

## 7.0 BUSHFIRE / GRASSFIRE

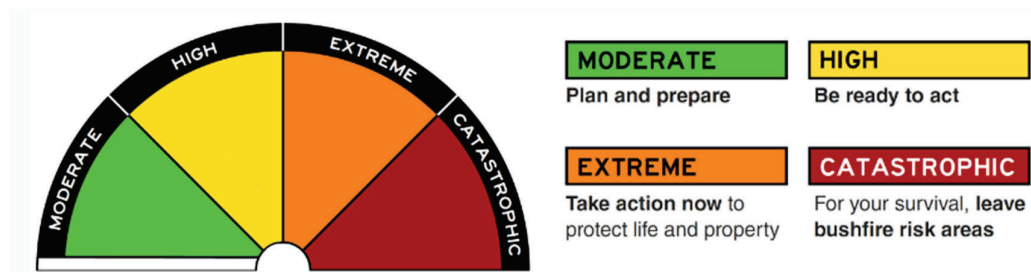
### 7.1 APPLICATION

Bushfire preparedness is not just a concern of rural and regional schools. Metropolitan schools may be at risk from site-specific factors (e.g. located in a leafy area) or because their students may attend activities or camps in bushfire-prone areas.

During the summer months, the Chief Warden, Principal or Senior Leadership Team should check the CFA website regularly for fire danger ratings.




Schools are responsible for their vegetation management. Those with identified bushfire risks must ensure that appropriate maintenance requirements are met, including the trimming and thinning of vegetation and the clearing of flammable elements from school areas. Ensure this is included within this document’s risk assessment sourced in section 11.0.


On days of High and Extreme fire danger, the Senior Leadership Team should meet to pre-plan actions for the remainder of the day. Once notified of a Catastrophic day by the Bureau of Meteorology within the schools designed fire district, the team must meet to confirm actions and ensure that all staff and students are advised. The school must close on days forecasted as Catastrophic days within the schools designed fire district and liaise with Melbourne Archdiocese Catholic Schools. The operation of school buses will also cease on Catastrophic days.



The table below outlines recommended actions for property holders in fire-prone areas given each classification of fire risk.

**FIRE DANGER RATING TABLE (VICTORIA)**

CATASTROPHIC		
What does it mean?	What should I do?	
	<p><b>If a fire starts and takes hold, lives are likely to be lost.</b></p> <p>These are the most dangerous conditions for a fire.</p>	<p><b>For your survival, leave bushfire risk areas.</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Your life may depend on the decisions you make, even before there is a fire.</li> <li>For your survival, do not be in bushfire risk areas.</li> <li>Stay safe by going to a safer location early in the morning or the night before.</li> <li>Homes cannot withstand fires in these conditions. You may not be able to leave and help may not be available.</li> </ol>
EXTREME		
What does it mean?	What should I do?	
	<p><b>Fires will spread quickly and be extremely dangerous.</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>These are dangerous fire conditions.</li> <li>Expect hot, dry and windy conditions</li> </ol>	<p><b>Take action now to protect your life and property.</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Check your bushfire plan and that your property is ready.</li> <li>If a fire starts, take immediate action. If you and your property are not prepared to the highest level, go to a safer location well before the fire impacts.</li> <li>Reconsider travel through bushfire risk areas.</li> <li>Leaving bushfire risk areas early in the day is your safest option.</li> </ol>
HIGH		
What does it mean?	What should I do?	
	<p><b>Fires can be dangerous.</b></p>	<p><b>Be ready to act.</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There's a heightened risk. Be alert for fires in your area.</li> <li>Decide what you will do if a fire starts.</li> <li>If a fire starts, your life and property may be at risk. The safest option is to avoid bushfire risk areas.</li> </ol>
MODERATE		
What does it mean?	What should I do?	

