

Bushfire-Ready Homes



Tasmania Fire Service



Retrofit guide for homeowners

Tips on simple changes to reduce bushfire risk

Small changes can have a big impact in helping our homes survive bushfire.

As climate change makes bushfires more frequent and more severe, we cannot rely on fire trucks being available to defend every property. Our homes need to be bushfire-ready.

All Tasmanians have the opportunity to 'harden' our existing homes against bushfire. This means increasing passive protection so that we feel more confident to prioritise leaving early, which is always the safest option.

While retrofitting our homes for bushfire resilience is no guarantee of protection, every action helps reduce the risk of fire impacting our own and our neighbours' properties.

During a bushfire, wind, embers, heat, flames and smoke all impact buildings in different ways. This booklet outlines how these aspects of bushfire may impact our homes, which parts are most vulnerable and what we can do to reduce the risk.





Before you start

Plan the work

Some retrofit measures may be easy enough to do yourself. Others will require a qualified tradesperson. You may even need council approval for major improvements. Make sure you do not impact on other important home features, such as ventilation and energy efficiency.

Know your risk

Most homes in Tasmania are either in or close to a bushfire-prone area. To find out about your place, check RiskReady alert.tas.gov.au/get-ready/risk-ready. If your house was built from 2012 onwards, it may have a Bushfire Attack Level (BAL) rating as well as a Bushfire Hazard Management Plan, which you must follow. If you do not have a copy, contact your local council. Knowing your BAL is useful for guiding the upgrades your home requires. To arrange a BAL assessment, visit the Building for Bushfire page at fire.tas.gov.au to find an accredited bushfire hazard practitioner near you.

Be safe

Hazardous materials like asbestos and lead are common in older Tasmanian houses. Make sure you, or a qualified tradesperson, test for these materials, treat them appropriately, and dispose of them according to local council rules.

Keep it up

Maintenance is important, especially before the bushfire danger period. You may want to set a regular reminder to:

- inspect your home
- seal or screen any gaps
- repair damage
- replace flammable elements.

Any time you are planning to replace an ageing or damaged element of the building, use the opportunity to increase your home's bushfire resilience. If you have a BAL rating, all upgrades should conform to BAL requirements.

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Find the weak points

Different parts of our homes are vulnerable to different elements of bushfire. If we know what we're up against we can start planning to reduce risk.

- W** Wind can carry embers and debris, break windows, lift roofs and knock trees over. Wind damage to your home can let embers in.
- E** Ember attack is the most common cause of house loss in bushfires. Embers can travel kilometres ahead of a fire front and can enter through any gap or crack larger than 2mm.
- H** Radiant heat can distort, crack or melt some building materials, allowing embers to enter the house (eg. standard glazing, plastics and many composite materials). It can cause others to ignite and burn intensely, spreading fire to other parts of the building (eg. treated pine).
- F** Flames may reach the house not only when the main fire front arrives but when embers ignite flammable vegetation or objects around the building (eg. boat, caravan or wheelie bin).
- S** Smoke can damage soft furnishings and carpets, even when doors, windows and vents are closed – but it is still important to close everything up and help avoid both smoke and ember entry.

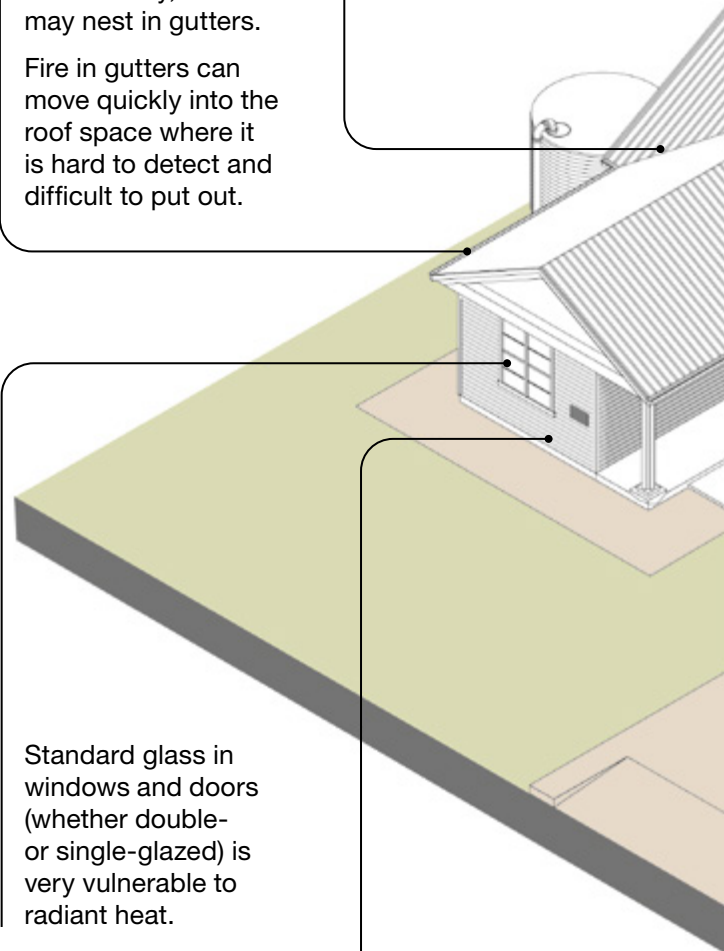
Trees close to the house may fill gutters with leaves and twigs. Even where trees are not close by, birds may nest in gutters.

