



Fire Recovery Unit

Fire Recovery Housing Survey 2012



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1 Executive Summary

In the first half of 2012, the Fire Recovery Unit conducted a Housing Survey Project with the objective of collecting accurate information on the current housing status, intentions, and rebuilding progress of individuals and households who lost their principal place of residence in the 2009 Victorian bushfires.

The project involved three exercises designed to address this objective:

- The collation of existing data from relevant government agencies.
- A telephone survey of 750 households conducted in May and June 2012. Households were contacted where existing data did not provide sufficient information to determine their current housing status.
- A postal survey of 142 households whose status was unable to be determined using the above two methods. This part of the survey commenced in July 2012.

The project comprehensively documents the current housing status of bushfire-affected households. Of the 1569 households targeted by the project, detailed information of the current housing status of 1,380 households has been obtained. The key findings of the survey are:

- Since February 2011, the number of households that have rebuilt, purchased a new property, or begun the process of rebuilding has increased from 77% to 87%.
- 81% of households are now in permanent accommodation, having either rebuilt, purchased a new property, or relocated into alternative housing arrangements.
- 19% of households remain in temporary accommodation, either in offsite arrangements or in temporary arrangements on their fire-affected property.
- 72% of these households in temporary accommodation are either in the process of rebuilding or intending to rebuild.
- 73% of households now in permanent accommodation have remained within the same Local Government Area.

The following report summarises the key findings and conclusions arising from this project. All data analysis has been undertaken by the Fire Recovery Unit.



2 Background

In November 2011, the State Government extended its planning exemption for people living in temporary accommodation on their land as a result of the 2009 Victorian bushfires. This amendment, which affects Clause 52.38 of the temporary planning scheme controls introduced in the aftermath of the bushfires, gives those living in temporary accommodation until 30 April 2013 to move into permanent accommodation or seek planning permits for their temporary dwellings.

As a result of this extension to planning exemptions, the Fire Recovery Unit commenced a Housing Survey Project to update information on the current housing status of each household that lost their principal place of residence¹ in the bushfires, with a focus on assessing the number of households currently in temporary accommodation, either on their bushfire-affected property or at an alternative location.

The completed housing survey provides a broad set of data to identify the housing status of households where the principal place of residence was destroyed, as well as the rehousing intentions for properties where the residents remain in temporary accommodation.

Previous surveys were undertaken by the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority (VBRRRA) in August 2010 and February 2011.

¹ “Principal place of residence” is defined as a residential dwelling or unit where the owner permanently resided on the property at the time of the bushfires, and the status was verified by the State Government (refer to 3.1 for more information)



3 Methodology

3.1 *Establishment of the Housing Survey Property Database*

The Housing Survey utilised a database of destroyed principal places of residence, informed primarily by records created by the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority and based on information collected via the Grocon-managed clean-up operation, the Department of Human Services' case management service and bushfire housing service, the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund (VBAF), and Rapid Impact Assessments undertaken in the immediate aftermath of the bushfires.

Throughout the course of the project, the number of destroyed principal places of residence was further refined to a final list of 1569 addresses.

3.2 *Housing Survey Stage One – Data Collection and Coordination*

In order to minimise the number of people required to be directly contacted by the Housing Survey, the Fire Recovery Unit conducted an extensive review of available data to determine (where possible) the current status of each household who lost their principal place of residence. The data reviewed included building permit and certificate of occupancy information, previous survey results collected by VBRRRA, sales data, and information from the Bushfire Housing Service. Additional information was sourced from the Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD) Rebuilding Advisory Service.

3.3 *Housing Survey Stage Two – Telephone Survey*

Following a review of the available data, the Fire Recovery Unit confirmed those addresses where the housing status or future intentions remained unclear. It was determined that this list of approximately 750 addresses would need to be contacted directly as part of stage two.

Prior to commencing the survey, a privacy collection notice was sent to the 750 addresses. Households were given the option to contact the Fire Recovery Unit to be removed from the survey call list if they did not wish to participate.

The Fire Recovery Unit engaged Information Victoria (Department of Business and Innovation) to undertake the survey, with calls made between 21 May and 8 June 2012.

The phone survey was conducted in accordance with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research. Compliance with the Information Privacy Act 2000 and DPCD's Information Privacy Policy was also reviewed.

Information Victoria staff were briefed prior to commencing the survey, and received training by the Red Cross in basic personal support to ensure that the survey was undertaken in an informed and compassionate manner. The Red Cross also provided experienced emergency recovery staff who sat with call centre staff throughout the survey period, assisting with complex calls that required additional personal support and ensuring call centre staff were likewise supported.

