building Code of Australia (BCA).

Scott Williams, CEO of FPA Australia says, "While bunkers and shelters cannot be relied upon to save lives, ensuring your bunker meets performance requirements is essential to its ability to operate successfully should you ever need to use it."

While anyone currently building a bunker must adhere to the interim regulations, FPA Australia is encouraging any individual who has installed a private bushfire shelter or bunker prior to 11 November 2009, to engage a Registered Fire Safety Engineer with related experience to inspect the bunker. This will assist in ensuring the bunker is suitable and fit for the purpose of providing refuge in the event of a bushfire.

FPA Australia has compiled a list of Fire Safety Engineers who are able to assist customers who have already installed a bunker or shelter. The listing is available to view at www.fpaa.com.au

Scott Williams says, "Bunkers or shelters are an additional or alternative fire safety measure and should only be considered as a last resort. They should not give you a false sense of security and replace what is an appropriately constructed building with necessary bushfire protection measures. Ensuring you are 'fire-ready' and have a complete fire management plan is critical."

"It is important to remember that fire protection measures such as bunkers should be one part of your overall fire plan and should not be relied upon as your only solution."

The Interim Regulations can be downloaded from the Victorian Building Commission website at www.buildingcommission.com.au.

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The Fire Protection Association Australia is the country's major technical and educational fire safety organisation, providing information, services and training to the fire protection industry and broader community. The Association represents around 10,000 people working in the fire protection industry.