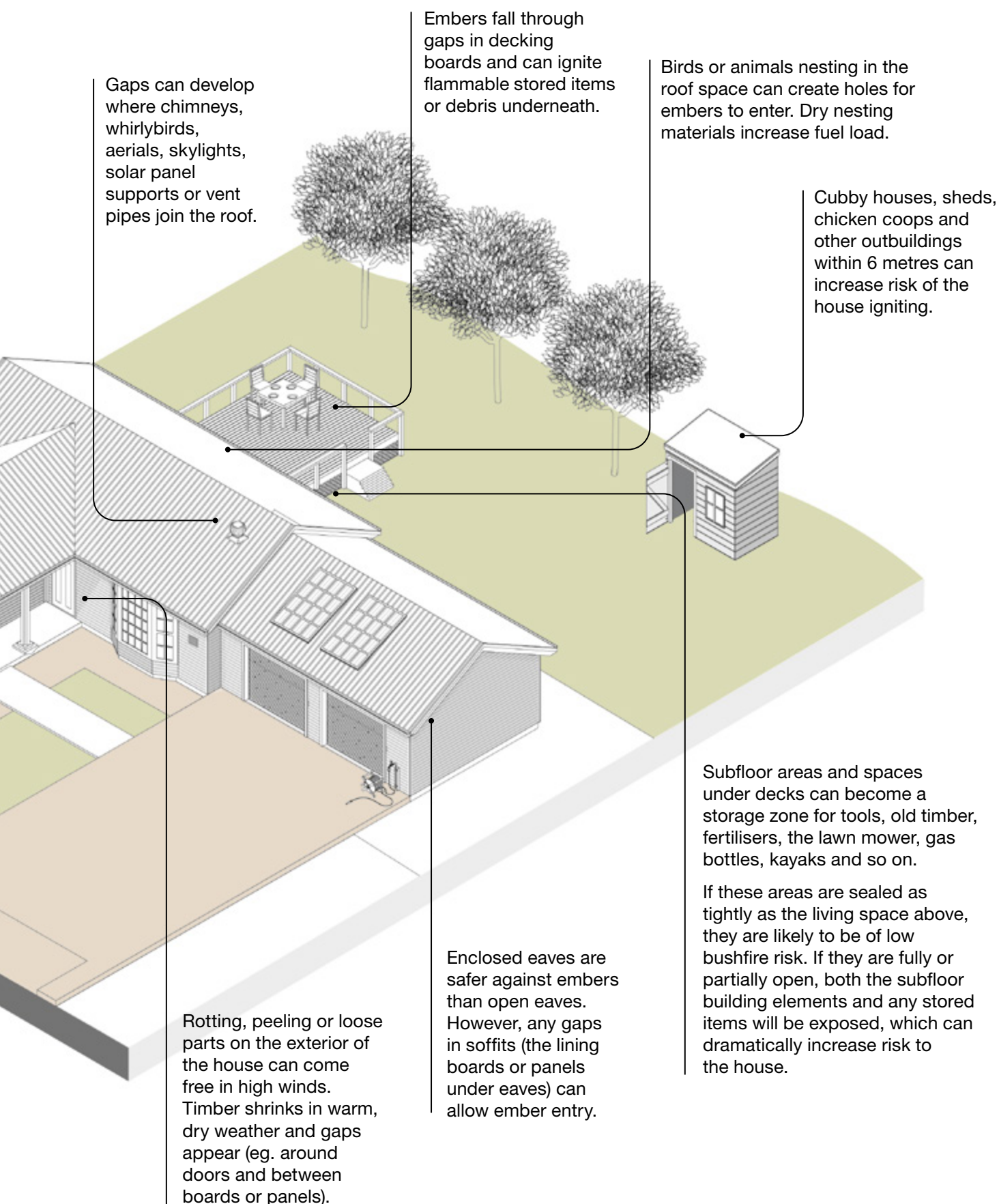
Fire in gutters can move quickly into the roof space where it is hard to detect and difficult to put out.

