

Cessnock Bushfire Recovery Information Sheet



The NSW Reconstruction Authority is providing support to individuals, families, farmers, and business owners affected by bushfires in the Cessnock Local Government Area. This update provides information on clean-up, waste removal, mental health support and all other services available for the community.

Face-to-Face Support

The NSW Reconstruction Authority opened a Recovery Assistance Point at Weston Civic Centre, 28 Second Street, Weston from Thursday, 21 December 12pm to 6:30pm and Friday, 22 December from 9:30am to 2:30pm.

As community need changes, the Service NSW website will be updated with information on where you can seek face-to-face support: <https://www.service.nsw.gov.au/services/recovery-centres>

The NSW Reconstruction Authority is available to connect you with services and support.

Returning to your Property Safely

Road Access, Assessments & Repairs

All roads across the impacted area are currently open. Council will update Live Traffic NSW. For up-to-date roads information, visit <https://www.livetraffic.com/> to view road access and any repair works.

Water Contamination

Rainwater may be contaminated by debris, dead birds or animals, fire retardants, or large amounts of ash. The water may also be contaminated if the tank, internal lining or plumbing was damaged.

The presence of ash and debris in rainwater is unlikely to be a health risk but could affect the appearance and taste. Fire retardants currently used in Australia are of low toxicity but may also affect the appearance and taste of rainwater.

If you are concerned that your rainwater tastes, looks or smells unusual, or you suspect your rainwater has been contaminated, an alternative safe water supply should be used for human or animal consumption.

If you need to bring in water, it is important you use an accredited water carter. If the water was used for firefighting by the NSW Rural Fire Service, reimbursement can be sought from Service NSW at 13 77 88.

Further information is available at <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/environment/water/Pages/rainwater-bushfires.aspx>

Damage to Wastewater Systems

On-site wastewater systems, such as septic tanks and aerated wastewater treatment systems (AWTS), and their land application systems, for example sprinklers and below ground drippers, can be easily damaged during a bushfire.

Avoid driving or walking near a fire-affected system until it is assessed by a licensed plumber or service technician familiar with on-site wastewater systems.

Cessnock City Council is assessing wastewater systems on affected properties. Further advice will be provided on scheduling inspections soon.

More information on managing wastewater can be accessed at <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/environment/factsheets/Pages/bushfires-onsite-wastewater-systems.aspx>

Firefighting & Water Replacement

During bush fire emergencies, firefighters may need to draw water from private properties as they work to protect life and property by suppressing the fire.

Under certain circumstances, such as during a prolonged drought, this water may be replaced by the NSW RFS in consultation with the Department of Primary Industries (DPI) as the Agriculture and Animal Services Functional Area under the NSW Government's Disaster Assistance Scheme.

More information on criteria can be found here: https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/187395/Firefighting-and-Water-Replacement-Factsheet-May-2022.pdf

Clean-up of Waste & Debris

Trees & Vegetation on Private Property

For impacted properties, small amounts of felled trees and burnt vegetation can be disposed of at your local waste facility. Please contact Cessnock City Council on 02 4993 4100 for information on what supports Council are able to provide.

Contact Service NSW on 13 77 88 if you need help with waste clean-up and disposal, as eligibility criteria applies.

Treated Timber

Copper chrome arsenate (CCA) is a wood preservative used to protect wood from rotting, fungi and insects. Burnt CCA-treated timber will contain arsenic. The SafeWork NSW provides information on safe disposal of CCA-treated timber and ash and steps you can take to protect your health.

Freshly treated CCA-timber can be identified by its yellow/greenish colour which fades to grey over time. It is not always easy to identify if a product is CCA-treated timber and if in doubt it is important to treat the timber as if it does contain CCA.

Small amounts of CCA-treated timber ash can be placed in a sealed plastic bag and disposed of at your local waste facility. Larger amounts of CCA-timber ash can be disposed of at the nearest suitable landfill. Please contact Cessnock City Council on 02 4993 4100 for information. Ash must be double bagged and sealed to ensure it's contained during transport and handling. Do not put CCA-timber or ash in your garden organics bin.

