

SECTION 02

PREPARE FOR BUSHFIRE

LEAVING EARLY IS THE SAFEST OPTION

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NEED SOME HELP?

- Visit **cfa.vic.gov.au**
- Call the Victorian
Bushfire Information
Line on **1800 240 667** or
via National Relay Service
on **1800 555 677**

SECTION 02 PREPARE FOR BUSHFIRE

LEAVING EARLY IS THE SAFEST OPTION

Bushfires are extremely unpredictable.

In a bushfire, people may be confused, disoriented and physically or psychologically stressed. In these conditions, making sound decisions becomes very difficult.

Leaving early is the safest way to survive a bushfire. People die trying to leave their homes at the last minute.

BEFORE THE BUSHFIRE SEASON

You need a Bushfire Survival Plan if you plan to leave. Use the *Bushfire Survival Planning Template: Leaving Early* tearout (at the back of this section) to help you prepare your plan.

Decide now what you are going to do on fire risk days – it could save your life.

SHARING YOUR BUSHFIRE SURVIVAL PLAN

Once you have prepared your Bushfire Survival Plan, it is a good idea to share the details of your plan with family, friends and neighbours. Doing so will save everyone a lot of distress when there is a bushfire as they will know that you are prepared and know where to find you.

Remember to update everyone about any changes to your agreed plan of action.

YOUR IMPORTANT INFORMATION

Keep your important items and information in a safe place during the bushfire season. Scan important information and photos and store them on a CD or memory stick.

Make sure your plan is flexible to account for different situations such as:

- weekends
- school holidays
- a work day
- when you are away from home.

How will these situations affect your ability to put your Bushfire Survival Plan into action?

LEAVING EARLY

In high-risk areas, leaving early is your safest option. This is particularly so on **Code Red**, **Extreme** and **Severe** days. Fires on these days can be dangerous.

Even people who are extremely well prepared can die fighting fires at home.

WHY YOU SHOULD LEAVE EARLY

- ✓ If you live in a high-risk bushfire area, your home will not be defensible on a **Code Red** day.
- ✓ **Code Red** is the highest Fire Danger Rating. These are the worst conditions for a bush or grassfire.
- ✓ Houses are not designed or constructed to withstand fires in **Code Red** conditions.
- ✓ On a **Code Red** day, leaving high-risk bushfire areas the night before or early in the morning is the safest option.

- ✓ If you live in a high-risk bushfire area, your home may not be defensible on **Extreme** or **Severe** fire risk days.
- ✓ Most homes in high-risk bushfire areas are not built to withstand bushfire.
- ✓ Defending your home is very risky – you could die or be seriously injured.
- ✓ Defending a property requires at least two able-bodied, fit and determined adults who are physically and mentally prepared to work long and hard in arduous and difficult conditions.
- ✓ Children, the elderly, people with special needs or disability should be well away from the threat.

KNOW YOUR TRIGGER TO LEAVE

The safest option is to leave high-risk bushfire areas the night before or early on **Code Red** days. Do not wait and see.

Code Red days are rare. When they are forecast they are **very** serious.

Know the Fire Danger Rating in your area. The Fire Danger Rating is your 'trigger' to act. The higher the rating, the more dangerous the situation if a fire starts.

For more information on Fire Danger Ratings, see page 14.

WHAT TO TAKE WITH YOU: YOUR RELOCATION KIT

OVERNIGHT BAG WITH CHANGE OF CLOTHES AND TOILETRIES

ADEQUATE AMOUNT OF WATER

IMPORTANT INFORMATION

> PASSPORT

> PHOTOS

> WILL

> JEWELLERY

WOOL BLANKETS

MEDICINES AND FIRST AID KIT

MOBILE PHONE AND CHARGER

CONTACT INFORMATION

> DOCTOR

> COUNCIL

> POWER COMPANY



WHAT TO DO BEFORE YOU LEAVE

There are things you can do around your property before you leave. These actions may minimise damage to your home from bushfire.

- ✓ Close all doors and windows.
- ✓ Move doormats and outdoor furniture away from the house.
- ✓ Block the downpipes and partially fill the gutters with water.
- ✓ Move stock or large animals to large paddocks with short grass.
- ✓ Turn off the gas supply.
- ✓ Leave the front gate open.

