

Our Ref: EF:jk/cp  
Enquiries: Jude Kennedy  
Telephone: (03) 9262 8346  
Fax: (03) 9262 8322



6 October 2011

Via email: [devpress@optusnet.com.au](mailto:devpress@optusnet.com.au)

Councillor Belinda Clarkson  
Nillumbik Shire Council

Dear Councillor Clarkson

I write further to your email of 5 October.

Considering that Council is planning to present the Eltham Lower Park Assessment Summary Report to the community for debate, we confirm that it would not be appropriate for the Assessor's name (██████████) to be viewable and support your recommendation for it to be blanked out prior to any community engagement. The assessment is based on CFA NSP Guidelines and criteria so the 'face' presented should, indeed, be CFA and not an individual on this type of form.

Regarding the request by Council for the initial 2010 Assessment Report, this would be held in Council records as provided at the time of the original assessment. The Assessment Report provided at that time would also include an Assessor's name and the same privacy concerns apply to this document as mentioned above.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Euan Ferguson'.

**Euan Ferguson AFSM**  
**Acting Chief Executive Officer**

**From:** Peter & Belinda Clarkson [mailto:devpress@optusnet.com.au]

**Sent:** Wednesday, 5 October 2011 12:20 PM

**To:** 'm.burke@cfa.vic.gov.au'

**Subject:** FW: Decommissioning of a Neighbourhood Safer Place - Eltham Lower Park

Mr Mick Burke

Chief Executive Officer of CFA

8 Lakeside Drive

Burwood East 3151

[m.burke@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:m.burke@cfa.vic.gov.au)

Dear Mr Burke,

**Re: Decommissioning of a Neighbourhood Safer Place - Eltham Lower Park**

In response to Community interest about the decommissioning of a Nillumbik Shire Council Neighbourhood Safer Place, please see attached the CFA Assessment and a local newspaper clipping.

I would like this assessment to be subject to community debate, because in the event of the Parks intended future use as a Neighbourhood Safer Place (NSP), my constituent's lives may be at stake. I do not require the Assessment Reports author to be made public, however the chart measurements and CFA logo, are crucial to informed community debate about "*trees verses human life*".

Would you please advise me if the Assessment Reports author, should be blacked out for privacy or any other reason?

Regards,

Cr Belinda Clarkson.

Nillumbik Shire Council

**PS** Would you please send me a copy of the previous CFA Report, that made this site a NSP, in June 2010.

# Fire retreat flunks CFA assessment

Nillumbik Weekley - 4/10/11

BY MEAGAN WEYMES

meagan.weymes@fairfaxmedia.com.au

NILLUMBIK could go into the fire season with one less fire refuge after the council-managed Eltham Lower Park failed a CFA reassessment.

The park in Eltham was designated a Neighbourhood Safer Place or a "place of last resort" in June last year but failed CFA criteria for protection against radiant heat.

Nillumbik Council will officially shutter the site before signage is removed and the community notified.

NSPs are intended to provide a safer place for people to go if their bushfire plans failed or they had no other options.

But the Eltham site is not the only NSP in doubt in Nillumbik.

Nillumbik council approved two other NSP sites in June last year but both have failed to secure approval from the Department of Education.

The sites are a basketball stadium and the open space around the building on the former Hurstbridge Secondary College on Graysharps Road.

Nillumbik councillor Belinda Clarkson said it would create confusion to decommission the NSP. "I believe decommissioning Eltham Lower Park as a Neighbourhood Safer Place may have devastating consequences."

Nillumbik has five NSPs: three in Greensborough, one in Diamond Creek and one in Yarrambat. St Andrews, Strathewen, Kinglake and Arthurs Creek, all affected by the Black Saturday fires, will go into the fire season without fire refuges.

A report will go to Nillumbik council for a final decision on the Eltham Lower Park site at the council meeting on October 25.



