

Community Recovery Newsletter

Wye River Fire

COMMUNITY
RECOVERY

WYE RIVER | SEPARATION CREEK

17 JANUARY 2016

This is a weekly newsletter being issued by Colac Otway Shire to provide the community key updates about recovery following the fire.



Community recovery committee

Council is calling for nominations from community members interested in being part of the Community Recovery Committee, for the ongoing recovery from the Christmas Day fires.

Nomination forms and Terms of Reference will be available at the Wye River Community Meeting today (Sunday 17 January), at the Melbourne Community Meeting this Thursday 21 January and on the Shire's website from tomorrow, Monday 18 January.

The aim of the Committee is to assist the recovery of the community from the impact of the disaster. Community members will play a vital function in ensuring that communities' views are actively integrated across all recovery activities.

The Committee will be Chaired by the Colac Otway Shire Mayor and supported by Council staff and Emergency Management Victoria.

Applications can be lodged online at colacotway.vic.gov.au or in person at the Bushfire Community Information Centre on Nelson Road, Apollo Bay or at the Colac Otway Shire offices in Rae Street, Colac

Applications close at 5.00pm on Friday 29 January 2016.

Accessing your property

The low impact zone, where houses are undamaged, is now accessible to residents.

Residents no longer need a wristband to access this area; however, they will need to verbally identify themselves as residents to security to gain access.

The high-impact zone has restricted access and currently residents can access their properties by making an appointment for an escorted visit. This is due to safety issues.

Residents are able to access their property under safety escort to collect personal items. This will remain in place until 31 January 2016, while a review of the requirements is undertaken.

Escorted tours are taking place seven days a week between 10.00am and 4.00pm.

These are by appointment only and can be made by phoning Colac Otway Shire on 5232 9400 between 8:30am-5:15pm, Monday to Friday.

Recovery kits can then be collected from the road management point in Wye River, opposite the CFA shed. These include Personal Protective Equipment which may have to be worn when visiting your property.

Assessments at undamaged properties

All homes in the high-impact zone are currently being assessed on a case-by-case basis looking at geological risks, including for landslips, asbestos and tree hazards.

DELWP and the Shire have engaged experts to undertake these assessments and provide advice on how and when residents can safely return to their homes.

We are working through this process as quickly as possible and home owners will be individually contacted by the Shire with information about their home risk assessment as soon as possible.

From the mayor

Welcome to the first of the Colac Otway Shire's Bushfire Recovery newsletters. Council is now working in partnership with the State Government to help the communities of Wye River and Separation Creek move forward after the devastating fires of Christmas Day.

Every community is different and the Wye River-Jamieson's Creek fire has certainly resulted in some unique challenges for those affected. The Council and all the agencies involved in managing this incident appreciate the patience and understanding the affected communities have shown as we work through the complexities.

We recognise the frustration of those who have not yet been able to re-enter their homes and we are working closely with the State Government to get as many people as possible into their homes safely.

I would also like to thank all of the agencies who have been involved in responding to this fire. It was due to their meticulous planning that we were able to escape without any loss of life.

The communities themselves have also been instrumental in the initial response to the fire and it is those communities we now look to help us drive the structured recovery effort. I encourage all those who are interested to nominate for the Community Recovery Committee, which will be supported by Council and Emergency Management Victoria. Details of how to nominate will be on Council's website from Monday 18 January.

In addition, there will be a Special Meeting of Council on Wednesday 20 January in Apollo Bay to consider a report that recommends Council waive rates for fire-affected properties.

I would also like to acknowledge Council staff, many of whom have spent very little time with their families over the holiday period, working instead to help resettle our community.

The State Government has already provided enormous support and together, in partnership with the community, I believe the communities of Wye River and Separation Creek will be stronger than ever.