WHERE CAN YOU GO ON HIGH-RISK BUSHFIRE DAYS?

- Family or friends in a low fire risk area.
- A place of relative safety, such as a shopping complex or central business district of a large regional or urban centre.
- Other community buildings, such as libraries in low-risk areas.

Do not forget to call family, friends and neighbours to let them know where you have relocated. Do you have all the phone numbers you are going to need listed in your mobile phone? As an added safeguard, write the numbers down elsewhere in case you lose your phone or do not have it with you on the day.

PLAN HOW YOU WILL REACH YOUR DESTINATION

- Make preparations and it will be easier to leave early.
- You will need to know what route to take and have an alternative if that route is blocked or congested.
- Your normal route may take much longer than expected.
- If you do not have your own car you will need to think about options, such as public transport or a neighbour.
- Practise packing the car so it is quick and everything fits – including your pets! It will take a lot longer than you think.
- Make sure you have enough petrol or fuel so you don't need to stop to fill up.

WHAT YOU WILL DO IF YOU CANNOT LEAVE

In recent fires, people who planned to leave took longer to get ready than they had expected. This resulted in them being delayed and leaving when fire was upon them – often with tragic consequences.

Fires are unpredictable and plans can fail. Having a backup plan can save your life if you are caught in a fire.

If you cannot leave the area consider shelter options close by that may protect you. These may include:

- a well-prepared home (yours or a neighbour) that you can actively defend
- a private bunker (that meets current regulations)
- a designated community shelter or refuge.

Last resort options could include:

- a Neighbourhood Safer Place (**Place of Last Resort**)
- a stationary car in a cleared area
- a ploughed paddock or reserve
- a body of water (such as the beach, pool, dam or river). This does not include a water tank. Dams may not be reliable as their water levels fluctuate and they may be empty in summer.

Note that last resort options carry a high risk of trauma, injury or death.

See page 38 for more information on your survival options.

If, as a last resort, you leave when there are signs of fire in your area, exercise extreme caution.

Driving during a bushfire is a last resort. A drive that will normally take five minutes may take two hours in the event of a fire.

It may become difficult to leave owing to dangerous road conditions. There may be road closures, smoke, fallen trees and embers.

You may become trapped by fire and exposed to dangerous radiant heat.

KNOW WHEN IT IS SAFE TO RETURN HOME

Check with police, fire authorities and your local emergency services before trying to go home. Even if the fire has been controlled, there may be other safety issues that you are unaware of that may affect your ability to return home. These include:

- fallen trees
- disruptions to essential services
- potential crime scenes.

Bushfires do not arrive at convenient times. Many bushfires start late in the afternoon.

What will you do if you have visitors staying with you? Will any family members be away on business or holiday?

Also make sure you revise your Bushfire Survival Plan whenever your circumstances change.

➤ DURING A FIRE

ALERT MESSAGES AND WARNINGS

During a bushfire, alert messages are used to give you an indication of the level of threat from a fire. For alerts and warnings:

- visit **cfa.vic.gov.au**
- tune in to your emergency broadcasters – ABC local radio, commercial radio and designated community radio stations
- Sky News television
- call the Victorian Bushfire Information Line on 1800 240 667 or via National Relay Service on 1800 555 677
- via the CFA_Updates Twitter account.

For some fires, you may hear the Standard Emergency Warning Signal (SEWS) before the alert message over your radio or television.

An emergency alert telephone warning may also be sent to your mobile and landline phone based on your billing address. This means if you live in the city and you are travelling in the country when a bushfire happens you will not receive a telephone warning by mobile phone.

THERE ARE THREE BUSHFIRE ALERT LEVELS

Advice

- General information to keep you up-to-date with developments.

Watch and Act

- A fire is approaching you.
- Conditions are changing and you need to start taking action now to protect your life and your family.

Emergency Warning

- You are in immediate danger and need to take action immediately.
- You will be impacted by fire.



Do not rely on an official warning to leave. Bushfires can start quickly and threaten homes and lives within minutes.

Keep a map of your local area. You can look at the map to see where the fire is.

If you are travelling through Victoria, you need to monitor conditions. Reconsider visiting high-risk bushfire areas on fire risk days.

CAUTION

If you receive a bushfire alert, you must take it seriously. Failure to take action may result in death or injury to you or your family members.

