FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

If there is a bushfire, is it safe to fight a fire if we have transmission lines on our property?

There is no specific CFA direction that says you can't fight fires if you have transmission lines on your property.

In the case of a bushfire response, an assessment will be made by the Incident Controller - and if it is considered safe to do so, responding crews can operate near transmission lines. Firefighters receive training on the control measures for fighting fires near transmission lines. Victoria's fire authorities also have appropriate policies and operational procedures in place.

CFA operational procedures advise not to directly attack fires in transmission line easement areas and crew members should maintain a safe working distance of at least 25 metres from lines or outside of easement areas, whichever is greater.

Is it true that "you can't chase a fire onto an easement"?

CFA operational procedures advise not to directly attack fires in transmission line easement areas. On transmission line easements, other methods of firefighting, such as indirect attack, parallel attack, or aerial attack will be considered.

As part of the initial size-up and ongoing review of the situation, an Incident Controller is encouraged to consider a 'safe person approach' and to conduct an ongoing 'dynamic risk assessment'.
If an Incident Controller considered it too dangerous to go onto an easement, that decision would be supported. Equally, if an Incident Controller assessed it to be safe, that would also be valid and supported.

The conditions of the easements themselves will vary – some may have livestock grazing underneath, some may have uncut grass etc. Working on a fireground is a dynamic situation.

How close can we get to transmission lines when fighting a fire?

The CFA operational procedures states that crew members should maintain a safe working distance of at least 25 metres from lines.

In the interests of safety, it is recommended to maintain a minimum distance of 25 metres from transmission lines or a distance outside of easement area if greater, when fighting fires. Smoke from fires near or under transmission lines can also create electrical arcs or flashovers. Flashovers are potentially life threatening to someone standing nearby.

If the power is isolated and the lines are de-energised, the risk is greatly reduced.

If we are fighting a fire and we come across transmission lines - would we have to pull back to the nearest road?

There is no CFA directive advising firefighters to retreat from transmission lines. There are operational procedures that requires crew members to maintain a safe working distance of at least 25 metres from lines.

An Incident Controller in charge of a particular fire will make an assessment in the field and may decide to increase this distance. ie. Require their firefighters to keep a greater distance from the power lines.

Re: Aerial firefighting. How far can the planes fly near transmission lines? Are they going to stop spraying when they get to the transmission lines?

Transmission lines are marked on aeronautical maps, so pilots will know where they are located.

The rules relating to aerial firefighting and aircraft in general are governed by the Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA), not by the CFA.

Aerial spraying/water bombing can take place in the vicinity of power lines. It is incumbent on pilots to assess local conditions at the time and work closely with the relevant fire authority.

Does smoke raise an electrical safety risk?

Smoke from fires near or under transmission lines can create electrical arcs or flashovers. A 'flashover' or 'arc' is when electricity, especially at higher voltages, jumps across a gap. The dense smoke and hot gases caused by a fire under or near a high voltage transmission line increases the risk of a flashover. A flashover may occur between conductors or from conductors to the ground. Flashovers are potentially life threatening to someone standing nearby.

Is it true that you can't spray transmission lines with water?

It is worth remembering that transmission lines exist outside in the open and are subject to bad weather and rain.

The lines and towers themselves are very unlikely to be on fire, so it is unlikely we would need to spray water directly at the power lines and/or towers. CFA operational procedures advise that water should not be applied to and apparatus (lines or towers).

Is any particular vegetation type recommended for under the transmission lines?

CFA does not recommend a particular vegetation type for under transmission lines.

However, the Transmission Network Service Providers (TNSP) are responsible for submitting an Electric Line Clearance Management Plan to Energy Safe Victoria (ESV) detailing how they will manage vegetation and ensure minimum clearance spaces are maintained in accordance with the Electricity Safety (Electric Line Clearance) Regulations 2020 (Vic). And every year ESV inspects sections of each of the transmission networks to make sure they have been appropriately managed before and during the fire season.

What is CFA's role in the transmission line construction process?

During the planning process, CFA will likely provide advice on the bushfire risk. This may be as a referral body, or as part of a technical reference group, or in the form of a more formal planning submission. CFA's role in the planning process will vary depending on several factors, including the requirements of the planning scheme and the location of the proposed transmission line.

Could there be an increased rate of spread due to the change in vegetation type under the lines?

The rate of spread of a fire is taken into consideration when determining the tactics and strategies required to fight a particular fire.

Vegetation can influence the rate of spread of a fire. The type of vegetation, its moisture content, the amount of it, the size of it and how it is arranged can all influence the rate of spread.

Other factors such as weather and topography also affect the rate of spread. For example, fire travel will roughly double in speed for every 10 degrees of incline.

When a bushfire burns across a landscape it is affected by variation in the vegetation, weather and topography it encounters, which means its rate of spread continually changes.

Reducing the amount of vegetation or keeping vegetation low to the ground will generally reduce the rate of spread of fire if all other factors are kept constant.

Am I able to go out onto my own land to fight a spot fire if I have transmission line?

CFA does not restrict landowners from fighting a fire on their own property. It really comes down to how the individual feels about their own capabilities. ie. their confidence, fitness, training, available equipment etc.

Do new transmission lines increase the risk of bushfires?

The construction of high voltage transmission lines creates risk, including fire ignition risk. However, fire mitigation actions during the construction of transmission lines are detailed in the TNSP Bushfire Mitigation Plan including specific controls prescribed under the Country

Fire Authority Act 1958 (Vic), for any works undertaken during a fire danger period that must be complied with. And fire risk must continue to be managed and mitigated throughout the operation and maintenance lifecycle of transmission lines.