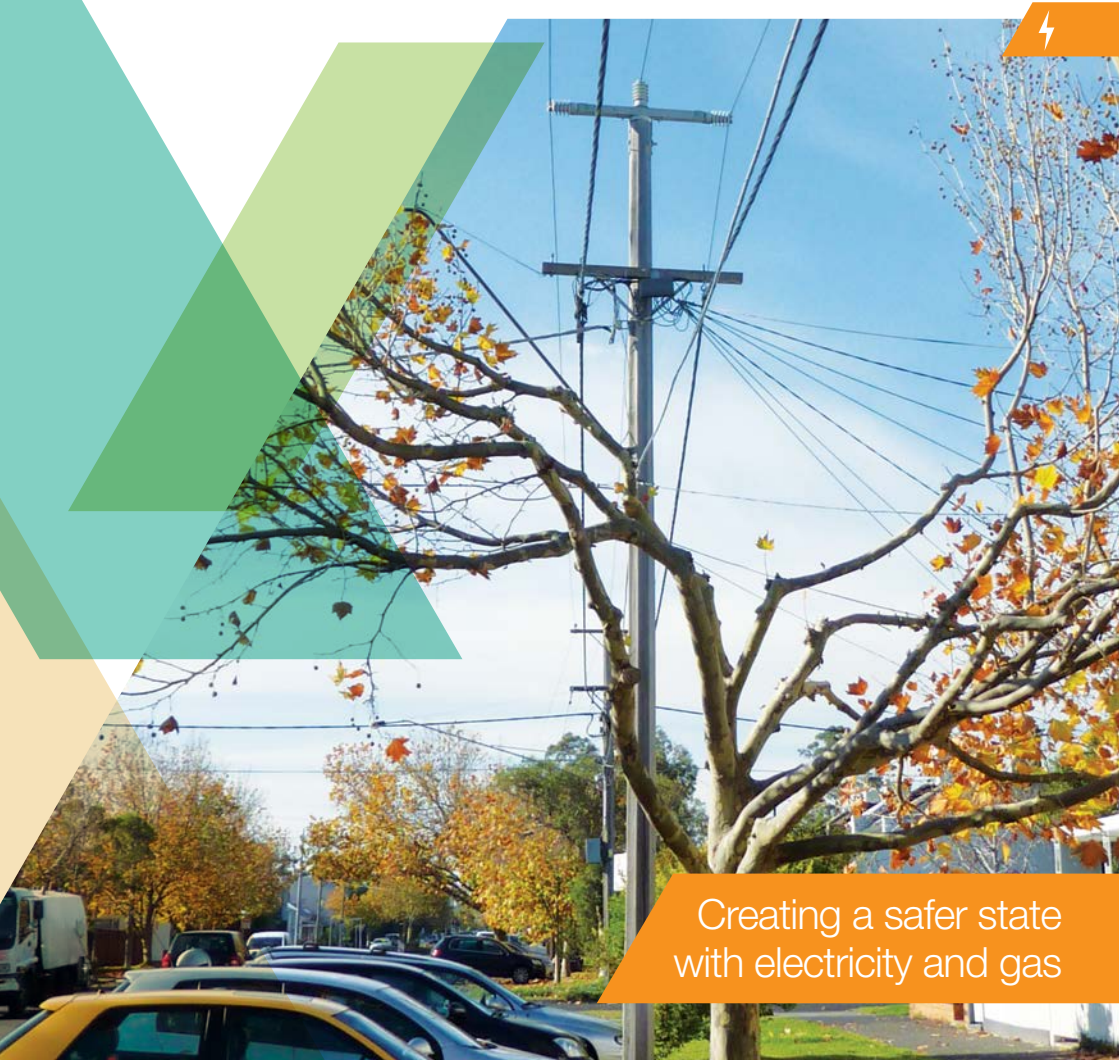


Powerlines and vegetation management

A guide to rights and responsibilities



Creating a safer state
with electricity and gas

Trees are an integral part of Victoria's streetscape but they can pose a threat to community safety if they grow too close to **powerlines.**

Vegetation failure and environmental conditions such as strong winds can cause powerlines to clash, cutting power to your home, starting a fire or causing the powerline to fall to the ground where it could injure or electrocute someone.