Anywhere that leaves and debris collect – junction points and inward-facing corners such as doorways, windowsills, steps and roof valleys – embers can collect too. During ember attack, these are the perfect places for spot fires to start.

Standard glass in windows and doors (whether double- or single-glazed) is very vulnerable to radiant heat.

Ventilation outlets are often made of plastic and designed to be continuously open, allowing embers into the house.





Retrofit for resilience

Retrofitting costs can vary greatly. This cost guide provides an idea of what can be done cheaply and what might require larger investment. The best value for money is usually in screening gaps and clearing spaces under floors and decks.

KEY

Bushfire element being addressed



Wind



Ember attack



Heat



Flames



Smoke

Cost guide (indicative only)



FREE/
No cost



Low



Moderate



High



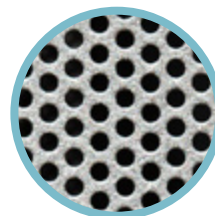
Cost guide: \$ – \$\$

- Seal holes in the roof with non-flammable joining strips or flexible, fire-rated, silicone-based sealant.
- Check roof tiles are tightly secured and replace damaged tiles.
- Plug ridge gaps in corrugated sheets with pieces of non-flammable mineral/rock wool insulation, and insulate under the ridge cap.
- Add extra roofing screws or change to cyclone-rated screws to protect against wind.



Cost guide: \$ – \$\$

- Ensure flyscreens are tight-fitting, free from holes, have non-flammable metal frames and max 2mm metal mesh.
- Safety glass is less vulnerable to heat than standard glass (double- or single-glazed).



Cost guide: \$ – \$\$

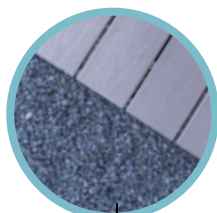
- Screen vents and weep holes with corrosion-resistant, 2mm metal mesh.
- Attach with screws either behind or over the top of metal or terracotta vents.
- Special metal screening devices exist for weep holes, but you can also cut the same mesh to size.

When the time comes to replace building elements – old or damaged cladding, decking, gutters, roofing, fascias, soffits – choose appropriate non-flammable materials like steel, fibre cement or (depending on your BAL) class 1 durability hardwood to reduce fuel load. If cost is an issue, consider replacing only those sections where debris builds up.

E

Cost guide: \$ –\$\$\$

- If replacing weatherboards or roofing, install a non-flammable sarking membrane to stop embers entering roof and wall cavities.



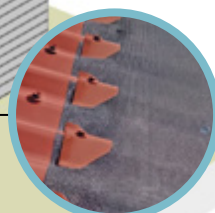
H

E

F

Cost guide: \$ –\$\$

- Replace at least the first 400mm of flammable decking boards with non-flammable alternatives where they join the house.
- If the deck substructure is timber, wrap the bottom of each deck post with metal flashing so that surface fire cannot ignite the deck from below.
- Cover the ground under the deck with gravel to reduce fire risk.



E

Cost guide: \$ –\$\$\$

- Metal gutter guard may protect gutters from debris and embers.
- Choose non-flammable 2mm mesh (eg. stainless steel).



W

E

F

S

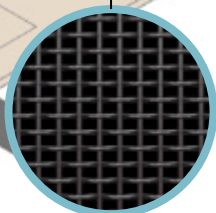
Cost guide: \$ –\$\$\$

- Look for cracks and gaps around the whole exterior of the house.
- Replace rotting weatherboards and remove flaking paint.
- Use fire-rated expanding filler foam to plug gaps around wall openings.
- Fix loose parts on doors, windows and cladding.
- Use weather strips on doors and windows and non-flammable brush seals on garage doors.