Bushfire alerts are not always given in the above order. As an example, the first alert you receive may be Watch and Act.

Look and listen for alerts issued for surrounding towns as your suburb or town may not be mentioned.



EVACUATION

Evacuation is not a substitute for planning ahead or choosing to leave a high-risk bushfire area early – before fire threatens.

In high-risk bushfire areas on **Code Red** days, it is always safer to leave the night before or early in the morning.

If you live with children, elderly or vulnerable people, they should be well away from any threat.

Leaving early should be part of your Bushfire Survival Plan.

EVACUATION

Evacuation is the planned relocation of people from a dangerous area to a safer place.

In some fires the Incident Controller may decide to issue a Recommendation to Evacuate for:

- individuals
- a house
- a street
- a large institution (such as a school or hospital)
- a suburb
- a town
- a large area of the state.

A Recommendation to Evacuate depends on a number of factors, such as:

- safety considerations
- the location and type of fire
- access routes and the local environment.

A Recommendation to Evacuate may identify:

- the location you need to travel to
- travel information
- the length of time in which it is safe to travel.

Sometimes it is not possible for an Incident Controller to issue a Recommendation to Evacuate. You should not rely on receiving one.

While CFA will do its best to provide official warnings, bushfires can threaten lives and homes in minutes.

Just because you do not receive a warning does not mean there is not a threat.

The safest option is to leave early.



➤ BUSHFIRE EDUCATION SERVICES AND RESOURCES

Each summer CFA runs programs and services to help residents prepare and plan for their safety.

A calendar of activities is advertised through pamphlets, local newspapers, sign boards and cfa.vic.gov.au

These are delivered free of charge in high-risk bushfire areas and include:

FIREREADY VICTORIA MEETINGS

These are held on street corners, in local halls and at shows and events from October until the end of the fire season.

Meetings take about one hour and provide information on local risk and personal survival. You will have an opportunity to discuss local concerns.

COMMUNITY FIREGUARD PROGRAM

Work together with your neighbours to improve knowledge and bushfire safety skills.

CFA provides local facilitators to assist in:

- understanding your bushfire risk
- enabling you to develop your Bushfire Survival Plan.

Community Fireguard operates in extremely high-risk bushfire areas. Check to see if it is available in your area.

HOME BUSHFIRE ADVICE SERVICE

A member of CFA will assess your property and provide a range of options to assist you to develop your Bushfire Survival Plan.

This service is free and offered all year round. Appointments take approximately one hour. Priority is given to people in high bushfire risk areas.

BUSHFIRE PLANNING WORKSHOPS

These are designed for those who have some understanding of their bushfire risk but need more support to develop their plans.

Structured as one-off, practical sessions, you and your family can work on your Bushfire Survival Plan with the help of a trained CFA facilitator.

HOUSE BUSHFIRE SELF ASSESSMENT TOOL (HBSAT)

This online resource is designed to help you assess the risk of vegetation and topography around your property.

The tool takes into account factors such as:

- vegetation
- topography
- the surrounding landscape for a 100-metre zone around houses.

TOWNSHIP PROTECTION PLANS

Township Protection Plans are a key source of information for you and your community.

They are important tools that highlight the shared responsibility between your community, fire services and local government.

Plans have been developed for a number of high bushfire risk communities across Victoria.

They provide important local information for you and your family to assist with planning before, during and after a fire.

Township Protection Plans are updated regularly.

Please visit cfa.vic.gov.au to ensure that you have the latest Township Protection Plan for your town.

Note: Some townships will not have a Township Protection Plan.

For more information about CFA's community education programs and services, contact your nearest regional office or visit cfa.vic.gov.au.



STILL WITHOUT A PLAN?

Research shows 75 per cent of people living in high-risk areas do not have a detailed Bushfire Survival Plan.

Don't have a plan? You are not alone. Advice and support are available.

You can:

- attend a CFA FireReady Victoria Meeting or Bushfire Planning Workshop
- join a Community Fireguard group
- book a free property assessment to assess your fire risk
- visit **cfa.vic.gov.au**
- call the Victorian Bushfire Information Line on 1800 240 667 or via National Relay Service on 1800 555 677
- talk to your local CFA brigade about how to plan for bushfire.