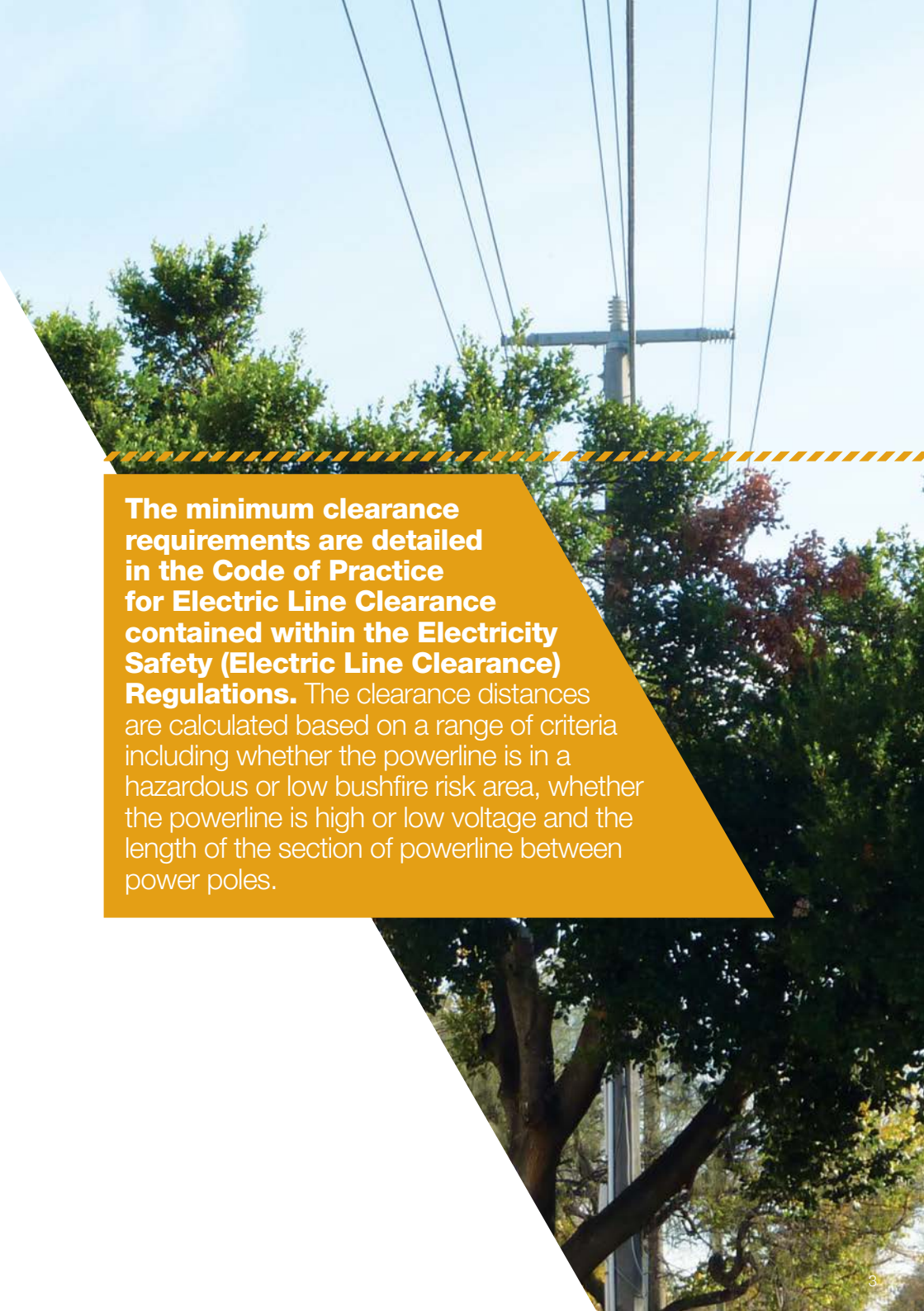
Each year, hundreds of homes and properties experience power outages were caused by vegetation impacting powerlines. This is not only inconvenient and dangerous, it adds to the cost of your power bill so Victoria has Regulations in place to ensure that vegetation is kept a safe distance from powerlines.

This guide has been prepared to explain what you need to know about powerline clearance: who is responsible; why it's important; the rules and Regulations that govern it; and the processes that are in place to ensure that safety can be balanced with amenity.

Vegetation around powerlines is largely managed by the electricity distribution businesses or local councils, depending on where you live and the location of the trees being managed. You can find your local distribution business at www.dpi.vic.gov.au/energy/electricity/electricity-distributors.

Regulations require councils and the distribution businesses to prepare and make publicly available an annual Electric Line Clearance Management Plan, which details how they will go about their clearance work. Property owners are responsible for ensuring vegetation is kept clear of low voltage powerlines on their land, but don't need to produce a plan.