- **Frank Buchanan**

From the Emergency Management Commissioner

In the emergency management space in Victoria we work together with communities, government, agencies and business. By working as one we strengthen not only our own capacity but that of communities to withstand, plan for, respond to and recover from emergencies' and overall, to build safer and more resilient communities.

An example of this togetherness has been seen during the Wye River fire. Emergency services, various agencies and departments, local and state government, business, industry and tourism and the community have all rallied together to get things done and support each other during a difficult time.

It is tough. It's going to continue to be tough and we all have a different experience and a different capacity to deal with it. Some people have lost their homes, some have lost their animals but you are together as a community.

Like any emergency, there have been lessons learned along the way and currently the Inspector General for Emergency Management is writing an independent report to Government through the Minister for Emergency Services to identify what has been learnt from the fire, and to provide opportunities for improvement across a range of operational and community engagement aspects of the fire.

We recognise and acknowledge there is concern about burnout operations undertaken as part of the strategy to control this fire prior to the Christmas Day fire. The operational decision to use fire to control the Wye River-Jamieson Track fire was not taken lightly. We'll continue to talk to you about it because you have a right to ask questions and to understand what has happened.

Personnel on the ground, at our control centres and at council are continuing to hear your concerns, challenges and ideas and these are being shared to ensure we are providing support to best meet your needs.

- **Craig Lapsley**

Melbourne Community Forum

Colac Otway Shire Council has organised a meeting in Melbourne next week to bring city-based property owners up to date with the bushfire recovery process in Wye River and Separation Creek.

Council and relevant agencies will attend to answer questions and provide updates.

The meeting will take place on Thursday 21 January at the Treasury Theatre in Macarthur Street from 5.30pm to 7.30pm.

Tank refilling and water

Tank refilling is still being offered for both commercial and individual users in fire affected areas. If you believe your water supply has been contaminated due to the fire, register for a roof and tank clean with the Shire at 5232 9400.

While testing to date has shown that there has been no impact on the Wye River from the fire, it is recommended that people do not swim in the Wye River estuary or draw water for use as drinking water or washing without suitable filtration and disinfection.

Update from Barwon Water

Barwon Water has been assisting fire-affected communities in Wye River, Separation Creek and Kennett River by providing essential water supplies via 3,000 litre water carts stationed at Wye and Kennett River. When empty, these water carts are replenished from the Apollo Bay town water system. Barwon Water has also been supplying water containers for residents.

Barwon Water also is assisting the Shire with the recovery of domestic water supplies in the impacted area. All properties in the area rely on rainwater for household water supplies and many of the house roofs and water tanks have been contaminated with ash from the fires, saltwater and fire retardant from aerial fire fighting efforts.

Currently, 74 residents have registered with 12 properties assessed by the Colac Otway Shire as requiring immediate attention.

Barwon Water has engaged a local plumbing contractor to undertake the roof and tank cleaning supported by regular Barwon Water contractor, Bartlett's Environmental, for the water disposal activities.

Cleaning of roofs started on Thursday and the first tanks were being emptied and cleaned on Friday. Around 200 properties are potentially impacted.

The fence

The fence lines were put up after the fire, and following assessments by independent experts that found potential risks in affected areas.

These include landslips, asbestos, debris from damaged buildings and hazardous trees.

This makes it potentially dangerous for residents and property owners to return. This includes for undamaged properties, as areas around them also need to be assessed.

Detailed assessments of undamaged homes are now being undertaken by a number of agencies and Shire staff will be in contact with residents directly about returning to their homes.

Our priority is to get as many people back to their homes as soon as possible, but we must do that safely.



Donations and fundraising

We understand that many people across Victoria are wanting to help those affected by the fires.

At this stage, we understand that donated goods from the public are not required and we will continue to work with you to assess what your community needs.

Monetary donations can be made through the Shire and we are currently working closely with Red Cross to determine how to best direct approximately \$120,000 donated by the Falls Festival.

Red Cross continue to accept secure donations online and through their 1800 811 700 number.

