**The community cannot rely solely on emergency services to protect it from fire. Self-reliant and aware people are able to plan, prepare for and manage fire risks themselves, in partnership with fire brigades, the Council, other agencies and community groups. Involve the whole family in identifying potential threats to life and property by developing, practicing and implementing a fire plan.**

**Q. Do I need to remove timber and firewood?**

No – not if the timber is to be used for construction or firewood/heating purposes.

Yes – if the timber is non-useful or derelict. Large quantities of branches and cut limbs must be removed.

Firewood should always be stored a safe distance from assets (houses, fences, neighbouring properties, etc) and **never** underneath houses. As you probably won’t use much firewood for heating over summer, you may need to relocate firewood stacks.

**Q. Can I trim back branches overhanging onto my property line from the neighbours’ property?**

Yes – you are entitled to trim overhanging branches from a neighbours tree but only back to your fence line. It is always a good idea to consult with your neighbours beforehand as a courtesy.

**Q. Can I cut and remove vegetation around my house?**

If your house was built before September 2009, all vegetation including trees can be removed from within ten metres of a house. All vegetation excluding trees (eg shrubs, undergrowth) can also be removed from within 30 metres of a house. You should be aware that mature trees and other plants can play an important role in preventing erosion and providing wind breaks. Please contact council if you need more advice on what should be cleared.

**Q. Can I cut back branches overhanging my house?**

Yes you can remove all vegetation including trees within ten metres of your house.

**Q. I live on a farm and have stock grazing all year around. Do I need to slash a break?**

No – if you have sufficient stock numbers, and continual grazing is evident that keeps the grass to the required height of 4” (100mm).

Yes – if inadequate numbers of stock, a twenty (20) metre slashed break at your boundary (fronting the road/s) is required.

Yes – minimum 10 metre slashed break at boundaries where an adjoining property dwelling exists.

**Q. I am a farmer growing a crop. Do I need to slash a break?**

No – if income producing. However, a slashed break around perimeter would offer further protection from potential bush fire threat.

**Q. I have a block of land in a Township and I have some small trees growing. Do I need to remove those trees?**

No – if trees planted are of environmental significance.

Yes – if classified as environmental weeds. Council recommends removal of all environmental weeds as these are invasive and highly flammable. For more information contact Council.

If you have houses next to your block, your neighbours may wish to clear vegetation to a maximum combined width of four metres along your fence line. They will need your written consent to do this.

**Q. I have a vacant block of land on the Coast (eg. Fairhaven). Do I have to remove all the undergrowth?**

No – not all undergrowth. That is indigenous / native vegetation should retained.

Yes – if adjoining properties have assets/dwellings, you have an obligation to further protect these. Concentrate clearing within proximity to assets and remove all undergrowth at the base of mature/established trees. This may minimise a crowning effect (ie. a fire that travels at the top of trees). Remove all weed types and remove existing branch heaps/residue/derelict timber and dead branches lying around.

If you have houses next to your block, your neighbours may wish to clear vegetation to a maximum combined width of four metres along your fence line. They will need your written consent to do this.

**Q. Should I remove all the grass and material once I have cut?**

Yes – if there are branches and leafy material. Ground fuel/leaf and twig litter should be raked, thinned out and removed. A thin layer can remain as this will decompose naturally over time. A litterbed depth of 15-20 mm is acceptable.

No – if a typical, grassed township block that does not have resultant cut material laying in distinct heaps/windrows.

**Q. Someone has illegally dumped material/branches on my block. Do I have to remove this?**

Yes – the responsibility is yours.

**Q. I have cleared my block, do I have to do it again?**

You have a responsibility to maintain grass to a height of 4” (100mm), for the duration of the fire season (declared fire danger period as proclaimed in the Government Gazette, normally December to the end of April). Note: A grassed allotment normally requires cutting more than once over the fire danger period.

**Q. Can I burn branches in the open air outside the Fire Danger Period?**

Yes – providing a “Duty of Care” is shown by following the attached Open Air Burning and Incinerators Guidelines and Standards (contact Council for a hard copy).

No – if a complaint is received based on Nuisance and Environmental Health regarding Open Air Burning and Incinerators Local Law No. 5 of 1995 (contact Council for a hard copy).

Note: Council regulation is currently partial prohibition, allowing burning on a Saturday and Wednesday between the hours of 10.00am and 3.00pm within residential areas only. This has been adopted as Policy as of 11 January 1999.

**Q. Can I burn branches in the open air in a declared fire danger period?**

No – This is the CFA declared period not allowing any open air burning, unless a permit is issued by the Municipal Fire Prevention Officer. This period is normally November to May and will be advertised extensively when introduced.

**Q. Can I remove vegetation from the roadside?**

Yes – If you have a nature strip, you have an obligation pursuant to the *Catchment and Land Protection Act 1994*, to eradicate and prevent the spread of prohibited weed on adjoining Land. Do not remove trees or environmentally significant vegetation or burn roadsides.

**Q. I have Crown Land/Council Reserve/forest adjoining me. Do the responsible authorities have to clear these properties?**

A Duty of Care must be shown. If you front onto public land, you may clear vegetation along your fence line to a maximum combined width of four metres with written consent from the land manager. Refer to one of the following appropriate authorities:

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| Department of Environment, Land,  Water and Planning  Fire Management  83 Gellibrand Street, Colac  Ph: 03 5233 5504 | Powercor  Regional Manager  PO Box 185, Geelong 3220  Ph: 03 5240 7569 |
| VicRoads  180 Fyans St, Geelong 3220  Ph: 03 5225 2525 | V-Line Passenger Pty Ltd  Environment and Risk Officer  Ph: 03 8414 8546 |
| Surf Coast Shire  Municipal Fire Prevention Officer  Ph: 03 5261 0600 | Surf Coast Shire  Environment Officer  Parks and Gardens Coordinator  Ph: 035261 0600 |