# CFA Neighbourhood Safer Places Assessment Summary Report

NSP ID: 100009354  
 Municipality: Nillumbik Shire  
 Location: Etham Lower Park  
 Address: Main Road (entry via Hohnes Road) Etham 3095

Location Type: Open Space  
 CFA Region: NW Metro  
 Assessment Date: 02.09.2011  
 Assessed By: [REDACTED]  
 Result: Non-Compliant

Assessment Factors	North Aspect	East Aspect	South Aspect	West Aspect
Vegetation Type	<b>WMO BAA Woodland</b>	<b>WMO BAA Woodland</b>	<b>WMO Cultivated Garden / BAA N/A</b>	<b>WMO BAA Woodland</b>
Current or Prescribed Separation Distance to	<b>110</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>80</b>
Vegetation Height	<b>20</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>20</b>
Effective Slope	<b>5</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>-8</b>
Site Slope	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
Prescribed or Deemed to Satisfy Requirements for distance achieved - (Distance equal to or greater	<b>N</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Y</b>	<b>N</b>
Deemed to Satisfy Requirements for slope achieved - (Effective Slope less than 20 degrees)	<b>Y</b>	<b>Y</b>	<b>Y</b>	<b>Y</b>
Deemed to Satisfy (DtS) Requirements Achieved	<b>N</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Y</b>	<b>N</b>
(If DtS not achieved) Calculated Heat Flux (To be no greater than 2kw for open space or 10kw	<b>4.46</b>	<b>9.82</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>2.45</b>
Treatments & Prescriptions (For Grassland areas				
Overall NSP Criteria Achieved	<b>N</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Y</b>	<b>N</b>
Result	<p><b>Compliant</b></p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> (Meeting the CFA assessment criteria on the day of assessment)</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> (Meeting the assessment criteria provided that prescriptions of management of grassland over the fire danger period are secured by agreed terms entered into by the landholder)</p> <p><b>Non Compliant</b></p> <p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> (Not meeting the CFA assessment criteria on the day of assessment)</p>			



# Bushfire Neighbourhood Safer Places

## CFA Assessment Guideline

June 2012

# **NEIGHBOURHOOD SAFER PLACES PLACES OF LAST RESORT**

## ***INTRODUCTION***

***Neighbourhood Safer Place*** means a place that may, as a last resort, provide shelter for people from the immediate life threatening effects of a bushfire.

They are an area or premises that may provide some sanctuary from direct flame contact and radiant heat. It is envisioned it would be an existing space or structure, such as an oval or a building that may protect a person against fire.

This assessment guideline articulates the process by which qualified/experienced CFA Officers assess the suitability of Neighbourhood Safer Places and is not intended for use by the general public.

## ***BACKGROUND***

Reducing the impact of bushfires is a shared responsibility between government, emergency service organisations and the community. The community has an integral role to take the necessary steps to prepare their property and to implement their bushfire survival plan.

This document sets out criteria for CFA's assessment of Neighbourhood Safer Places. The criteria provide a framework to assist Municipal Councils to identify Neighbourhood Safer Places to provide a place of last resort for people to gather during the passage of a bushfire front. The primary purpose of a Neighbourhood Safer Place is the protection of human life from a bushfire.

The 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission (VBRC) Final Report stated that the people who left their homes sheltered in a variety of locations for example, other houses or buildings; bunkers, reserves and ovals; pubs; in-ground swimming pools, cars and dams. Some people reported that these were pre-planned alternatives and in some cases, helped people survive. However, the VBRC also heard examples of people dying in very similar locations, which serve to highlight that, these locations do not guarantee safety (VBRC Final Report Vol 2: pg 19).

The VBRC also stated that "many people did not have a well-thought-out plan and were left to make their own decisions without the benefit of assistance from the authorities [and] for these people, the lack of alternatives, the provision of shelters, refuges or evacuation, became critical as a fallback option (VBRC Final Report Summary: pg 5). They also "considered that a revised bushfire safety policy should provide information about places in which to shelter and support for individuals in identifying such places" (VBRC Final Report Vol 2: pg 21). Neighbourhood Safer Places continue to be a part of the shelter options for community members.

## **CONCEPT**

A Neighbourhood Safer Place is a space that:

- is a place of last resort for individuals to access and shelter in during the passage of fire through their neighbourhood - without the need to take a high risk journey beyond their neighbourhood;
- provides a level of protection from the immediate life threatening effects of a bushfire (direct flame contact and radiant heat); and
- is intended to provide relative safety;
- does not guarantee the survival of those who assemble there; and
- should only be accessed when personal bushfire survival plans cannot be implemented or have failed.

