

# PROGRAM POWERS UP FOR BUSHFIRE SAFETY

**EXCLUSIVE**

**MITCH CLARKE**

A LANDMARK safety program implemented across Victoria after the catastrophic Black Saturday fires has reduced bushfire risk by more than 44 per cent, a new report has found.

The \$750m Powerline Bushfire Safety program was implemented following the 2009 Victorian bushfires royal commission, which found more than 70 per cent of deaths in the Black Saturday fires were caused by fires started by electrical infrastructure.

Aurecon's recent Powerline Bushfire Safety Program Benefits Realisation Report found the program has reduced the risk of bushfires starting from powerlines across the state by 44.1 per cent.

The program involves a range of electricity asset and network control measures, including the installation of giant safety switches called rapid earth fault current limiters.

The switches - which are located in high bushfire risk areas - prevent fires starting by shutting off a powerline's power when it makes contact with vegetation.

The second tranche of the limiter rollout is complete, with the third and final tranche now under way.

By May next year more than 30,000km of high-voltage powerlines across rural and regional Victoria will also be protected.



Victoria's Black Saturday bushfires ravage the Bunyip State Forest near Labertouche in 2009. Picture: Alex Coppel

In the summer of 2019-20 alone, it was estimated that the 19 operational switches prevented 33 potentially catastrophic fires.

This summer, one limiter has already been activated in Mildura.

Under the program, more than 700km of bare-wire

powerlines in high bushfire risk areas have been replaced with underground or insulated overhead conductors.

The report also found the Powerline Bushfire Safety Program reduced the risk of electrocution of people working near powerlines.

It also improved the resilience of the network and promoted local industry development and job creation.

Energy, Environment and Climate Change Minister Lily D'Ambrosio said the report detailed a "great outcome" for Victorian communities,

especially those living in high bushfire risk areas.

"The Powerline Bushfire Safety Program has delivered on its promise to significantly reduce the risk of bushfires started by bare-wire powerlines," Ms D'Ambrosio said. "It now has a proven track record."

## BUSHFIRE PROBLEMS?

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