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Wind turbine fire safety fears spark urgent call for Allan govt to step in

Credit: Shannon Deery - September 29, 2024 - Sunday Herald Sun - [heraldsun.com.au](https://www.heraldsun.com.au) ~~

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The Allan government is facing calls for an urgent audit of Victoria's 2500 wind turbines amid fears they lack critical fire safety equipment.

Ahead of the upcoming bushfire season, concerns are mounting over the safety measures in place to protect both regional communities and key infrastructure from potential fire hazards.

As the government rolls out another 900 turbines over the next decade and faces an ongoing fight over constructing powerlines through western Victoria to connect turbines to the Melbourne grid, the Sunday Herald Sun can reveal the state's energy safety regulator, Energy Safe Victoria, has no records of whether or not wind turbines are fitted with critical internal fire suppression systems.

The gap in oversight has sparked alarm about the effectiveness of current regulations and the preparedness of the energy sector in addressing the risks associated with the government's push toward renewable energy.

CFA guidelines recommend fire suppression systems are installed on all wind turbines, as well as automatic shutdown capabilities to enable turbines to be completely disconnected from the power supply in the event of fire.

Fire hazards at wind energy facilities can include electrical hazards, chemical hazards, and potential fire spread because of air flow impact or falling debris from fire-impacted turbines.

In June Energy Safety Victoria launched an investigation after a wind turbine burst into flames in Portland.

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Firefighters were forced to let the blaze burn out after futile attempts to control the fire.

Irrewarra CFA captain, John Martin, said wind turbines posed significant dangers for both aerial and ground firefighting operations.

Mr Martin said it was almost always impossible for crews to get close to wind turbines, meaning bushfires could quickly spread from the turbine before facing any resistance.

“If you give a fire like that in that particular landscape a head start, the front’s going to get bigger and bigger and before you know it you’ve got a pretty serious, fast-running grass fire,” he said.

“It makes us feel pretty helpless. Anything within the tower, we can’t touch, we’ve just got to leave it.

“But it is the grass fires that really concern us as to how we can actually manage to eventually get on top of those.”

Mr Martin said there should be laws requiring fire suppression systems to be installed in every single wind turbine.

“It’s a no-brainer, it doesn’t matter the cost,” he said.

“Whichever way you look at it, these things do present problems for us in the CFA.”

Shadow Emergency Services Minister Richard Riordan called for an immediate audit of the state’s turbines.

“Fire suppression technology exists but is an optional extra for wind companies who this year received a massive cut to their fire service levy charges thanks to the Allan government,” he said.

“Protection of our rural communities from out of control wind turbine fires should not be an optional extra.

“A wind turbine fire cannot be fought from the ground, and it cannot be beaten from the air, only internal fire suppression equipment such as CO2 gas can be used to put these fires out effectively.

“A hot February day and a wind turbine spraying molten fibreglass, hot oils and other debris across many square kilometres of accessible grass lands is a disaster waiting to happen.”

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A Victorian government spokesman said owners and operators of wind farms must comply with strict energy safety laws and regulation.

“Wind turbine fires are rare,” she said.

“CFA volunteers have experience and procedures already in place to safely fight fires around this infrastructure.

“Last year we strengthened Energy Safe Victoria’s powers to ensure operators of wind farms comply with strict energy safety laws and regulations – this includes submitting detailed safety management plans to the regulator for approval.”

Source: Shannon Deery - September 29, 2024 - Sunday Herald Sun - [heraldsun.com.au](https://www.heraldsun.com.au)

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