

Victorian Post Disaster Legislative Framework

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With the current Victorian policy position of 'Leave and Live' which is designed to put the protection of human life at the forefront of fire and emergency management which is absolutely appropriate, we must understand the challenges and consequences of a policy that asks significant numbers of people to leave their property on bad fire weather days, recommends and in many cases encourages evacuation and its implication around community expectations and response.

One key impact will be a significant increase in the number of property losses in comparison to previous years where the fire services emphasis was on educating the community on how to prepare and defend their property if physically fit and mentally able.

If we agree 'Leave and Live' is the right approach, then Government will need to review the current legislative and policy frameworks to support large scale recovery and rebuilding of not only individual properties, but potentially whole communities and ways to mitigate such large potential future losses.

The Legislative Framework shown with this post demonstrates the current legislative and implied bureaucratic challenges individual families and business will have to work through post each disaster. Whilst this list is not exhaustive and will vary depending on the type of rebuild involved, it provides a snapshot of what legislation (supported by underpinning regulations, policies and standards) could apply; directly or indirectly during the rebuilding process and ongoing compliance.

For discussion purposes, we should consider some of the ways to support the 'Leave and Live' approach:

1. Government could undertake a detailed review of all relevant legislation with the objective of significantly reducing the bureaucratic and administrative burden to streamline recovery and rebuilding processes after major events with the objective of using new innovative and sustainable building design and construction methods and standards incorporating human life safety features; and
2. Promote and encourage new, innovative and practical ways to protect existing properties with the emphasis on the protection of human life. A lot of work has been done in this area since Black Saturday; and
3. Fire services and other relevant Government agencies increase their commitment and investment into community strengthening and resilience building.

Whilst 'Leave and Live' encourages people to leave early on bad fire weather days or to evacuate during a fire event when safe, in reality, most will not leave early and many, when confronted with a fast moving fire will find themselves unable to leave.

This is evident with the number of emergency community warnings issued each summer advising affected communities that 'it is too late to leave and to shelter in place'.

The 2016 Global Risk Report identified extreme weather events and major natural catastrophes from climate change as two of the main risks the world faces over the next 10 years and has put out a '*call to action*', particularly around '*improving systemic resilience*'.

Unless we fully understand the meaning of 'Leave and Live' and the interconnections with the three discussion points above as a starting point, we risk not having an integrated risk and evidenced based approach needed to manage severe fires and post disaster recovery. The consequences too social,

economic and environmental assets will be enormous. In these increasing National and Global uncertain financial and challenging times, are we able to afford such potential significant losses?