The electrical distribution businesses are required to submit their plans to Energy Safe Victoria (ESV) for approval each year. ESV is the independent regulator responsible for ensuring the safety of the state's electricity, gas and pipeline infrastructure.



The minimum clearance requirements are detailed in the Code of Practice for Electric Line Clearance contained within the Electricity Safety (Electric Line Clearance) Regulations.

The clearance distances are calculated based on a range of criteria including whether the powerline is in a hazardous or low bushfire risk area, whether the powerline is high or low voltage and the length of the section of powerline between power poles.



While the Code details minimum clearances that must be maintained, it isn't a **'one size fits all'** system. On application from a council or distribution business, ESV may approve variations to the clearance distances specified in the Code, provided a safe outcome can be achieved.

This allows for amenity to be taken into consideration in particular locations, provided this can be adequately balanced with safety. This is assessed by ESV on a case-by-case basis.

You can find a copy of the Code on ESV's website at www.esv.vic.gov.au.

Where amenity is an issue, ESV encourages councils and the distribution businesses to undertake extensive consultation with the affected party or communities and together explore the various options available, giving consideration to the use of technical solutions, to resolve clearance issues.

It is also important to ensure that vegetation cutting takes into consideration arboreal standards so that the long-term health and viability of the tree isn't compromised.

The Code requires the Electric Line Clearance Management Plans prepared by councils and the distribution businesses to specify how they will notify and consult with affected persons on vegetation cutting or removal on both public land and private property.

Under normal conditions, **notice is required to be given at least 14 days, and not more than 60 days, prior to work commencing** either in writing or via publication in a newspaper circulating in the area. This is to provide affected persons the opportunity to explore other solutions to achieve the required safety outcomes.

The notice should contain the contact details of the responsible person should you have any concerns or queries.



The Code also requires the Electric Line Clearance Management Plan to detail the dispute resolution process to be followed if agreement cannot be reached.

If negotiations with a distribution business fail to achieve a satisfactory outcome, the matter can be referred to the Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria) (EWOV) via phone on **1800 500 509** or via the website at **www.ewov.com.au**. Issues with councils that can't be resolved should be referred to ESV at **www.esv.vic.gov.au**.

Legislation also contains requirements relating to the identification of trees that are hazardous to electric lines where they are likely to fall onto or otherwise come into contact with an electric line. Councils must, in their Municipal Fire Prevention Plans, specify procedures and criteria for both the identification and notification of hazard trees. Where a person identifies a hazard tree the person responsible for maintaining the clearance space may cut or remove the tree provided that it has been assessed and confirmed hazardous by a suitably qualified arborist.

While the Code details minimum clearances that must be maintained, it isn't a 'one size fits all' system.



Trees on private property

Trees on your property must be kept clear of powerlines and the home occupier is responsible for this.

You are responsible for the cutting of any trees on your property that may interfere with your own electric service line or private electric line, or a private electric line on an adjoining property.

Trees near other electric lines that cross your boundary or trees within your property near the electric lines in the street are the responsibility of the electricity distribution company. See diagrams below.

For safety reasons it is recommended that trees be cut before they grow to within 1m of an insulated electric service line and 2m of a bare wire electric service line.

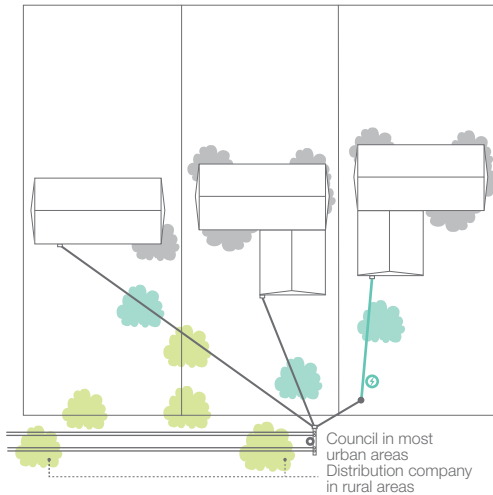
If the trees are closer than the clearances above, or if cutting may cause any branches to fall onto electric lines, do not cut them yourself but contact a trained and experienced expert in vegetation management.

Legislation authorises electricity distribution companies to enter your property to inspect and maintain electric lines.



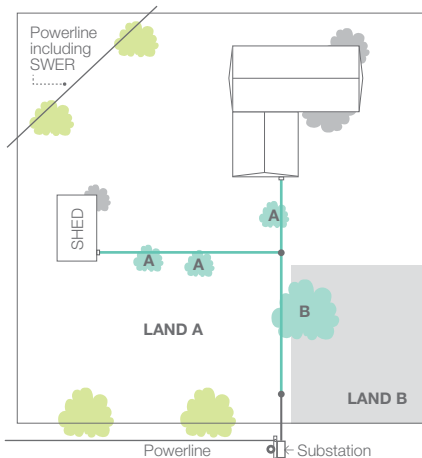
Never cut trees near powerlines yourself— always hire a trained and experienced expert in vegetation management.

