

WELLINGTON SHIRE COUNCIL

Fire Prevention Guide

Is it a fire hazard?

Determining if something is an actionable fire hazard is about more than just “will it burn?”

Our officers are trained to look for vegetation that will easily ignite if exposed to flame or embers and to consider what fuels will promote the growth or spread of fire.

Other factors include land use and location, proximity to residential dwellings, volume of observed vegetation and the land’s slope.

These general vegetation rules help guide us:

Grass, bracken & other fine fuels

Fine fuel is any vegetation less than 6mm in diameter (about the width of a pencil), as these materials will dry more quickly, ignite more easily and burn faster once ignited.

Fine fuels include grass (living or dead), bracken, twigs, leaves, pine needles and fallen bark.



Standing grass and bracken are the main focus of our fire prevention efforts as these will carry fire, allowing it to quickly spread to surrounding land.

Undergrowth

When we talk about undergrowth, we mean heavy grounds fuels, excluding grass, that grow underneath the tree canopy of a property. Common undergrowth includes shrubs, small bushes and saplings.



A fire in heavy undergrowth will heat the trees above it, increasing the risk of flames climbing into the canopy, creating a much larger and more difficult to control fire.

Trees

Healthy standing trees generally only catch fire once preheated by ground fuels already burning around them. We will never direct an owner to remove healthy standing trees.

Dead or dying trees are a potential hazard and may need to be removed.

We may also require that low branches be pruned to separate them from ground fuels.

Tree debris

Discarded tree branches and other debris may be a fire hazard if placed against a building, is on land with excessive grass levels or is piled under the canopy of standing trees. Tree debris piles are assessed on a case by case basis.

Overhanging tree branches

Tree branches overhanging neighbouring properties are a civil matter between property owners. They can only be considered a potential fire hazard if in direct contact with a residential dwelling and are assessed on a case by case basis.

Hay bales



While hay bales are made up of cut grass, the tightly packed arrangement of the vegetation limits its ability to take in oxygen, making it difficult to ignite or sustain combustion.

Hay tends to slowly smoulder rather than burn with damage normally limited to the bale itself and items directly touching it. Hay fires rarely spread past the area they are stored.

Wellington Shire's pastoral lands produce well over 1 million hay bales each year, with fire brigades responding to fewer than 20 hay fires annually.

Hay bales will only be considered a potential fire hazard if placed directly against a residential dwelling, not when stored in a fire purpose shed or left on open land.

Blackberries

Proper management of live Blackberry takes time and normally involves the use of herbicides, which is outside the scope of fire prevention requirements. Inappropriate management of a Blackberry infestation can make it worse.



Large patches of dead blackberry thickets may be treated as a fire hazard in the same manner as other large volume dead vegetation, but live blackberry infestations will not.

Everything else

Fire prevention legislation does not allow Council to regulate derelict buildings, vehicles, shipping containers, gas cylinders, discarded building materials, other "junk" items or any items inside a building.

Properly stored firewood piles are not a hazard unless placed directly against a neighbouring residential dwelling.

Snakes

Reporting the presence of snakes on overgrown land does not change our inspection process. We can still only action the potential hazards described here.

Where do I find more information?

- Visit Council's 'Fire' webpage www.wellington.vic.gov.au/fire
- Visit the CFA's 'Prepare your Property' webpage [How to Prepare Your Property | CFA \(Country Fire Authority\)](http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/How-to-Prepare-Your-Property)