Visit <https://www.safework.nsw.gov.au/resource-library/natural-disasters/property-hazards-following-a-bushfire-fact-sheet> for more information.

Hazardous Materials & Asbestos

Buildings and other structures damaged in a bushfire leave health and safety hazards in the remaining debris and ash. If a fire-damaged building was built before 1990, it is likely to contain asbestos.

A fire damaged asbestos building does not generate significant levels of asbestos fibers in the air unless it is disturbed. Although it is generally low risk to walk around or nearby asbestos damaged buildings, risks can increase when the material is disturbed.

The site will need to be continually damped down so as not to cause dust or be sprayed with polyvinyl acetate (PVA), or a similar sealant, to reduce the risk of the asbestos fibers becoming airborne (further reapplication requirements need to be monitored). This needs to continue until the site is cleaned up. Dust suppression should not be so great that it causes runoff into nearby drains and waterways.

It is advisable you do not do any clean-up of asbestos yourself. Asbestos will be removed by a licensed asbestos removalist, who will ensure work is carried out safely.

All bushfire generated waste that contains asbestos must only be handled by appropriately trained people and disposed of at a landfill that can lawfully receive this type of waste. The nearest suitable landfill can be located by contacting Cessnock City Council on 02 4993 4100.

For more information on asbestos management, visit SafeWork at <https://www.safework.nsw.gov.au/resource-library/natural-disasters/property-hazards-following-a-bushfire-fact-sheet>

Damaged Buildings or Structures

If you have damaged structures on your property and are insured, check with your provider about support for clean-up. At this stage, non-or under-insured properties will be required to self-manage structural clean-ups and disposals.

Clean-up & Replacement of Fencing

Impact assessments are being completed and reviewed to determine the need for fencing clean-up, disposal and replacement.

Once this work is complete, information will be provided on support for fence replacement.

Fire-impacted fencing (free of dirt/vegetation) may be taken. The nearest suitable landfill can be located by contacting Cessnock City Council on 02 4993 4100.

Using Private Contractors

If you're using a building contractor or tradesperson for services to assess or rebuild structures on your property, you should check that they have a valid contractor license.

You can check for a license online. If you can't find it, contact NSW Fair Trading to confirm that the person does hold a contractor license. By law, all contractors must show their license number on all advertising, stationery and signage.

You can check a building license at <https://www.service.nsw.gov.au/transaction/check-a-builder-or-tradesperson-licence>

Looking After Yourself & Others

Bushfire Mental Health Support Services

Bushfires often cause trauma and distress for individuals, families and communities. Many people affected will recover over time with support from relatives, friends and colleagues. Some people will require additional psychological support.

There are a range of specific resources to help people work towards recovery in the event of a disaster. The Disaster Recovery Chaplaincy Network, NSW Health, the Australian Red Cross, Salvation Army and Rural Financial Counselling Service are available at the Recovery Centre to provide support where needed.

Support services can also be contacted by calling the NSW Mental Health Line on 1800 011 511 or Service NSW on 13 77 88.

Looking After Yourself

During a bushfire emergency, and when returning home, it is important to take care of yourself and your mental health.

Remember to:

- spend time with family and friends.
- try to get back to a routine but don't push yourself and work too hard.
- continue a healthy lifestyle (try to eat well, sleep and exercise)
- take time out, but don't isolate yourself.
- accept help when it's offered.

It's important you seek professional help if you are experiencing extreme feeling of distress, emotional reactions that last for more than a few weeks, or distress that interferes with your regular everyday activities.

More information is available at <https://www.service.nsw.gov.au/services/health-and-care/mental-wellbeing-resources>

Grants

A disaster declaration has been made by the Australian and NSW Government for the Cessnock Local Government area,

Grants and loans may be available for primary producers, small businesses, sporting and recreation clubs and not-for-profit organisations who meet criteria and have been impacted by the bushfire. Disaster Relief Grants are available for low income households who have been significantly impacted by the fire.

