

Relief Drinking Water Standard Operating Procedure

Frequently Asked Questions

How do I get my house water tank refilled with drinking water?

You may have emptied your household water tank for fire fighting or it may now contain ash or other contaminants. You could be eligible for a refill. This is known as 'relief drinking water.'

Relief drinking water can be supplied when:

- Supply of drinking water is not met by other relief services and support arrangements.
- The household is not on reticulated (town) water and relies on tank water for domestic use.
- The applicant occupies the property as a primary place of residence.
- Tank water is used for drinking and other domestic purposes.
- Tank water is not used primarily for agriculture, stock water and watering gardens.
- The household's water tank is contaminated due to the emergency and is located in the impacted area.
- Household's application is submitted by the due date where a due date is set by the program.

How do I apply to access relief drinking water?

Your local council, water corporation or nearest recovery hub can assist you.

For the major fires in January 2026:

Major fire	Region	Local council	Water corporation
Berrys Lane Longwood Fire	Hume	Murrindindi Shire Council Strathbogie Shire Council Mitchell Shire Council Mansfield Shire Council	Goulburn Valley Water
Walwa – River Road Fire	Hume	Towong Shire Council	North East Water
Harcourt (Ravenswood-Fogartys Gap Road Fire)	Loddon Mallee	Mount Alexander Shire Council	Coliban Water
Streatham (Yalla-Y-Poora Road Fire)	Grampians	Corangamite Shire Council Pyrenees Shire Council Ararat Rural City	Grampians Wimmera Mallee Water (Streatham and surrounds) Central Highlands Water (Skipton and surrounds)

Or complete the form at the end of this document and email water.recovery@deeca.vic.gov.au and sccvic.water@scc.vic.gov.au

We will also be communicating the program through social media, water corporations and other means.

How long after an emergency can relief drinking water be supplied?

The aim of this program is to supply drinking water for an impacted community within three weeks after a decision is made to commence the program. For the January 2026 fire, we anticipate the program will run until at least 6 February 2026.

The community program can be extended to include delivery to households who return to properties later.

What relief drinking water service is provided?

Each eligible household will receive up to 20,000L of relief drinking water for essential use. Tanks can be drained before filling to ensure clean water is in the tank.

What areas are eligible for relief drinking water?

A bushfire affected area is where water-bombing activities have occurred, and fire retardants, ash or debris have fallen directly onto properties. If you live in a bushfire affected area your private drinking water could be contaminated from debris, ash, dead animals, aerial fire retardants and water-bombing. If the water tastes, looks or smells unusual, do not drink, use for food preparation, brushing teeth or give to animals (pets or livestock). Use bottled water for drinking and apply for relief drinking water.

A map will be prepared that defines the area where household tank contamination has reached a level not suitable for drinking and domestic use. In the case of bushfire, the map will include the area directly burnt by the fire plus it may include an additional zone where smoke carrying ash and soot caused contamination of tank water. Even if a map has not been prepared for your area yet, you're still encouraged to apply for relief drinking water.

In non-bushfire affected areas, smoke tainted rainwater is unlikely to be a health concern. If you are concerned about the taste of your rainwater, use bottled water for drinking and continue to use your rainwater for other uses.

The roof and gutters are contaminated by bushfire and soot – is gutter cleaning included?

No. Cleaning rooftops contaminated by bushfire ash and soot is the households responsibility.

For more information see <https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/HealthyLiving/bushfires-and-water-tanks>

After a fire: private drinking water and water tank safety - translated information.

How do I know if my tank is contaminated?

The signs of water contamination include your water looking, smelling or tasting unusual. Do not use the water for drinking or food preparation. Do not give water to animals.

Boiling water does not remove fire retardants or other chemicals from your water.

Do not reconnect tanks until:

- the rooftop is clean
- the bushfire has passed
- the smoke has subsided.

What should I do to protect my tank after bushfire?

If you did not disconnect your downpipes before the bushfire passed, disconnect them as soon as possible. You can also:

- activate the first flush diverters
- block the inlet to the downpipes with waxed cardboard boxes or thick plastic.

Before reconnecting or opening the inlet to your downpipes, you should either:

- hose off your roof catchment area
- clean or wait for a good period of rain to flush and prevent contaminants from entering your tank.

Always take care when cleaning your roof manually. Finding a professional cleaner is a good option.

Where can I find out about other relief and recovery offerings?

Relief and recovery support is available for people impacted by the January 2026 Victorian bushfires. Visit Emergency Recovery Victoria: vic.gov.au/january-2026-victorian-bushfires

I cannot return home or my tank has been lost in the fire, where can I access drinking water?

Households who require immediate access to drinking water should contact the emergency relief centres in the affected area.