Neighbourhood Safer Places should be recorded in Township Protection Plans. However, not all townships will have Neighbourhood Safer Places identified in these Plans as they may not meet specific criteria identified in this document and within a council's Municipal Neighbourhood Safer Places Plan. Some towns may not have the fire risk profile to indicate a need for a Neighbourhood Safer Place.

Neighbourhood Safer Places are not to be confused with Fire Refuges<sup>1</sup>, Relief Centres, Recovery Centres, Assembly Areas, or Informal Places of Shelter, each of which have a different and specific purpose.

## **LIMITATIONS**

Neighbourhood Safer Places have a number of limitations, being:

- limited capacity;
- no guarantee of safety;
- they do not cater for animals;
- emergency services will not necessarily be present;
- they do not provide meals or amenities;
- they may not cater for particular special needs (e.g. infants, elderly, ill or disabled);
- they may not provide shelter from the elements, particularly flying embers; and
- there are risks to people during access, shelter during passage of the fire front and egress from Neighbourhood Safer Places.

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<sup>1</sup> Fire refuges have been described in the OESC Fire Refuges in Victoria – Policy and Practice (2005). However, these guidelines are currently undergoing a review with the FSC and because the issues associated with fire refuges are being considered separately, they will not be considered further in this document.

## ***CFA Neighbourhood Safer Places Assessment Criteria***

Neighbourhood Safer Places should provide protection to people from lethal levels of radiant heat through an appropriate separation distance between fire hazards, particularly vegetation, and the site of the Neighbourhood Safer Place. Isolated flammable elements may occur within the separation space so long as such elements do not add to a fire's rate of spread nor significantly contribute to the radiant heat impacting on the Neighbourhood Safer Place.

Fire industry collaboration established criteria to determine the suitability of any site as a Neighbourhood Safer Place. The critical criteria decided upon was radiant heat load with maximum allowable radiant heat loads agreed upon for sites that are open spaces and those that are buildings. It was further agreed that each Neighbourhood Safer Place needs to be assessed on its merits, with radiant heat load calculated using the NSW Rural Fire Service Site Bush Fire Attack Assessment Methodology (Douglas and Tan, 2005) as the assessment tool in these guidelines.

### ***Radiant Heat and Setback Measurements***

To provide initial direction to CFA staff and others in assessing the suitability of potential Neighbourhood Safer Places, the following guidance is provided:

Neighbourhood Safer Places must meet the following criteria for **radiant heat load**:

- 1 If a Neighbourhood Safer Place is an open space the maximum potential radiant heat impacting on the site must be no more than 2kw/m<sup>2</sup>.
- 2 If a Neighbourhood Safer Place is a building, the maximum potential radiant heat impacting on the building must be no more than 10kw/m<sup>2</sup>.

By way of example, Neighbourhood Safer Places adjoining extreme fuel hazards, this equates to a separation distance from the fire hazard of:

- greater than **310 metres** from the outer edge of the NSP for an open space; and
- greater than **140 metres** from the outer edge of a building to the fire hazard.

It is acknowledged that for NSPs abutting less than extreme fuel hazards this separation distance may be reduced so long as the criteria for maximum radiant heat impact are met.

### ***Additional Management for Neighbourhood Safer Places in Grassland Areas***

Grasslands have a distinct place in the Neighbourhood Safer Places framework, due to:

- the potential for rapid growth in conditions of adequate warmth and moisture; and
- the requirement under section 50J of the CFA Act for councils to review their NSPs by 31 August each year.

Councils may identify a suitable Neighbourhood Safer Place site in a grassland area that can only meet the assessment criteria with active management of the site over the fire danger period, with treatments including slashing, mowing or grazing.



In these circumstances CFA may certify the site as meeting the assessment criteria provided that appropriate, specified and prescribed treatments are in place throughout the fire danger period. This must include prescriptions for management of the grassland secured by agreed terms entered into by the landholder. The landholder may be the council, a public authority, an agency or a private person.

The identified treatment of the grassland must be included within the MFPP or MFMP (whichever is relevant). Council has the role of facilitation and, if required, enforcement of the treatment(s) during the fire danger period. Fire Prevention Notices would not ordinarily be an appropriate method for achievement of management prescriptions in NSPs. Their use would only be an option of last resort that councils may use where a private landholder has reneged on their agreed conditions **and** the grassland condition constitutes or may constitute a danger to life or property from the threat of fire.