Plant only suitable species of trees that do not interfere with powerlines. Advice can be sought from your distribution company.



Key

-  Owner/occupier
-  Distribution company
-  Private electric line
-  This situation is more common in rural areas
-  Service line
-  Pole
-  Owner/occupier Land A
-  Owner/occupier Land B



Your questions answered

Why do you have to clear vegetation from powerlines?

It's about your safety and ensuring that vegetation doesn't cause your electricity supply to be disrupted. If vegetation gets too close to a powerline, you could lose power, expensive household electrical items may be damaged, industry may be disrupted, or the powerline could fall to the ground and injure or electrocute someone, or cause a fire. This is very important during high wind or storms.

Who is responsible for tree clearance in my suburb?

Depending on where you live and the location of the trees it could be your council or one of the electricity distribution businesses—CitiPower, Powercor, AusNet Services, Jemena, United Energy, or a contractor working on their behalf.

Home occupiers are responsible for ensuring trees on their property are kept a safe distance from powerlines. They are advised to seek advice from a suitably trained and experienced professional on vegetation management.

Questions?

If you're unsure who is doing the tree clearance in your street or town, ask your local council or electricity distributor.

City and inner suburbs

CitiPower
1300 301 101

Western suburbs and western Victoria

Powercor
13 22 06

Outer northern and eastern suburbs and eastern Victoria

AusNet Services
1300 360 795

Northern and north-western suburbs

Jemena
1300 131 871

Southern suburbs and Mornington Peninsula

United Energy
1300 131 689



Do councils and electricity distributors cut trees according to the same rules?

Yes. The clearance requirements are detailed in the Code, which stipulates the minimum clearance distances that must be maintained to ensure safety, based on a range of criteria. This includes whether the powerline is in a hazardous or low bushfire risk area (the majority of urban areas are classified as low risk), whether the powerline is high or low voltage and the length of the section of powerline between power poles. How regularly they are going to return to cut the vegetation is also a significant factor in determining how much is to be cut. This is determined by the party responsible. Distribution businesses operate on a two or three-year cutting cycle and should shorten it when required. Most councils operate on a two-year cycle, shortening it as required to reduce the extent of pruning.

Councils and distribution businesses are legally required to ensure that vegetation stays outside the mandated clearance zone, but where there are trees of significance they can apply to ESV for a variation to the default clearance distances provided a safe outcome can be achieved. This is assessed by ESV on a case-by-case basis.

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Councils and distribution businesses are legally required to ensure that vegetation stays outside the mandated clearance zone, but where there are trees of significance they can apply to ESV for a variation provided a safe outcome can be achieved.

My street has a tree of historical significance. Does it have to be pruned?

Yes, all vegetation must be kept a safe distance from powerlines but there are ways this can be done while preserving the amenity of significant trees or streetscapes.

Councils and distribution businesses prepare Electric Line Clearance Management Plans and these require them to consider the cultural or environmental impact of the proposed work. Trees of historical significance can be assessed on a case-by-case basis to ensure a balance between safety and amenity. Options to preserve the amenity of trees include more regular pruning, a technical solution or a variation to the Code approved by ESV.

Where no other alternatives are available, the person responsible for undertaking the clearance can apply to ESV for a variation to the Code's default clearance distances.

Electric Line Clearance Management Plans allow affected persons to negotiate with councils and distribution businesses to establish conditions under which other solutions may be used. These plans are required to be available for inspection by the public at the party's principal office.

Do they have to let me know before they start work on trees in my neighbourhood?

Yes, the party doing the vegetation management work is required to notify affected persons about the cutting or removal of trees. Under normal conditions a notice is required to be given at least 14 days and not more than 60 days prior to work commencing either in writing or via publication in a newspaper circulating in the area.

The notice should contain the name and details of the person you should contact if you have any concerns or queries.



What do I do if I'm not happy with proposed work on trees in my neighbourhood?

The councils and distribution businesses have dispute resolution processes outlined in their Electric Line Clearance Management Plans.

You should first contact the company or person named in the notice to affected persons. Notice is usually given in writing or via publication in a newspaper circulating in the area.

Every attempt should be made to settle the dispute with this point of contact. The dispute resolution process outlined in the Electric Line Clearance Management Plan should contain escalation provisions.

