

BUSHFIRE PRONE FAQ

Building Information Sheet #15

What is Bushfire Prone?

The State Government Department of Planning has produced a map of areas it considers to be at risk in the event of major bushfire due to the proximity of large areas of bushland. These areas have been declared Bushfire Prone and as such are subject to assessment of fire risk. The map can be found on the Office of Bushfire Risk Management, (OBRM), portion of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, (DFES) website.

<http://www.dfes.wa.gov.au/regulationandcompliance/bushfireproneareas/Pages/default.aspx>

What happens if I am in a Bushfire Prone Area?

Being in a Bushfire Prone Area, (BPA) will not affect any property until new development is proposed, the legislation is not retrospective. Should an owner of a property, which is in a BPA, wish to construct a structure which requires an application for a planning or building approval from the City, they will need to also submit a Bushfire Attack Level (BAL) assessment. These structures are typically Class 1 (residential houses), Class 2 (apartments), Class 3 (eg Motel, school dormitories, lodging houses), Class 10a (sheds garages, or patios) or an associated deck.

A BAL assessment will determine the level of fire intensity which may be experienced in a major fire which affects the subject property. This in turn determines the level of construction necessary to improve the proposed developments resistance to bushfire attack from burning embers, radiant heat, flame contact and combinations of the three attack forms.

If your BAL assessment comes in at BAL-40 or BAL-FZ then you will need to prepare a Bushfire Management Plan, (BMP) for the property as well.

What is a Bushfire Attack Level (BAL) Report?

A BAL assessment is prepared by a suitably qualified assessor and is designed to determine the Bushfire Attack Level of an individual property. Levels are defined in six (6) categories BAL-LOW, BAL-12.5, BAL-19, BAL-29, BAL-40, and BAL-FZ (Flame Zone) and are based upon the regions Fire Danger Index, (FDI) for the property, (for Perth this is recognised as an FDI of 80), the vegetation type around the property, the distance to individual vegetation types and the slope under the vegetation affecting the property.

Once the Level is determined the construction standard of the new development can be determined using Australian Standard 3959-2009, (AS3959). BAL-LOW has no effect on construction standards whilst BAL-FZ adds very stringent construction standards.

Are there any exemptions from getting a BAL Assessment?

The City of Kalamunda's Local Planning Scheme 3, (LPS3) gives exemptions for certain types of development, however, the Building Code of Australia, (BCA) calls up AS3959 for all applications where the property is within a BPA. This means that if you have been given an exemption in regards to applying for a Planning Application due to the Scheme provisions you will still need to have a BAL assessment undertaken for your Building Application.

AS3959 however, does provide for some exemptions these being a detached roofed structure such as an outbuilding, shed, garage, carport, etc, that is more than 6m away from property's residence. Or alternatively the structure is designed to comply with clause 3.2.3(b) or (c) of AS3959 that is, be designed to provide a minimum fire resistance level (FRL) of 60/60/60, (1 hour fire rating).

What can I do to decrease my BAL?

You can decrease your BAL by having a Bushfire Protection Zone (BPZ) that is a 20m circular area clear of vegetation and other flammable materials around your home. A BPZ is also referred to as an Asset Protection Zone.

(See the 'What is a Bushfire Protection Zone' PDF available from the DFES website) <http://www.dfes.wa.gov.au/safetyinformation/fire/bushfire/Pages/BushfireProtectionZones.aspx> for the full set of information sheets or <http://www.dfes.wa.gov.au/safetyinformation/fire/bushfire/BushfireInfoNotesPublications/DFES-InfoNote-BuildingProtectionZone.pdf> for just the BPZ.

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