

Information for people affected by the East Gippsland bushfires



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VicEmergency warnings and information

- Website: www.emergency.vic.gov.au
- Hotline: 1800 226 226 (for other languages call the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) on 131 450 (freecall) and ask them to call the VicEmergency hotline).
- App: search your app store for 'VicEmergency'

Road closures and information

- Website: www.traffic.vicroads.vic.gov.au

There will be multiple and changing road closures in East Gippsland including the Princes Highway. For the latest information on road closures visit traffic.vicroads.vic.gov.au, download the VicTraffic app, follow @VicTraffic on Twitter or check the VicTraffic Facebook page.

- Closures are in place at Great Alpine Road, Bairnsdale and at Imlay Road, Narrabarba in New South Wales.

Other major road closures include:

- Great Alpine Road from Bairnsdale to Doctors Flat
- Bruthen-Nowa Nowa Road from Bruthen to Nowa Nowa
- Monaro Highway from Cann River to the New South Wales border
- Bonang Road from Orbost to the New South Wales border
- The stretch of road that includes Bruthen-Buchan Road, Gelantipy Road and Snowy River Road from Nowa Nowa to the New South Wales border
- A number of local roads in East Gippsland have been closed because of fire impacts.

For the latest information on road closures visit traffic.vicroads.vic.gov.au, download the VicTraffic app, follow @VicTraffic on Twitter or check the VicTraffic Facebook page.

Always observe road closures and instructions from emergency services.

Register.Find.Reunite

Everyone in East Gippsland or who has left East Gippsland should register with Register.Find.Reunite online at www.register.redcross.org.au or by calling 1800 727 077.

This will assist both the emergency services and allow your loved ones to know you are safe

You can use Reigster.Find.Reunite to find someone if you have friends or family you are unable to locate. Use 'Find' to look for people you know may be affected by an emergency.

Concerned about welfare of family and friends.

If you are unable to locate a family member or friend using RFR (see above), you need to contact Victoria Police via 000 (emergency) or Assistance Line via 131 444 (non-life threatening)

Displaced persons

Persons who have been displaced where possible should arrange to stay with friends or family until it is safe to return home.

If this is not possible, emergency temporary accommodation may be provided at Emergency Relief Centres.

Persons should also consider accessing support available. (see other sections for specific information) Persons can attend an Emergency Relief Centre for assistance and information about the support services available.

Emergency Relief Centres

Emergency Relief Centres have been established at various locations. These centres can provide the provision of essential needs to individuals, families and communities in the immediate aftermath of an emergency. This includes food, shelter and bedding. Services will vary across each centre. For the most updated list of centres please see: https://emergency.vic.gov.au/relief/#relief_centres

These centres are being run by Council staff and also have representatives from the Department of Health and Human Services, the Red Cross, Victoria Police and the Salvation Army.

BAIRNSDALE

Bairnsdale City Oval

40 MacArthur St, Bairnsdale

Services available: catering, basic accommodation/bedding

Opening Hours:

Bairnsdale Racecourse – (must register at Bairnsdale City Oval before attending this site)

Forge Creek Rd, Bairnsdale

Services available: catering, basic accommodation/bedding

Opening Hours: 24 hours.

East Gippsland Livestock Exchange

11 Saleyards Rd, Bairnsdale

Services available: space available for temporary housing of large animals
Opening hours:

LAKES ENTRANCE

Lakes Entrance Service Centre

18 Mechanics St, Lakes Entrance

The Lakes Entrance Relief Centre has now closed and will operate as a recovery/information centre out of the Lakes Entrance Service Centre from 8am to 6pm, commencing Thursday 2 January.

OMEEO

Omeo Recreation Reserve

Park Street, Omeo

Services available: catering

Opening hours: 24 hours.

ORBOST

Orbost Recreation Reserve (cricket oval)

Nicholson Street, Orbost

This site has been set up as an assembly area for those in nearby communities who wish to gather in the township if you do not have safer options.

Community meetings

There are currently no community meetings planned. Monitor East Gippsland Shire Council and DELWP social media and websites for information in regard to future meetings.