If agreement is still not reached, the parties in the dispute may choose to refer the case to the Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria) (EWOV) or ESV. A complaint about a distribution business can be lodged to EWOV by phoning 1800 500 509 or via the website at www.ewov.com.au or a complaint about a council can be lodged with ESV at www.esv.vic.gov.au.

Quick contacts

Complaints about distribution businesses can be lodged with EWOV by phoning **1800 500 509** or via www.ewov.com.au
Complaints about councils can be lodged with ESV at www.esv.vic.gov.au.



Trees growing into powerlines could cut power to your home, start a fire or cause the powerline to fall to the ground where it could injure or electrocute someone.

How do I get a tree assessed on a case-by-case basis?

The first step is to ensure that any trees of cultural or environmental significance are listed by your council on its register of historic or significant trees. You should contact your local council for further information in relation to the registration process. The person responsible for undertaking the clearance work is required to check this register and identify trees of significance before starting work and, as far as practical, restrict cutting or removal. The distribution businesses also have a significant tree register as part of their Electric Line Clearance Management Plans. You should contact the distribution business that operates in your area to discuss if a specific tree or streetscape exists on its significant tree register. If the tree in question is not on a register you should approach your council or distribution business to discuss this. If you are not happy with the response you receive you may choose to refer the matter to the Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria) (EWOV) or ESV.

A complaint can be lodged to EWOV by phoning **1800 500 509** or via the website at **www.ewov.com.au** or to ESV at **www.esv.vic.gov.au**.

How do clearance requirements differ between areas of hazardous and low bushfire risk?

Most residential areas are classified as low bushfire risk for the purposes of vegetation management. The clearance requirements stipulated in the Code are quite different for hazardous and low bushfire risk areas. For example, the minimum clearance distance for a typical, bare low voltage powerline (up to 45m span length) in a low bushfire risk area would be 1000mm whereas the same powerline in a hazardous bushfire risk area would require 1500mm plus an allowance for the movement of the powerline, which could be an additional 1000mm. To maintain this minimum clearance, additional pruning is required to cater for regrowth of vegetation, this being dependent on the type of vegetation, environmental conditions and frequency of the cutting cycle. Accordingly, the longer the inspection and maintenance cycles, the greater the amount of cutting required.

Have the cutting requirements become more stringent since Black Saturday?

No. Changes to the clearance regulations in 2010 altered the way clearances in areas of low bushfire risk were calculated to be generally less than before. Previously “sag and sway” of the powerline had to be factored in on a case-by-case basis for both low and hazardous bushfire risk areas, but the new regulations included this in the amended clearance figures. This made it easier for councils to comply.

Tip

Where amenity is an issue, ESV encourages councils and the distribution businesses to consider reducing the pruning cycle or use of technical solutions, provided safety outcomes can be achieved. ESV can assist.

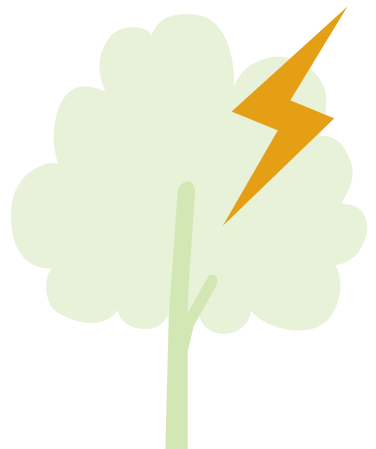
A story in our local paper said trees needed to be cleared in the suburbs because of bushfire risk. Is this true?

No. The regulations and Code clearance requirements did not change as a result of the 2009 bushfires and the State Government's implementation of bushfire reduction initiatives. Adequate clearance between vegetation and powerlines is vital to ensure community safety and reliability of supply. It is not about bushfire risk in the majority of suburban areas.

What do I do if I think there is a tree that might fall into an electric line?

Contact the person responsible for maintaining the clearance space around the electric line and advise them of the hazardous tree.

If you are not satisfied with their response you may choose to refer the matter to the Energy and Water Ombudsman (Victoria) (EWOV) or ESV. A complaint can be lodged to EWOV by phoning **1800 500 509** or via the website at www.ewov.com.au or to ESV at www.esv.vic.gov.au.







 **Quick contacts**

Energy and Water
Ombudsman (Victoria)

1800 500 509

www.ewov.com.au

Energy Safe Victoria

www.esv.vic.gov.au

For further information go to
www.esv.vic.gov.au or phone
ESV on **(03) 9203 9700**.

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4 Riverside Quay
Southbank VIC 3006

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