E

Cost guide: \$ –\$\$

- Check if external outlets for heat pumps and exhaust fans have an internal screen to exclude embers.
- Some can have internal screens retrofitted. If not, when they need replacing, consider units that are fitted with ember-proof mesh.



Move and protect what you can

Any flammable object close to your house – caravan, boat, woodpile, wheelie bin, timber fence – can be a source of ‘consequential fire’. In other words, even if a fire front is far away, embers can ignite these items and cause your home to catch fire as well.



Under the house and deck, remove all stored items and keep the subfloor space completely clear, or enclose the area using 2mm metal mesh or non-flammable sheeting (noting that underfloor ventilation may be an issue).



Cost guide: \$–\$\$

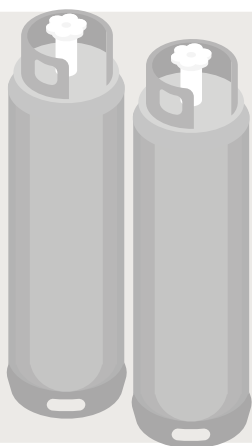


Place firewood at least 6 metres from the house during the bushfire danger period.

Use a non-flammable container, such as a metal bin with a lid, to store a small amount of wood nearer the house.



Cost guide: \$–\$

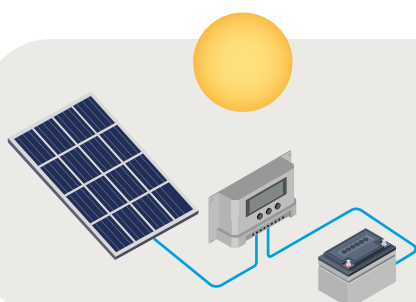


Store gas cylinders at least 3 metres away from the house (or appropriately enclosed in a concrete or brick enclosure), well away from doors and windows.

They must sit on a sturdy, non-flammable base of concrete or pavers (not on decking) in a well-ventilated space and be securely chained upright. Face release valves away from the house. For more information check the Tasmanian Gas Safety Regulations and the Standards Australia Handbook on the next page.



Cost guide: \$–\$\$



Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) typically use lithium-ion batteries and can present a fire risk.

Ensure they are only ever installed and maintained by accredited technicians and located in a well-ventilated space away from entries and exits.



Cost guide: \$–\$\$\$



Are there flammable items located close enough to ignite your house (within 6 metres)? Make sure you keep clear space around the building. Park cars, boats or caravans more than 6 metres away.

Could a fire truck easily access your property in a bushfire? Trucks need 4 metres of space both horizontally and vertically and firefighters need to be able to safely move around your home.



Cost guide: \$-\$

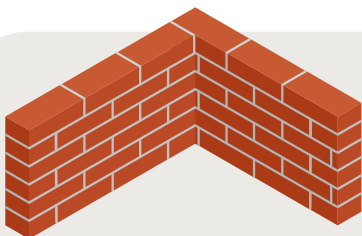


Where birds or other animals are nesting in the roof space, the nesting material should be removed (if possible) and holes well sealed.

Mineral or rock wool insulation allows the roof to breathe while protecting from ember entry.



Cost guide: \$-\$\$



Non-flammable barriers can help protect a house from radiant heat and flames. These might include a metal fence, shed, brick or stone wall or water tank on the side of your home from which a bushfire is most likely to approach.



Cost guide: \$-\$\$



An independent water supply helps fire crews defend your home and is required for any bushfire sprinkler or other defence system. Make sure your water supply is clearly labelled and easily accessible to firefighters.



Cost guide: \$-\$\$\$



Common items like plastic or timber garden furniture, play equipment and stored building materials can become mobile fuels in windy bushfire conditions.

It's a good idea to keep these secure and away from the house (eg. in a shed) during a bushfire.



