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## Loss and identity, rebuilding communities and buildings after the Victorian bushfires

‘They can start with a momentary flicker, they can burn for months, and their effects can scar landscapes and lives for years’ (Nova website, n.d.).

Bushfires are a common occurrence throughout much of Australia. Every year, thousands of hectares of Australian bush go up in smoke. Between European settlement and the time of writing in late 2011 there have been 91 major bushfire events that have taken a total of 851 lives (Attorney General’s Department, n.d.).

However, the fires that struck Victoria in the south-east of Australia on 7 February 2009, ‘Black Saturday’, were of a level of destructiveness that was unprecedented, taking well over twice the number of lives of the previously most destructive fires (Attorney General’s Department, n.d.).

On Black Saturday, the Country Fire Authority (CFA), the fire brigade for rural Victoria, responded to 632 fire incidents including 15 major fires (‘fires that caused the death of people or major damage to property or that had the potential to cause considerable loss’) (2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission 2010a). The fires devastated over 450 000 hectares, affected at least 78 communities and took 173 lives in the most horrific of circumstances. Four hundred people were injured (PricewaterhouseCoopers 2010). Over 11 000 farm animals were killed or injured, more than 2000 properties were destroyed and a further 1400 damaged, and over