DHHS Emergency Relief Assistance Payment - Personal Hardship Assistance Program

If you have been affected by a natural disaster and you are experiencing financial hardship, you may be eligible for an emergency relief and/or emergency re-establishment payments. These grants are managed by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

Emergency relief assistance

Emergency relief assistance may be available for up to 7 days after the emergency event. A one-off payment (up to \$1800 for families/\$500 for individuals) is provided to help meet immediate needs, including emergency food, shelter, clothing, medication and accommodation.

A needs assessment is carried out by a Personal Hardship Assistance Officer at an Emergency Relief Centre to determine eligibility.

Relief payments are not available:

- To tourists
- To cover the costs of cleaning up fallen trees or branches on properties
- To cover the cost of repairing or replacing fences. If a tree has fallen on your house, please call the SES or your local council for more information
- For losses or impacts associated with power outages. Contact your energy distributor if you have any questions
- To cover business losses or compensate for lost income
- Motor vehicle repairs or towing
- Paying insurance excess.

More information on assistance:

- Department of Health and Human Services website: www.services.dhhs.vic.gov.au
- VicEmergency hotline: 1800 226 226
- VicEmergency website: www.emergency.vic.gov.au

Other DHHS grants may be made available later. Council will update the community if this occurs.

Other financial assistance and support

- **Centrelink:** 132 850
- **Insurance Council of Australia disaster hotline:** . More info: 1800 734 621
- **Rural Financial Counselling Service (RFCS):** Free financial counselling to farmers and small related businesses who are in, or at risk of financial hardship. Call 1300 045 747
- **Farm household allowance:** A payment for farming families in financial hardship. For information call the Farmers Assistance Hotline on 132 316 (Mon to Fri, 8am to 8pm).
- **Salvation Army:** DHHS at Emergency Relief Centres may refer persons on to Salvation Army for additional assistance.
- **State Trustees:** 1300 138 672
- **Superannuation** (early access on compassionate grounds): 1300 131 060
- **Victorian Disaster Legal Aid:** 1800 677 402
- **Consumer Affairs Victoria:** Information and advice about your rights and obligations following an emergency, including on renting and rebuilding, and insurance. Visit www.consumer.vic.gov.au/disasterhelp or call 1300 55 81 81
- **Australian Passport Information Service:** You may be eligible for a free replacement passport if it has been lost or damaged in the bushfire. Call 131 232.
- **Telstra:** 132 203 to register for a relief package and/or assistance with free or interim services during the recovery period.

Insurance

Property owners affected by the bushfires should contact their insurers as soon as possible to lodge claims and seek assistance under their policies.

If your property has been damaged in the bushfires, you should contact your insurer as soon as possible for information on the claims process and what you are entitled to under your policy.

If you are unsure about your insurance details or have general inquiries about the claims process, contact the Insurance Council of Australia's disaster hotline on 1800 734 621.

More info: Go to www.understandinsurance.com.au and search for 'bushfires'.

Water tanks

It is possible your water tank supply will be contaminated after a bushfire. Boiling water does not remove fire retardants or other chemicals from your water.

If the water in your tank is contaminated, we strongly recommend that you get the tank rinsed and refilled.

For more information contact Council's Environmental Health team on 5153 9500.

For more info on ash in water tanks, go to www.epa.vic.gov.au and search for 'Ash and water tanks' or call the EPA on 1300 EPA VIC (1300 372 842).

For information about keeping your drinking water safe, refer to the Department of Health and Human Services website at www2.health.vic.gov.au and search for 'After a fire and drinking water'.

Replacement of water used for firefighting

Property owners who have had water taken from dams or other private water supplies by DELWP or CFA firefighters can apply to DELWP to have the water replaced.

Essential water replacement requests must be submitted **within 3 months** of the essential water being taken for bushfire fighting operations.

To make a request, download the Essential Water Replacement form from the Forest Fire Management Victoria website at www.ffm.vic.gov.au and searching for 'Public land recovery'.

Email the completed form to bushfire.recovery@delwp.vic.gov.au.

Enquiries: Call 1800 226 226.