Contact Service NSW on 13 77 88 to find out more or to apply. You can also visit <https://disasterassistance.service.nsw.gov.au/> to locate the assistance available to you.

Donations

If you need donated support

Bushfire Appeal

Cessnock City Council has partnered with Rotary Australia and the Rotary Club of Kurri Kurri to establish a fund to provide benevolent relief and support to those directly impacted by the Cessnock Road Fire in the Hunter Valley region. The significant bushfire event saw three fires converge to form one large, fast moving blaze that threatened several communities. Multiple homes and businesses were lost in the fire.

Mayor Jay Suvaal has announced a \$5000 donation from Cessnock City Council to kickstart the fundraising effort for victims of the devastating fire. Members of the public looking to support bushfire victims through tax deductible donations are encouraged to visit the donations page through <https://donations.rawcs.com.au/36-2023-24>.

If you have been impacted by the fire and wish to be considered for financial assistance, you can email Kurri Kurri Rotary Club at kkrcinc@gmail.com.

For people impacted by the fires and needing donated goods, you can contact Kurri Kurri Community Centre on 02 4004 3100. Their opening hours are 9am to 5pm, Mon to Thurs, and 9am to 4pm on Fridays. They are not open on public holidays. They will be closed from 23 Dec until 2nd Jan.

Members of the public wishing to donate items, please contact the coordinators of the Kurri Kurri Community Centre on 02 4004 3100 to discuss what the fire impacted people need.

For other ways to donate, please visit <https://www.nsw.gov.au/emergency/donations>.

Bushfire Preparedness

We've seen the devastating impact that bushfires have on communities across NSW.

It's important you take the time now to prepare for bushfires. That means knowing your risk and having a plan for what to do during a fire.

As part of your bushfire plan, you should:

- Discuss what you will do in a fire, whether that is leaving early, or deciding to stay if you are well prepared.
- Prepare your home and get it ready for bushfire season.
- Know the bushfire alert levels and fire danger ratings, and the actions you need to take should advice change.
- Keep key information handy such as phone numbers, websites, and places to stay up to date on conditions in your area.

You can create an online plan in as little as five minutes. Visit: <https://www.myfireplan.com.au/>

Recovery Services for the Community

Recovery Support Service	Contact details
Service NSW 16 North Avenue, Corner of, Darwin Street & North Ave, Cessnock NSW 2325	13 77 88 https://www.service.nsw.gov.au/disaster-customer-care
Hunter Valley Community Mental Health Service for Mental Health support and follow up 560 High Street, Mainland, NSW 2320	Monday - Friday 02 4939 2900 After hours: Mental Health line 1800 011 511
Farmgate Support Program	0477 322 851
RA Disaster Relief Grants	via Service NSW https://www.service.nsw.gov.au/transaction/apply-for-the-disaster-relief-grant
Rural Financial Counselling	1800 344 090 hunter@rfcsnr.org.au
Red Cross	1800 733 276 https://www.redcross.org.au/emergencies/
Department of Primary Industries	1800 814 647
Salvation Army	137 258 https://www.salvationarmy.org.au/need-help/disasters-and-emergencies/bushfire-response-and-recovery/
Legal Aid	1800 801 529 https://disasterhelp.legalaid.nsw.gov.au/how-we-can-help
Lifeline	13 11 14
NRMA Insurance - new and existing claims enquires for NRMA, CGU and WFI	NRMA (www.nrma.com.au) - 13 11 23 CGU (www.cgu.com.au) - 13 28 40 WFI (www.wfi.com.au) - 1300 934 934
Cessnock Council Website - for local information and assistance	https://www.cessnock.nsw.gov.au/Home
Hunter Food Relief Centre Offering free meals to those in need.	Operating Tues – 9am-1pm & Thurs 12pm-3pm Uniting Church, Cnr Cumberland & Copper Street, Cessnock 0406 985 369
SoupzOn Through Grace Offering free meals to those in need	Operating Mon/Wed – from 5pm-8pm Baptist Church Hall, Cnr Cooper & King Streets, Cessnock And Operating Fri/Sat – from 7pm Rotunda, TAFE park, Cessnock