A Wye River and Separation Creek Community Appeal has also been set up by the Spirit Foundation and the best way to donate money is through this appeal.

Roads and access around fire affected areas

Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning and Colac Otway Shire have engaged Advent Security to provide 24-hour road management to Wye River and Separation Creek.

This will remain in place until 31 January 2016, while a review of the security requirements is undertaken.

There are two zones of access – the low impact undamaged zone, and the high-impact zone that is now enclosed by a fence.

Only residents and other authorised people have access to these areas.

Both zones have a road management point in place.

In addition, security staff are patrolling the temporary fence line to ensure that there are no unauthorised people accessing the restricted zone.

Emergency financial assistance

The Department of Health and Human Services has been issuing payments to eligible residents impacted by the fires to help meet their immediate needs for things like emergency food, shelter, clothing and personal items.

Some residents may also apply for the Emergency Re-establishment Payments, which are available to eligible households for clean-up, emergency accommodation, repairs, rebuilding (a principal place of residence), and replacing some damaged contents.

Eligibility for the Emergency Re-establishment Payment depends on whether your home (principal place of residence) has been destroyed, is unfit or unsafe to live in, or made inaccessible for more than seven days. Applicants also need to meet an income test with the amount payable being influenced by your total weekly family income; and where your losses are not being met by insurance, compensation or any other assistance.

People should visit the Community Recovery Information Centre open daily at 69 Nelson Street, Apollo Bay (opening hours: 10am-4pm) to learn more about the range of support available.

Returning home safely after a bushfire

Houses, sheds and other buildings or structures burnt in a bushfire can leave potential health hazards. These may include fallen or sharp objects, damaged electrical wires, leaking gas and weakened walls.

Hazardous materials may also be present and can include asbestos, ash from burnt treated timbers and garden or farming chemicals.

Wear protective clothing (such as long pants and full sleeves) when checking your property after a bushfire. Make sure you also wear sturdy footwear and heavy-duty work gloves. Wash your hands after removing contaminated clothing and articles.

Personal Protective Equipment Kits are available from the Colac Otway Shire Council building - 69 Nelson Street, Apollo Bay.

For more information visit the Better Health Channel www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/bushfire-aftermath-safety-tips

Emotional support is available

It is normal to have strong reactions following a distressing or frightening event.

Emergencies create a high level of stress that can have a significant effect on emotional health and wellbeing. You may feel exhausted and emotional and these reactions can occur hours, days, weeks or even months after the event.



Dozens of Red Cross and Victorian Council of Churches volunteers have been helping distressed people as they return to their properties, and checking in by phone to ensure they have access to the support they need.

Another option to receive emotional support is to visit with your local GP or health service provider who can tell you what support is available in your local area.

Or you can call Lifeline on 131 114 and Beyondblue on 1300 224 636 or visit the Better Health Channel www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/conditionsandtreatments/trauma-reaction-and-recovery.

More information and staying informed

A specialised bushfire recovery line has been established to assist with enquires and requests arising from the fire. Please call the Colac shire office on 5232 9400 between 8.30 am and 5 pm Monday to Friday and between 10 am and 4 pm over the weekend. You will be prompted to 'dial 1' to access the recovery line.

You can like the Colac Otway Shire Facebook page for updates or go to <https://www.facebook.com/colacotwayshirecouncil/>

A community recovery information centre is open at 69 Nelson Street, Apollo Bay. Opening hours: 10 am - 4 pm every day.

Representatives from the Department of Health and Human Services, Red Cross, Victorian Council of Churches and local council are in attendance.

You can also keep across what is happening with the fire and the latest warnings and advice by visiting emergency.vic.gov.au, tuning into Victoria's emergency broadcasters or by calling the Victorian Bushfire Information Line (VBIL) on freecall 1800 240 667. Download the Fireready app or follow VicEmergency on Twitter (#vicfires) or Facebook.