Water connection issues

Reduce water use where possible

East Gippsland Water is currently experiencing higher than usual customer demand, which is putting pressure on the water supply system, resulting in low pressure. Water users are asked to minimise water usage where possible.

East Gippsland Water is maintaining supply in the face of significant challenges, but asks the community to help by restricting use to essential usage only.

Due to excessively high demand on the water system in some towns, water supplies are impacted. To help conserve supplies, residents are being urged to assist by restricting water use to essential use only

Mallacoota – Drinking water

Council is aware of community concerns regarding the distribution of supplies to people within the Mallacoota community.

The distribution of essential items within the town is being coordinated by the local emergency management team.

This is a dynamic situation. Procedures for the distribution of supplies will be implemented and communicated to the community as these deliveries continue.

All customers and visitors are asked to restrict their water use immediately to essential use. A boil water notice is in place and people are asked not to drink water directly out of the tap unless it is boiled. We expect to resume normal service within 72 hours and will provide a further update as soon as possible

For connection issues contact: East Gippsland Water: 1300 134 202

Power supply issues

Power reconnection: Contact your electricity distribution company.

You must use a licensed tradesperson for gas or electric work following the effects of flood or fire.

If electricity supplies have not been restored to homes for any reason, property owners must not connect permanent generators or perform other electrical work around the home. Such practice is both illegal and dangerous – this work can only be carried out by licensed electricians.

Any gas appliances which has been water affected should not be used until inspected by a licensed gasfitter who will detect if they are not operating properly and if necessary shut them down.

Take care when using temporary energy generators. The leads from the generator to electrical appliances must be as short as possible and in good condition. Temporary generators must not be installed inside buildings because of the dangers of carbon monoxide poisoning from engine exhausts. We recommend that you seek help from a licensed electrician to connect an energy generator.

More information: Go to www.energy.vic.gov.au and search for 'Flood, fires and energy safety' or Ausnet Services 13 17 99.

Phone and internet services

For issues with your phone or internet service, call your phone provider to report a fault and get your phone calls redirected to another number (such as a mobile phone number).

Farm and livestock

Agriculture Victoria staff are working with affected landholders to assess injured livestock and losses of agricultural assets and livestock.

- **If you have injured livestock or need support with animal welfare assessments:** Call 1800 226 226
- **For information on bushfire recovery:** Call 136 186 or visit www.agriculture.vic.gov.au/animalemergencies
- **If you have injured pets:** Seek advice immediately from your local vet or call the RSPCA on 9224 2222.
- To report wandering livestock: Call Council on 5153 9500 Council has raised the issue of water provision for stock with Agriculture Victoria.

Deceased livestock

- **Report deceased livestock:** to Agriculture Victoria on 1800 226 226 - they will provide advice on disposal.
- **Burying deceased livestock:** If you bury livestock please follow EPA guidelines. You can find information on these guidelines by calling the EPA 24 hours a day on 1300 EPA VIC (1300 372 842). You can also go to www.epa.vic.gov.au and search for 'Bushfire waste disposal.'

Farm recovery

Agricultural Victoria can provide technical advice and help you make decisions on topics such as:

- agisting livestock affected by a bushfire
- assessing livestock after a bushfire
- disposing of carcasses
- stock containment areas
- pasture recovery

For more info on these topics go to www.agriculturevic.gov.au and search for 'recovery' or call 136 186.

Help for injured wildlife

You can also use the online 'Help for injured wildlife' tool from DEWLP to find and contact the closest wildlife carers and rescue and rehabilitation organisations. Go to www.wildlife.vic.gov.au and search for 'Help for injured wildlife tool.'

Smoke and your health

For medical advice for burns or exposure to smoke: See your doctor, local community health centre or call Nurse on Call on 1300 606 024. Nurse on Call offers expert medical advice from a registered nurse, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week for the cost of a local call from anywhere in Victoria.

For more information visit www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au and search for 'Smoke and your health.'