Cost guide: \$

More information

Find out more about bushfire retrofitting



Standards Australia

Construction of buildings and maintenance of properties in bushfire-prone areas - Homeowner's Handbook
store.standards.org.au/product/sa-hb-208-2-2026



CSIRO

Bushfire best practice guide
<https://research.csiro.au/bushfire/>



Victorian Building Authority

A guide to retrofit your home for better protection from a bushfire
bpc.vic.gov.au/resource-hub/guides/retrofit-your-home-for-better-bushfire-protection



Queensland Government & CSIRO

Bushfire resilient building guidance for Queensland homes
www.qra.qld.gov.au/resilient-homes/bushfire-building-guidance-queensland-homes



Bushfire Resilience Inc

Helpful, easy to understand videos covering a range of 'house hardening' measures
bushfireresilience.org.au/resource-hub/



National Emergency

Management Agency (NEMA)
National Resilience Action Library
<https://www.nema.gov.au/our-work/resilience/national-resilience-action-library>

Tasmania Fire Service resources



Building for bushfire

Key guidelines and fact sheets on building in a bushfire-prone area in Tasmania

fire.tas.gov.au/Show?pageId=colBuildingForBushfire



Make your bushfire plan

Retrofitting and maintenance of your property is just one part of being prepared for bushfire – find more information and make your bushfire plan here

bushfire.tas.gov.au/

Notes

Frequently asked questions

Can I use special paint instead of replacing flammable building materials?

Fire-retardant paint can reduce the risk of flammable building materials igniting. The protective properties of painted elements exposed to the weather will become less effective over time and will require regular reapplication. When selecting a product, check whether it has been designed for bushfire exposures and where possible, choose a product that has been subjected to an accelerated weathering test. Always apply paint products according to the manufacturer's instructions.

What about sprinklers?

A bushfire spray system or dousing system may have some benefits, but it can be an expensive option and requires an independent water supply. The design and installation of bushfire spray systems are unregulated and owners should exercise caution when choosing a system. For more information see the Building for Bushfire page at fire.tas.gov.au.

What about bushfire shutters?

Tight-fitting, non-flammable bushfire shutters can help protect windows and doors from ember entry and radiant heat but can be costly. It is important that shutters can be manually closed from either inside or outside your home, without relying on mains power (if motorised). Contact an installer for more information.

What about bushfire bunkers?

While bushfire bunkers and shelters are beyond the scope of retrofit measures, you can find information about these on the Building for Bushfire page at fire.tas.gov.au.

If I have a gutter guard product, do I still need to clean my gutters?

Yes. While not as regular, gutter maintenance will still be required as it is possible for grass and weeds to take hold and grow through the mesh. Talk to a professional installer for more information on how to clean gutters once the product is in place.

What if I'm building a new home?

All new homes built in bushfire-prone areas must comply with construction standard AS 3959. Your assessed Bushfire Attack Level (BAL) rating will determine the use of certain materials and protection measures. Contact an accredited bushfire hazard practitioner for more information. Visit the Building for Bushfire page at fire.tas.gov.au.

What can I do in a rental property?

There are many actions you can take to ensure subfloor spaces and the external perimeter of the home are kept clear. For retrofitting measures, contact your landlord or property manager to clarify what you can do and what upgrades they might be willing to make.

Check Bushfire-Ready Gardens for tips on maintaining your outdoor space.



If you have an emergency call Triple Zero (000)

- Ask for Fire, Police or Ambulance.
- **Stay calm**, don't shout, speak slowly and clearly.
- When asked, give as much detail about your location as you can.



For assistance:

- **National Relay Service**
accesshub.gov.au
- **Expression Australia Auslan Emergency Interpreter app**
expression.com.au



Australian Government

National Emergency Management Agency

This publication is supported by the Australian Government's National Emergency Management Agency through the Disaster Ready Fund.



Learn more at:
fire.tas.gov.au

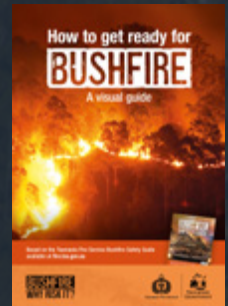
Free-call 1800 000 699



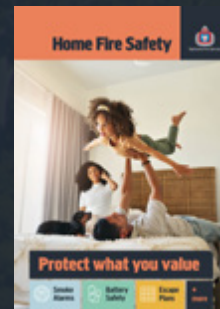
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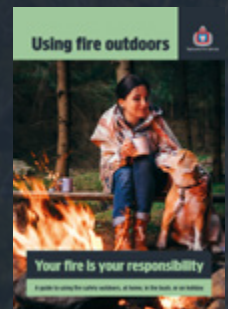
Bushfire Safety Guide



A visual guide to Bushfire Safety



A guide to Home Fire Safety



A guide to Using fire outdoors



TAS ALERT

Fire Incidents and Warnings:

TASALERT.com



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