3.4 *Housing Survey Stage Three – Postal Survey*

To seek to determine the status of households remaining unknown after the phone survey, a paper survey was posted during July to 142 households where previous mail to the household address had not been returned. Those households who specifically declined to participate in the phone survey were excluded from the paper survey.

Early responses to the paper survey have been incorporated into the results of this report.



4 Results and Key Findings – All Data

4.1 Permanent and Temporary Accommodation

The current housing status of households has been broadly categorised into permanent or temporary accommodation. Permanent accommodation includes housing solutions such as completed rebuilds, the purchase or construction of new dwellings, long-term rental arrangements and alternative solutions such as aged care facilities and long-term overseas or interstate relocation. Temporary accommodation is defined as households currently in short-term housing solutions and seeking one of the permanent housing solutions outlined above.

Key Finding: The survey has confirmed that 81% of households where the principal place of residence was destroyed in the bushfires now reside in permanent accommodation.

Number and Percentage of Households Categorised by Status

Status	Number of Households	Percentage
Permanent	1112	80.6%
Temporary	268	19.4%
Subtotal	1380	100%
Unknown	189	-
Overall Total	1569	-



4.2 Comparison Against Previous 2011 Housing Survey

In February 2011, the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority undertook a survey of households based on recipients of the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund Destroyed Dwelling Gift.

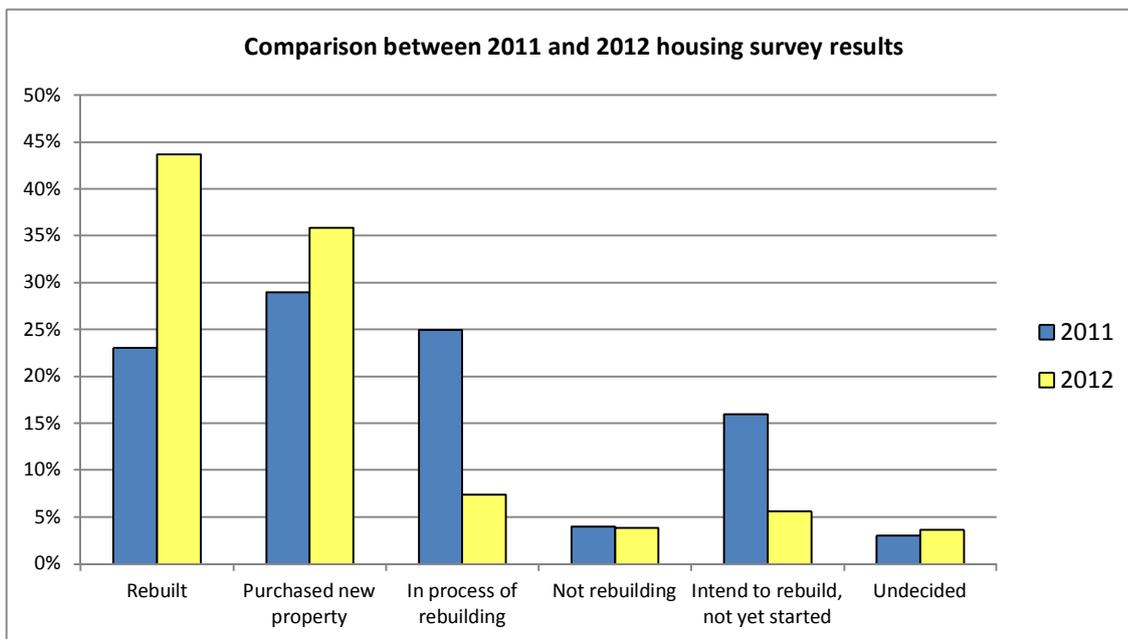
Key Finding: By February 2011, 77% of households who lost their principal place of residence had either rebuilt, purchased a new property, or were in the process of rebuilding. In July 2012, this figure has increased to 87%. This figure increases to 91% if the 3.8% of people who have decided not to rebuild but are in other arrangements, such as long-term rentals, are also included.

Percentage of Households by Status Category

Status	February 2011 (1524 households)		July 2012 (1569 households)	
Rebuilt	23%		43.7%	
Purchased new property*	29%	77%	35.9% *	87.0%
In process of rebuilding	25%		7.4%	90.8%
Not rebuilding	4%		3.8% **	
Intend to rebuild but not yet started	16%		5.6%	
Undecided	3%		3.6%	

*includes alternative arrangements for permanent accommodation including aged-care facilities.