Mental health and wellbeing after the bushfires

- Please check in at the Emergency Relief Centre to find out about the many services available to assist you and your family, and to connect with others in your community.
- It is normal for a distressing or frightening event to affect you physically, mentally and emotionally. Look out for others and if you need help, seek help. You might find talking to friends and family useful, or talk with your GP.
- It may be a good idea to see a counsellor or psychologist to help you process your experience.

Australian Psychological Society Referral Service: Call [1800 333 497](tel:1800333497)

Information on trauma reaction and recovery: Go to www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/healthyliving/trauma

Support helplines

- **Lifeline:** 131 114 24-hour telephone counselling, information and referral service.
- **BeyondBlue:** 1300 224 636 Provides information on depression and anxiety. To access professional counselling services, please make contact with your GP and ask for a referral.
- **Kids Help Line:** 1800 551 800 Confidential telephone counselling service for young people aged 5–25 years.
- **Headspace:** 1800 650 890
- **ParentLine:** 132 289 Counselling and information for families with children (up to 18 years) from 8am to midnight, 7 days a week.
- **Men's Line Australia:** 1300 789 978 24-hour counselling and advice for men.
- **Safe Steps Family Violence Support:** 1800 015 188
- **Family Violence support:** There is an increased risk of family violence after an emergency. Help is available by calling 1800 RESPECT (1800 737 732 - confidential) or go to www.vic.gov.au/familyviolence
- **Windermere:** 1300 946 337

Council services

Our call centre is open on 5153 9500.

Mallacoota residents should call 5153 9500.

Customer Service centre changes for 2 and 3 January 2020:

- Call Centre open for business as usual and fire related matters. Operating from Service Street
- Service Street closed to public – to be redirected to Corporate Centre in Bairnsdale.
- Pyke Street closed to public – to be redirected to Corporate Centre in Bairnsdale
- Paynesville Service Centre closed to public – to be redirected to Corporate Centre in Bairnsdale
- Orbost Service Centre closed to public – to be redirected to Corporate Centre in Bairnsdale

People seeking property specific information

Many parts of East Gippsland remain inaccessible and Council staff and contractors have no direct access to many fire affected areas. Currently, Council does not have access to property specific information and is unable respond directly in fire affected locations.

Waste

With many roads closed throughout and bushfire threat continuing, our contractors will commence service kerbside waste bins as soon as the situation allows. This will mean that some areas do not have their bins collected as scheduled.

The following landfills/transfer stations are open as per normal operating hours and days:

- Metung
- Orbost
- Benambra
- Bairnsdale
- Lakes Entrance
- Marlo

Bruthen transfer station is currently closed.

Food waste:

For those who living in areas affected by power outages and now have spoilt food in their fridges/freezers, our transfer stations in the following locations will accept this waste for free:

- Metung
- Orbost
- Benambra
- Bairnsdale
- Lakes Entrance
- Marlo
- Omeo (when re-opened)

- Swifts Creek (when re-opened)
- Buchan (when re-opened)

To access this free service, please show staff at the transfer stations your paperwork from an Emergency Relief Centre (ERC) or your driver's licence with your current residential address if you did not access an ERC.

Once roads are re-opened and the fire risk eased, Council will provide larger bins in fire affected communities free of charge.

Green waste:

Green waste collection will still take place Thursday 2 January in Swan Reach, Johnsonville and Nicholson as per normal. Our service cannot yet access Bruthen areas.

General waste:

General waste collection in Swan Reach, Johnsonville and Nicholson scheduled to take place tomorrow, will now occur on Friday 3 January. No collection in Bruthen. General waste collection will take place in Orbost tomorrow (Thursday)

For Mallacoota residents:

Mallacoota transfer station is currently closed. Residents can use waste trailers at the caravan park for domestic waste.

Disposal of stock:

Disposal of dead stock should be discussed with Agriculture Victoria via 136 186. Council will accept small dead animals at these sites.

Community donations

- Donations of food etc should be coordinated through Red Cross – People should contact Red Cross.
- Material donations are best donated to various established charities.
- There is also a community donation point, instigated by community members, at the Lucknow Memorial Hall.

The Gippsland Emergency Relief Fund (GERF) has launched an East Gippsland fire relief appeal for cash donations. This can be accessed via www.gerf.org.au