

Wednesday, 21 October 2009

SA CONSUMERS WARNED ABOUT BUSHFIRE BUNKERS

The State Government is urging South Australians thinking about buying and installing bushfire bunkers to carefully examine claims being made about their effectiveness.

Consumer Affairs Minister, Gail Gago, says the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission is investigating web-based claims by three traders that their fire bunkers meet an Australian Standard for the product.

“This type of claim is misleading because there is no formal Australian Standard in place when it comes to fire bunkers,” Minister Gago said.

“While the Australian Building Codes Board is currently working on a national standard for the design and construction of bushfire bunkers for domestic use, there is not yet any recognised standard in place.

“So it is clearly not appropriate to sell these sorts of structures with the reassurance that the product meets an Australian Standard.”

Ms Gago – who issued today’s warning during Bushfire Awareness Week - says the SA Government’s Office of Consumer and Business Affairs has not, to date, received complaints about these sorts of claims being made to South Australian consumers.

“However it’s important that South Australians are alert to the risk of bogus claims.”

A Cautionary Note has been prepared by the State Government to encourage people to consider a number of complex issues and to seek professional advice.

The Cautionary Note – Bunkers and Shelters can be accessed from the Department of Planning and Local Government web site on www.dplg.sa.gov.au and hard copies will shortly be available from local council offices.

John Hanlon, Deputy CE of the Department of Planning and Local Government, says that there is clearly a heightened level of fear in the wider community about bushfires, following last summer’s tragic Victorian bushfire fatalities.

“That’s why it’s so important for people thinking about buying these structures to know that bunkers - which can cost more than ten thousand dollars - aren’t currently endorsed by planning authorities as a safe refuge in a bushfire,” he said.

The Country Fire Service is also concerned that some people may rush into buying bushfire bunkers without thoroughly exploring their options and the other steps that should be followed when trying to protect their lives from the risk of bushfires.

“People really need to seek out their own expert advice and make sure that when it comes to bushfire management they don’t put all their eggs in one basket,” CFS Chief Officer, Euan Ferguson said.

“There’s no substitute for other preventative measures, such as vegetation management, clean gutters and water storage.”

- Any consumer queries about representations being made about bunkers should be directed to the **Office of Business and Consumer Affairs**.
 - General advice line, tel: 8204 9777
 - Country callers, tel: 131 882.

Further general information on bushfire protection can be obtained from the following:

- **Country Fire Service**
 - Telephone: 1300 362 361
 - Email: cfshq@cfs.sa.gov.au
 - Web site www.cfs.sa.gov.au

- **Department for Planning and Local Government**
 - Telephone (08) 8303 0602
 - Email: dplg.building@sa.gov.au
 - Web site: www.dplg.sa.gov.au

- **Your local council**

For further information contact Loine Sweeney on 0407 395 467