	<p><b>Most fires can be controlled.</b></p>	<p><b>Plan and prepare.</b></p> <p>4. Stay up to date and be ready to act if there is a fire.</p>
<p><b>NO RATING</b></p>		
	<p><b>What does it mean?</b></p>	<p><b>What should I do?</b></p>
	<p>The system also introduces an 'off' level for days where no proactive action is required by the community. This does not mean that fires cannot happen, but that they are not likely to move or act in a way that threatens the safety of the community. This rating is the thin white wedge on the colour wheel sitting under 'Moderate'.</p>	

*Courtesy Country Fire Authority*

## 7.2 BUSHFIRE PREPAREDNESS CHECKLIST

### BUSHFIRE PREPAREDNESS CHECKLIST

- Check the Governing Body website for potential and actual closure notifications
- Check the relevant Emergency Services website for current information
- Determine who is responsible for monitoring fire risk information and how
- Complete Bushfire & Emergency Management Self-Assessment and review any issues resulting from the assessment.
- Review Emergency Management Plan before the official start of the bushfire season
- Ensure the back-up of the payroll master file is part of the school’s normal back-up procedures. Regularly test that the back-ups can be used to recover all vital information
- Ensure communication procedures are in place to contact parents and guardians in the event of closure or evacuation. This includes communications to parents and guardians warning of impending school closures 72, 48, and 24 hours before a Catastrophic day
- Allocate roles and responsibilities of Principals, staff, parents, and guardians in executing emergency evacuation procedures
- Ensure that the planning procedures for offsite activities (such as camps and excursions) include consideration of the risk of bushfire in the offsite activity location
- Maintain a schedule for monitoring and removal of materials that may be easily ignited around buildings and schools
- Ensure flammable materials are stored safely
- Ensure building exits are kept clear of obstructions at all times
- Designate assembly points that allow appropriate access to emergency equipment
- Ensure that emergency vehicles have access to schools and grounds

## 7.3 EARLY COMMUNICATION

In the event of a bushfire, the prime consideration is the safety of students, teachers, staff, parents, and guardians.

During such an event considerable confusion and worry may be prevented if the people concerned know the procedures to be adopted. Schools must make sure that all parents, guardians, and other school community members are aware of these procedures. Ask parents, guardians, and staff to familiarise themselves with these procedures and to discuss them with students.

## 7.4 TRIGGERS FOR CLOSURE

Planned or Pre-emptive closure:

- On the declaration of a Catastrophic fire danger day, Emergency Services advises that fire safety plans should be enacted. In this circumstance, the Catholic Education Office will advise Principals that at-risk schools in the designated areas are to enact their Emergency Management Plans and closure notification processes.
- This includes activating the communication tree and advising local ABC radio to inform all parents and guardians, students, staff, and others providing services to the school of the proposed closure. Others to be contacted may include bus operators, suppliers, support agencies, etc.
- Immediate closure: Emergency Services may occupy and control a school site and instruct the Principal to close the school immediately in response to an imminent fire threat.

- Continuing closure: Emergency Services and/or Governing Body may recommend a school remain closed due to:
  - The threat of continuing fires.
  - Unsafe access.
  - Potential smoke, water contamination or building safety concerns.

## **7.5 SCHOOL REOPENING**

Following a bushfire incident schools that have been closed should reopen in close consultation with the Catholic Education Office

Parents and guardians, students, and teachers will be advised when schools will be opened via the school, the media, and governing body websites.

## **7.6 DURING HEIGHTENED FIRE DANGER**

Parents and guardians should arrange to collect their children from:

- Bus Stops – if students are passengers.
- School – if students cycle or walk to school.

Students should be housed in their homerooms and moved to the main building if necessary to ensure they are accessible and safe.

All teachers must maintain an accurate record of students to enable the school to account for missing or extra students.

If parents and guardians need to collect their children before the end of the school day, they must ensure the student is signed out and that the student’s teacher is informed.

Coordinating teachers will communicate with staff and bus transport authorities to facilitate students coming to designated locations to join their parents and guardians.

Students must only be released to an authorised person. Staff must cross-check with the student emergency card which records the name of the person(s) authorised to pick up a student.

