

Sykes: Fire bunkers warning

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Nationals Member for Benalla, Bill Sykes, warns members of the public to be aware of companies selling potentially 'below standard' fire bunkers.

"Given the current situation and an existing 'climate of fear' due to the recent, and ongoing, bushfires I understand people's need to want to protect themselves by purchasing and installing a fire bunker. However the public needs to be aware of the possibility for companies to take advantage of the present fire situation and sell fire bunkers which could potentially prove to be nothing more than a 'Bakers Oven'," Bill Sykes said.

Debate about improved bushfire protection following the disaster of February 7 has only just begun and there is a massive amount of work to be done in relation to reviewing and implementing new safety standards by the relevant authorities.

"At this moment there are no regulations in place for the production and installation of fire bunkers," Bill Sykes said. "There are no requirements in the Building Code of Australia that sets out guidelines for fire proof bunkers."

Standards Australia are currently fast tracking a review of Australian Standard 3959, the standard for construction of buildings in bushfire-prone areas, but there are no recommendations at this point to include fire bunkers in the Standard. It is likely a new Standard may be considered, in the future, for fire shelters.

"Standards Australia has not got a Standard for fire shelters or refuges. It is likely such a Standard may be considered in the future after the findings of the Bushfire Royal Commission," Bill Sykes said.

It is critical anyone considering purchasing a bushfire shelter be aware of the lack of regulation and that there is no guarantee existing bushfire shelters would adequately protect life in the event of a bushfire.

"This is an area which requires a great deal of research to ensure these constructions are safe, not only during a bushfire but also when not in use," Bill Sykes said. "What safety features, for example, do bushfire shelters currently on the market have to ensure a child cannot inadvertently be locked inside?"

The Bushfire Royal Commission will undoubtedly address the issue of fire bunker safety and design. It is essential fire bunkers are manufactured by strict standards and professionally installed.

"If companies are going to start production of fire bunkers it is essential they get it right. I urge anyone who may be considering installing a fire bunker to put off making an 'impulse' buy until the issue of fire bunkers has been thoroughly investigated and research and safety standards are set by the appropriate authorities," Bill Sykes said.