

# MessageMatrix



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## Bushfire shorts A snapshot of random goings on in the world of bushfire

### Bushfire implementation plan

The Victorian Coalition Government tabled the Bushfire Implementation Plan in Parliament in May. The plan details the progress and plans for implementing the 67 recommendations of the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission. The plan can be downloaded from [www.premier.vic.gov.au](http://www.premier.vic.gov.au)

Neil Comrie will oversee the plan in his role as Independent Bushfire Implementation Monitor.

### Powerlines

The draft report from the Powerline Safety Taskforce was released in early May. The release was followed by a series of community consultation meetings around Victoria, and was open for public comment until the end of June. The final report is due 30 September 2011.



### Black Saturday clean-up

The clean-up of properties destroyed or damaged in the Black Saturday bushfires is almost finished. Since March 2009, 2900 blocks have been cleared.

### Buy-back

The Victorian Government has allocated \$5million for the 2011/12 financial year (out of a total \$50million allocated last year) to fund the voluntary acquisition of properties where other mitigation measures are not feasible.

### Smoke tainted wine

Also in the 2011 Victorian budget was \$4million for the establishment of a Centre for Smoke Taint Research, to be set up in Mildura. The Centre will investigate the impacts of smoke on wine and how to mitigate the risks of smoke taint.

Scientists at DPI have also developed a smoke taint index for growers to determine which fruits are likely to be accepted or rejected by the market.

### Murrindindi fire findings

Police have concluded the Murrindindi bushfire was not deliberately lit. This means the fire (and subsequent deaths) can now be investigated by the Coroner.

### Smokey gene

Researchers at the University of Western Australia have discovered a gene that allows dormant seeds buried in soil to detect germination stimulants in bushfire smoke, called karrikins.

### Housing project

Habitat for Humanity, an international non-profit group that builds houses for poor people, is to build 25 houses in Yea for families affected by Black Saturday who do not have the financial or physical ability to otherwise do it themselves. Under the H4H model, families are expected to contribute 500 hours of their own time into building the house- known as 'sweat equity'.

### Wallow fire

A large fire burnt through north-east Arizona into New Mexico, resulting in numerous towns being evacuated. Suspected to have started from an unattended campfire, it burnt more than 2100km<sup>2</sup> and was the largest fire in Arizona's recorded history.

### Las Conchas

Another fire in New Mexico burnt into the Los Alamos National Laboratory, causing evacuations, closure of the lab, and fears of radiation leaks from the facility and plutonium waste stored onsite. Los Alamos was founded during WWII as a centralised facility to coordinate the research of the Manhattan Project, the Allied project to develop the first nuclear weapons. Today Los Alamos is one of the largest science and technology institutions in the world.

## The Joey report

From Nancy: Joey is now 12 weeks old and a bundle of fun, even in the dead of the night! The time has gone so fast and watching him develop is just amazing. He has just discovered his hands and feet belong to him which is funny to watch. He is now giving us

real smiles and has learnt how to giggle.

I am amazed that I can carry something for 9 months and it not look one bit like me! He really is his Daddy's boy.



# The Victorian Road Bushfire Risk Assessment Guidelines

by Rachel Thompson and Jon Boura

Terramatrix has been working with VicRoads to develop the Victorian Road Bushfire Risk Assessment Guidelines and a supporting risk assessment tool. The need for the Guidelines came as a response to recommendation 62 of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, which states:

VicRoads implement a systematic program of bushfire risk assessment for all roads for which it is responsible, to ensure conformity with the obligations in s.43 of the Country Fire Authority Act 1958 and with the objectives expressed in the VicRoads 1985 Code of Practice.

The Guidelines set four safety objectives for bushfire management on roads:

- Prevent fires on roadsides
- Contain roadside fires
- Manage safety of road users
- Provide control lines

The risk of fires starting on and spreading from the road reserve (objectives 1 and 2) are assessed and mapped via the Victorian Fire Risk Register (VFRR) – VicRoads Module. The methodology for the Module was designed by Terramatrix and developed in partnership with CFA, under the guidance of a multi-agency project team coordinated by VicRoads. The project team was made up of representatives from VicRoads, CFA, DSE, MAV and Victoria Police.



Bushfire on the Pacific Highway, NSW  
Photo courtesy of Martin Johnston

The Module assesses the likelihood of ignition and spread of fire beyond the road reserve, and the consequence of a fire on the road reserve and in the broader landscape.

Factors that influence likelihood and consequence were identified and a methodology developed in which contributing factors are rated and weighted to establish a prioritised list of roads classified into three groups according to level of risk. These are:

- Low risk roads where the level of bushfire risk does not warrant specific bushfire mitigation works;
- Moderate risk roads which will receive the standard suite of treatments which form part of the standard VicRoads maintenance program; and
- High risk roads which require detailed assessment and possibly additional fire risk mitigation treatments.

A prototype of the Module was developed in Excel for testing the conceptual design and business rules prior to building a GIS application. The prototype was used by CFA's VFRR team to build GIS layers, based on the Terramatrix methodology, and using datasets from within the VFRR or supplied by the road managers. A range of maps were produced representing the High, Moderate and Low risk roads. These maps were trialled with the IFMP planning committees at Regional and Municipal level in order to validate their accuracy. A road segment assessment and treatment selection tool was also developed and tested with the Shire of Yarra Ranges and East Gippsland Shire.

The trial of the Module was overall successful, and following minor amendments, maps are currently being produced to inform the road risk assessment process across the entire State. The application of the Guideline and Module to municipal roads is also currently being considered.

## The new Bushfire Management Overlay



Following recommendations made by the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission in their final report in 2010, the Victorian Government is currently reviewing the State Planning Provisions relating to bushfire. The Bushfire Planning Provisions Team has been established by the Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD) to respond to the VBRC recommendations on planning and building. One significant change is the replacement of the Wildfire Management Overlay (WMO) with a Bushfire Management Overlay (BMO). The application of the BMO will be informed by a new statewide bushfire hazard identification framework and mapping, being coordinated by the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE).

At this stage we do not know exactly what the changes will be or what impact they may have on a development application. We do, however, believe there may be significant changes to the assessment process and standard permit conditions under the new BMO. Planning applications assessed after the BMO comes into effect may need to have been developed using the new assessment process, even if the application was submitted prior to the BMO coming in.

DPCD will prepare the planning scheme amendments to introduce the bushfire overlay into planning schemes. It is anticipated the transition to the new overlay will take place around October 2011. Given the pending changes, Terramatrix has stopped accepting new WMO assessment projects until details on the changes are available.