## **7.7 SCHOOL BUSES**

If a fire occurs during school time in a zone serviced by the school ALL students on possible affected bus routes will be held at that school until the all-clear is given.

NOTE: On Catastrophic days, school buses would most likely not be operating.

- Bus drivers must make themselves aware of possible hazards on their routes and determine areas of temporary refuge (this information must also be held by the Principal coordinating bus arrangements).
- Buses with students on board must not leave the school without the approval of the Principal.
- Bus drivers must carry some form of a communications device to contact Emergency Services or the school.
- Bus drivers must notify Emergency Services (typically the police) and the school immediately via two-way radios or mobile phones if a bus is delayed en route.
- Bus drivers must not allow students to alight from buses if fires are burning in the area unless parents and guardians are waiting for them. If no-one is waiting, buses will take students to the nearest safe area. (Safe areas to be agreed to by police and Principal coordinating bus arrangements).
- Bus drivers must have a card prominently displayed at all times showing telephone numbers of the school, Police, and local CFA.
- If the road is blocked, the bus should return to the school, unless otherwise directed by Emergency Services personnel.

## **7.8 FAMILY FIRE SAFETY PLAN**

All families (particularly those in bushfire prone or high-risk areas) must have a family fire safety plan that aligns with their school Emergency Management Plan.

The family fire safety plan should include information about alternative care arrangements for students if the school and children's services are closed with some warning.

The family fire safety plan should be practised so families are familiar with the procedures to be followed in a bushfire.

## 7.9 LOCALISED BUSHFIRE EVENT

This advice is generic in nature and may alter according to the circumstances. If early evacuation advice is not issued or the fire is approaching the school, and it is unsafe to evacuate, everyone should remain in the building after the following precautions are taken:

- Ensure Safe Refuge is ready for use.
- Assess initial information and confirm the fire threat level (refer to Fire Danger Rating Table).
- Identify which buildings need to be evacuated in the case of a fire. Do not stay in portable/demountable buildings.
- Phone 000 for Fire Brigade (dial an additional 0 for an outside line, if required) or dial 112 if calling from a mobile and follow advice. Inform 000 / fire brigade operator which building/s the staff and students will be housed in. Keep in contact as the fire approaches buildings so the operator can direct services as they may become available.
- Contact the Catholic Education Office emergency contact to report the incident.
- The primary responsibility of staff is the safety of students.
- Move everybody inside, to the pre-determined Shelter-In-Place location (preferably bricked and tiled); away from the part of the building that will be initially exposed to the fire.
- Check attendance against class rolls at the assembly area.
- Turn off power and gas.
- Listen to the local radio or TV on battery-powered sets for bushfire/weather warnings and advice.
- Close all windows, doors and block crevices, cracks, and gaps with wet materials (e.g. towels, clothing) and fill gutters, all sinks, washbasins, and drums with water.
- Stay inside in the identified area (preferably bricked and tiled) with available water and away from windows.
- Once the fire has passed, evacuate the building, assess, and remain in a safe area.
- Staff should extinguish fires that may have started in or near the buildings once they have determined it is safe to do so. Designate trained, properly equipped teams (with firefighting equipment and wearing personal protective equipment) to extinguish spot fires and burning embers where safe to do so. This should be done in teams of not less than two staff, and they should have some form of communication with the staff member managing the Shelter-In-Place procedure (normally the Chief Warden). Staff should be suitably attired in natural fibre clothes (long-sleeved top, long pants) and sturdy shoes.
- Ensure staff/students do not hamper Emergency Services or put themselves at risk by going near damaged buildings or trees.
- Contact the Catholic Education Office for further advice and support, as appropriate, including media support.
- Implement procedures to resume school activities, including arranging counselling support for anyone affected by the fire.