Households that have lost their drinking water tank in the emergency should contact a recovery support worker via a local Recovery Hub, or call 1800 560 760 for guidance on accessing financial support, including rebates for damaged tank systems. Eligibility criteria apply.

I need more than 20,000L – where can I access additional water?

If you have run out of tank water, you can access designated Emergency Water Supply Points (EWSP), which are typically council bores or water corporation standpipes.

How to Access: Locate your nearest EWSP using the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) [interactive map](#).

Permits: You may need to contact your local council (e.g. Pyrenees Shire Council) to obtain a permit for access, allowing them to monitor water levels and ensure sustainability.

Costs: While some water is provided, costs may apply for commercial use or at certain standpipes.

The government has a [drought relief package](#), which includes subsidies for water carting.

Where can I get more help?

- Your local water [corporation](#).
- Environmental health section of your [local council](#) – for local water carters or tank cleaners
- [EPA Victoria's Fire retardants and health publication 1721](#) – for further information on fire retardants
- [VicEmergency](#) Tel. 1800 226 226 – for general information on fires in Victoria
- For more information about private drinking water supplies:
 - [Victorian Department of Health – Your private drinking water supply](#)
 - [Health – Guidance on use of rainwater tanks](#)

Water was taken from my property for fire fighting – how can I get it replaced?

The Essential Water Replacement After Bushfire scheme helps to relieve hardship in the community by replenishing essential private water supplies that have been used by fire services during bushfire emergencies.

The Victorian Government has a policy regarding replacing essential water used during bushfire fighting operations.

- [Essential water policy \(PDF, 461.5 KB\)](#)
- [Essential water policy \(accessible\) \(DOCX, 778.4 KB\)](#)

CFA and Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMV) firefighters have the legislative powers to take water from any waterway or water source for firefighting purposes.

The water owner can request replacement of essential water under this scheme.

The water replacement scheme recognises that, while farmers understand the urgency of firefighting, their basic water interests have to be protected too.

If taken for firefighting purposes, a reasonable and sufficient volume of essential water will be provided to sustain the:

- health of affected residences and pets
- health and productivity of stock.

To lodge a request for essential water replacement, download and complete the Essential Water Replacement form, then email it to emergency.recovery@deeca.vic.gov.au.

- [Essential water replacement form \(PDF, 85.4 KB\)](#)
- [Essential water replacement form \(accessible\) \(DOCX, 148.7 KB\)](#)

Your local council, DEECA or CFA Office can assist you with lodgement if required.

Essential Water Replacement requests must be submitted within 3 months of the essential water being taken for bushfire fighting operations.

I am a Primary Producer, can I use a grant to replace my tank?

The Albanese and Allan Labor Governments will deliver close to [\\$100 million in additional support](#) for the recovery of communities and businesses across Victoria devastated by bushfires.

Primary Producer Recovery Grants

Primary producers are the backbone of local economies and their recovery is critical after the devastation of these bushfires.

An initial \$40 million in grants of up to \$75,000 will be provided to eligible primary producers, to help cover the costs of clean-up and reinstating their enterprises.

Funding can be used for essential recovery activities such as disposing of livestock, rebuilding or replacing damaged on-farm infrastructure and restoring operations. Water infrastructure associated with the farm business is considered equipment so would be included.

Grants will open as soon as possible and will be delivered by Rural Finance. Information on eligibility and how to apply will be available at ruralfinance.com.au.

Relief drinking water replacement request / authorisation form

LANDHOLDER TO COMPLETE		
Name:		
Address:		
Phone Number:		
Email:		
Fire Name (if known):		
Municipality:		
Details of drinking water required:		Date:
Location of water source		Quantity of essential water required in units (litres) Must be less than 20,000L

Submit this form to: water.recovery@deeca.vic.gov.au

Note: relief drinking water is only available for household use in fire impacted areas not on reticulated (town) water and the home relies on the tank water for domestic use.

Requests must be submitted within the eligible period for the fire.

DEECA/WATER CORPORATION USE ONLY			
Property in eligible area and timeframe?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO	Confirmed by/Role/Agency:	Date:
Drinking water?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO		
Volume of water			

Approved requests to be sent to relevant municipality or water corporation managing supply

MUNICIPALITY OR WATER CORPORATION USE ONLY			
Date request submitted:		Date of delivery:	
Name of water supplier:			
Name of water carter:			
Landholder advised?	<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO		
Volume of water delivered:			
Water delivery confirmed:	Name:	Signature: <i>(Sign or insert digital signature below)</i>	Date:
<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO			

Send water carter invoice (for cartage only) to: water.recovery@deeca.vic.gov.au