** includes long term rental, people living with family or friends in an ongoing capacity, or those who have relocated interstate or overseas





5 Results and Key Findings – Households in Permanent Accommodation

5.1 Permanent Accommodation - Location

The survey traced the movement across Local Government Areas (LGAs) of those households who have secured permanent accommodation.

Key Finding: Of those permanently accommodated households where the current housing location is known, 73% (726 households) have either rebuilt onsite or secured alternative accommodation within the same Local Government Area.

Number and Percentage of Permanent Households Categorised by LGA Location

Status	Number of Households	Percentage	
Rebuilt Onsite	602	60.8%	73.3%
Relocated within LGA	124	12.5%	
Relocated outside LGA	264	26.7%	
Subtotal	990	100%	
New postcode not identified	122	-	
Overall Total	1112	-	



6 Results and Key Findings – Households in Temporary Accommodation

6.1 Households Living in Temporary Accommodation – Intentions

One of the key objectives of the housing survey was to accurately record the rehousing intentions for properties where the residents still remained in temporary accommodation. Households currently in temporary accommodation have been the focus of recent support services aimed at assisting people into permanent accommodation, such as the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund - Further Housing Assistance Gift.

Key Finding: 72% of households in temporary accommodation are either in the process of rebuilding or intending to rebuild.

Number and Percentage of Temporary Households Categorised by Intention

Intention	Number of Households	Percentage
Currently Rebuilding	102	38.1%
Intend to rebuild, not yet started	86	32.1%
Converting temporary structure into permanent dwelling	4	1.5%
Not rebuilding, seeking alternative arrangements	12	4.5%
Undecided	64	23.9%
Total	268	100%

71.9%



6.2 Households Living in Temporary Accommodation – Households Living Onsite – Intentions

As well as housing status, the survey has sought to ascertain the rehousing progress and intentions of households currently residing in temporary accommodation on their fire-affected property. Households currently residing in these arrangements are subject to the temporary planning scheme controls brought in after the bushfires, which expire on 30 April 2013. These arrangements allow for the use of temporary accommodation on bushfire-affected properties while people transition into permanent accommodation or seek planning permits for their temporary dwellings.

Key Finding: A large majority of households (82%) in temporary accommodation onsite are either in the process of rebuilding or intending to rebuild. There are 74 households living onsite who are yet to commence rebuilding or who are undecided about their future housing arrangements.

Number and Percentage of Temporary Households (Onsite) Categorised by Intention

Intention	Number of Households	Percentage	
Currently Rebuilding	64	44.4%	81.9 %
Intend to rebuild, not yet started	50	34.7%	
Converting temporary structure into permanent dwelling	4	2.8%	
Not rebuilding, seeking alternative arrangements	2	1.4%	
Undecided	24	16.7%	
Total	144	100%	



6.3 Households Living in Temporary Accommodation – Households Living Offsite - Intentions

There are 124 households currently in temporary accommodation away from their fire-affected land (offsite). The majority of these households are in rental arrangements elsewhere, or living with family or friends. The majority of households living in temporary accommodation away from their block are considered to be living in stable housing solutions, such as in rental properties, however these arrangements may not meet the long-term housing aspirations of these households.

Key Finding: The percentage of households living in offsite temporary accommodation who are undecided about their future housing arrangements (32%) is significantly higher than the percentage of households living in onsite temporary accommodation who are undecided about their future housing arrangements (17% - see 6.2). This may be reflective of the stable arrangements of their current accommodation (ie rental) and that their decision timelines are not subject to the temporary accommodation provisions.

Number and Percentage of Temporary Households (Offsite) Categorised by Intention

Intention	Number of Households	Percentage
Currently Rebuilding	38	30.6%
Intend to rebuild, not yet started	36	29.0%
Converting temporary structure into permanent dwelling	0	0.0%
Not rebuilding, seeking alternative arrangements	10	8.1%
Undecided	40	32.3%
Total	124	100%

7 Other Outcomes of the Telephone Survey

Between 21 May and 8 June 2012, Information Victoria within the Department of Business and Innovation undertook a telephone survey of 750 households on behalf of the Fire Recovery Unit. The survey targeted those households where the housing status or future housing intentions remained unclear from available data.

In addition to contributing to more accurate data, the housing survey provided an opportunity to refer relevant households to available services and support programs. Call centre staff reported that respondents were generally appreciative of the opportunity to undertake the survey, and grateful for the opportunity to access referral pathways provided during the survey.

Of the households contacted, there were 90 referrals to the Fire Recovery Unit, 12 referrals to the Rebuilding Advisory Service (RAS), 16 referrals to Red Cross, and over 300 new subscriptions to the Fire Recovery Unit monthly newsletter.