**7.10 ACTIVATION AND ESCALATION POINTS FOR ACTION**

<p><b>POTENTIAL OF FIRE IN THE SHIRE ON A HIGH DANGER DAY OR ABOVE</b></p>	<p>On ‘Very High’ fire danger days, the team will meet to ensure preparedness and agree on actions should an incident arise.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Draft messages for staff, students, parents, and guardians should be prepared.</li> <li>- All resources were checked.</li> <li>- Vigilance encouraged.</li> </ul> <p>This is the minimum level of preparedness for the Fire Danger Period.</p>
<p><b>CONFIRMED FIRE IN THE SHIRE ON A HIGH DANGER DAY OR ABOVE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Call the team together.</li> <li>- Confirm the potential threat.</li> <li>- Commence incident monitoring via CFA website, ABC Radio 774, Bushfire Info Line.</li> <li>- Confirm the location of the fire and weather forecast.</li> <li>- Does the fire pose any threat to the school?</li> <li>- If likely to escalate, confirm appropriate actions (if late in the day, is there any disruption to student homebound transport?).</li> <li>- Commence communication strategy to staff, students, parents, and guardians.</li> <li>- Initiate Site Evacuation Procedure (off-site) if evacuation is required.</li> </ul>
<p><b>FIRE IN THE IMMEDIATE VICINITY OF THE CAMPUS ON A HIGH DANGER DAY OR ABOVE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Call the team together.</li> <li>- Confirm the location of fire and weather forecast (wind strength and direction).</li> <li>- Commence incident monitoring via CFA website, ABC Radio 774, Bushfire Info Line.</li> <li>- Is the school in the travel path of the fire?</li> <li>- Confirm appropriate action – Early dismissal of students, School Closure, preparation for movement to Safe Refuge</li> <li>- Commence communication strategy to staff, students, parents, and guardians.</li> <li>- Initiate site Evacuation Procedure (off-site) if evacuation is required.</li> <li>- Ensure wardens have been activated and are available on the radio.</li> <li>- Considerations – a time of day, transport limitations due to lack of buses, adequate supervision of students when at home, number of staff directly affected, and students that reside in an area that is directly under threat.</li> </ul>
<p><b>FIRE THREATENING THE SCHOOL ON A HIGH DANGER DAY OR ABOVE</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Call the Senior Leadership Team together.</li> <li>- Confirm the location of the fire and weather forecast (wind strength and direction).</li> <li>- Commence incident monitoring via CFA website, ABC Radio 774, Bushfire Info Line.</li> <li>- Is the school in the travel path of the fire?</li> <li>- Confirm appropriate actions – Early dismissal, move to the Safe Refuge, site evacuation if safe to do so.</li> <li>- Commence communication strategy to staff, students, parents, and guardians.</li> <li>- Initiate site Evacuation Procedure (off-site) if evacuation is required.</li> <li>- Ensure wardens have been activated and are available on the radio.</li> <li>- Considerations – the time of day, transport limitations due to lack of buses, adequate supervision of students when at home, number of staff directly affected, and students that reside in an area that is directly under threat.</li> </ul>



<p><b>CATASTROPHIC DAY          DECLARED AT LEAST ONE          DAY PRIOR</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Call the management team together.</li> <li>- Confirm closure of the school is the appropriate action.</li> <li>- Commence communication strategy to staff, students, parents, and guardians.</li> <li>- Considerations – transport limitations due to lack of buses, adequate supervision of students when at home, the number of staff directly affected.</li> </ul>
<p><b>CATASTROPHIC DAY          DECLARED ON THE DAY</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Call the team together.</li> <li>- Confirm appropriate action – early dismissal, School closure, site evacuation.</li> <li>- Commence communication strategy to staff, students, parents, and guardians.</li> <li>- Initiate site Evacuation Procedure (off-site) if evacuation is required.</li> <li>- Considerations – transport limitations due to lack of buses, adequate supervision of students when at home, the number of staff directly affected.</li> </ul>

**7.11 MORE INFORMATION**

- Local Government Authority.
- ABC Radio broadcasts regular bush fire activity in consultation with relevant authorities as do local radio stations in rural areas.