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### BUILDING STANDARDS ALONE WON'T SAVE LIVES

The Victorian Association of Forest Industries (VAFI) supports the State Government's new building regulations as a valuable improvement on existing standards, given the correct use of timber can better the new benchmarks.

The VAFI CEO, Philip Dalidakis, said that although the new building standards would limit the amount of exterior timber used, it was important to remember that timber is still one of the safest materials available for structural use.

"Timber is too easily identified as a weakness in design when in fact, if implemented correctly, it is equal to or better than the new standards," Mr Dalidakis said.

"Correctly designed structural timber systems are both highly fire resistant and durable; not forgetting it is also recyclable, biodegradable and stores carbon."

Mr Dalidakis called on the State Government to mandate the use of Victorian timber in the reconstruction efforts, in much the same way they show a preference for locally made and sourced materials under the Victorian Industry Participation Policy.

"Timber needs to be properly recognised as a suitable material because of the hugely important role the industry plays within the fire affected communities. Ensuring timber's use as a key material in the reconstruction efforts will have a direct positive flow-on affect to local economies and businesses."

Whilst these new regulations are a crucial part of residential protection, Mr Dalidakis also issued a warning that the most important aspect of bushfire safety is not the building itself but the environment in which it resides.

"Living in bushfire prone areas is no different to driving a car on the road, no matter how safe your own car is - you still need to respect the situation and exercise caution," Mr Dalidakis said

"There is certainly no quick fix solution; however, proper forest and vegetation management combined with common sense planning will do more for public safety than any other one element of preparation; including the strengthening of building codes."

"Actively managing our forests through a range of techniques including prescribed burning, forest thinning and timber harvesting helps to minimise fuel loads, maintain fire fighting access and ultimately save lives."

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