

Preface

Bushfire Legal Help is a collaborative effort by legal service organisations who came together to provide free legal support to people affected by the February 2009 Victorian bushfires.

Bushfire Legal Help is made up of Victoria Legal Aid, Law Institute of Victoria, Federation of Community Legal Centres, Public Interest Law Clearing House (PILCH), Victorian Law Foundation and Victorian Bar.

This Handbook has been produced to help you sort out the many confusing legal problems that may arise at this time of grief and loss. We have endeavoured to make the Handbook a useful and easy-to-use resource that you can refer to. You will find information here about:

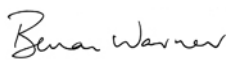
- bushfire related legal issues that might be important for you to consider
- when you may need to get professional help
- where to get that help
- other services and relief that may assist you.

The Bushfire Legal Help Handbook is a result of lengthy collaboration between Bushfire Legal Help partners. Staff from Victoria Legal Aid, PILCH, Law Institute of Victoria and members of the Federation of Community Legal Centres and the private profession generously contributed their time and expertise in producing this resource.

Our thanks go to the many people who worked so hard to bring this Handbook to you.

Particular thanks go to the staff at Victoria Legal Aid who co-ordinated the project, and to Victoria Law Foundation who provided assistance with funding and hosting this resource on the Bushfire Legal Help website.

We hope that this Handbook will provide assistance and support during this difficult time. The thoughts of Bushfire Legal Help remain with you and all Victorians who have lost so much in the bushfire disaster.



Bevan Warner
Bushfire Legal Help



Acknowledgements

The Bushfire Legal Handbook has resulted from collaboration between BLH partners, assisted by the pro bono expertise of many members of the private profession.

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- the Law Institute of Victoria, for liaising with their members who provided pro bono assistance and for providing relevant material and research assistance
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- the many staff who gave their time generously, from the following: the State Coroner's Office, the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, the Supreme Court Probate Office, Jobwatch, the Consumer Action Law Centre, Fitzroy Legal Service, the Tenant's Union of Victoria, Homeless Persons Legal Clinic, Russell Kennedy, Aitken Partners, Minter Ellison, Corrs Chambers Westgarth, DLA Phillips Fox, Holding Redlich, Herbert Geer, Mallesons Stephen Jaques, Minter Ellison, McKean Park Lawyers, Clayton Utz, Blake Dawson, Tourism Victoria, Consumer Affairs Victoria, Telstra.

We also thank the many agencies and organisations throughout Victoria, whose publically available information and services offered to bushfire affected people have been included in this handbook.

About this book

Who is this Handbook for?

This Handbook is for people affected by the February 2009 Victorian bushfires and for others who are helping them.

What is the purpose of this Handbook?

The Handbook provides an overview of some of the legal issues that you may face as a result of the bushfires, as well as services and relief that can assist you. You may be faced with many confusing legal problems at this time, such as dealing with insurers, destroyed wills or family law issues. This Handbook does not contain legal advice nor all of the law that may affect you. However, it may help you understand the basics about each area and when you may need professional help.

Remember, the law changes all the time and you should get legal advice about your particular situation. **See** 'Where to get help'.

What does the Handbook cover?

The Handbook contains chapters on:

- insurance
- property
- fencing
- family and relationships
- employment
- debt
- utilities
- renting
- victims of crime and other compensation
- Wills and estates
- Coroner's process
- 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission
- lost documents
- relief
- Where to get help.

What other help is available?

At this time of grief and loss you may feel overwhelmed when considering the legal and other issues you face. It is important that you get legal advice and other support. **See** the 'Where to get help' section at the back of the Handbook for services that can help you. The 'Relief' chapter also contains information about relief assistance currently being offered as well as relevant contact details.

For other legal information, call the Bushfire Legal Helpline on 1800 113 432. The Helpline can give you advice and referral to ongoing help from Victoria Legal Aid, community legal centres and private lawyers acting without a fee.

Where do I get this Handbook from?

This Handbook is available from www.bushfirelegalhelp.org.au. A limited number of printed copies are also available.

Individual fact sheets based on most areas of the Handbook are available in hardcopy and online. Visit www.bushfirelegalhelp.org.au for these fact sheets and other bushfire legal information.

You can order the hardcopy fact sheets or Handbook by emailing publication@vla.vic.gov.au or by calling 9269 0223.

DISCLAIMER

The information contained in this Bushfire Legal Help Handbook is designed and intended to provide general information on legal topics, current as at 1 June 2009. The contents do not constitute legal advice, are not intended as a substitute for legal advice and should not be relied on as such. You should get legal advice in relation to your individual circumstances and any particular matters you may have.

Jurisdiction for legal information

The legal information in this Bushfire Legal Help Handbook relates to the laws of Victoria, Australia and applicable laws of the Commonwealth, current at the time of first publication unless otherwise stated.

Limitation of liability

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