

CFS FACT SHEET

ON THE DAY OF A BUSHFIRE



The most important thing on high fire risk days is to be alert to what is going on around you. Most of your preparatory actions will be the same whether you are leaving early or staying and defending. They include:

- monitoring the radio
- checking the weather forecast
- ringing neighbours to share facts and opinions
- ringing the Bushfire Information Hotline about what is happening in your area
- going outside and looking for smoke every 30 minutes
- performing the actions that will allow you more time in Stage 1 if a fire occurs
- performing the actions that are part of your local community strategies, for example, checking on a vulnerable neighbour.

Leaving early

If you plan to leave early, you must be aware of the following points well in advance of a bushfire threat.

- Know your trigger to leave.
- Leave early on high fire danger days or even the night before.
- Go to a location outside the bushfire risk area.
- Know beforehand where you are going (for example, a shopping centre or family members).
- Plan alternative routes in case your normal route is in the bushfire risk area.
- Monitor the radio for fire updates and bushfire warnings.
- Ensure all members of your family are familiar with your Bushfire Survival Plan and have options in case you are separated.
- If your children are at school, know their procedure and how it fits with your Plan.
- Ensure you have made arrangements for your pets.
- If a bushfire occurs, do not return to your home until advised by police or emergency services.
- Fire may threaten an area for days or even weeks, so plan to be away from home for some time.



Actions before leaving

The following list may depend on your available time.

- Discuss the day's activities early with all family members.
- Bring indoors any doormats, outdoor furniture and hanging pots.
- Ensure all family members are wearing protective clothing.
- Advise neighbours and other family of your actions.
- Shut all windows and internal doors.
- If your curtains are not wool, take them down and put them away.
- If your curtains are wool, close them.
- Inside your home protect windows with woollen blankets, foil or cross with tape
- Move flammable furniture away from windows.
- Remove small flammable objects (for example, cushions) and put away.
- Close up the house.
- Connect hoses.
- Clear gutters.
- Block downpipes.
- Ensure yard is cleared of rubbish.
- Shut off gas and electricity.

What to take

- Relocation kit
- Pets in their boxes or cages (dog on leash)
- Pack of personal items, toiletries and clothing for each family member
- Drinking water
- Radio, mobile phone, batteries
- Woollen blanket for each family member
- Computer
- Masks and gloves
- Favourite item for children
- Shovel.



Staying and defending

If you plan to stay and defend your home, you must be committed to staying. You must not decide to leave at the last minute because your Bushfire Survival Plan will be based on the decision you have made beforehand.

The keys to survival

The basic keys to survival in a bushfire are:

- a clearly understood Bushfire Survival Plan and back-up plan in the event that circumstances change
- a minimum defensible space of 20 metres, more if your house is on sloped land
- suitable firefighting equipment
- an adequate water supply (a minimum of 5000 litres)
- a water pump, either petrol or diesel, and hoses
- an ember-proof house.

Prior preparation

- Prepare your Bushfire Survival Kit.
- You need to be mentally and physically prepared to defend your home.
- In a major bushfire, emergency services resources could be stretched, making it impossible for fire crews to protect every house. The responsibility for home protection ultimately rests with you.

Clothing tips

- Wear clothing made from natural fibres for protection against radiant heat. Make sure they are loose enough to allow for sweating and cooling.
- Don't wear boots with nails or studs.
- Wear neck-hugging clothing.
- Have a personal survival kit you can take whenever you travel.

Extra accessories

- Indoor plant sprayer
- Bottle of artificial tears
- Sunscreen.

Bushfire Watch and Act & Emergency Warning messages

The CFS will provide as much information as possible to help you make an informed decision however you may not always receive an official warning directly.

Monitor the CFS website www.cfs.sa.gov.au and your local ABC Radio station or FIVEaa on a battery powered radio. It is recommended you do not rely on a single source for emergency information.

There are three levels of messages that can be issued during a bushfire on radio and the CFS website. You need to understand the different messages and what they mean for you. These messages will alert you to danger so that you can take action.

However, if you are in a bushfire prone area it is important that you remain vigilant during the summer and do not rely solely on these messages as there is no guarantee you will receive one in time. A bushfire may impact upon you more quickly than CFS is able to respond.

The three levels of messages are:

- ***Emergency Warning - Bushfire Emergency Warning message.***

An Emergency Warning message is the highest level of message. The message tells you that you will be impacted by fire and you need to take action immediately. This message will be preceded by an emergency warning signal (a siren sound) to get your attention. The message will also contain information about the severity of the fire, time to impact and what you should do.

- ***Watch and Act - Bushfire Watch and Act message.***

A Watch and Act message alerts you that a fire is approaching, conditions are changing, and that your life may come under threat. You need to act now to prepare for the approaching fire front and protect yourself and your family.

- ***Advice - Bushfire Advice message.***

A fire has started. There is no immediate danger. This is general information to keep you up to date with developments. A fire may pose no threat to life or property because:

- It is a small, controllable fire
- It is a fuel reduction burn being conducted by fire agencies
- It is a fire burning in a remote area away from people, homes or structures.

You should take all of these messages seriously and consider the information carefully.



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On the day of a bushfire threat

Early preparations

- If the children's school is in a bushfire prone area, check if the school has a Bushfire Survival Plan and that it has been made bushfire safe. If not keep your children at home or ensure they are not in a fire risk location.
- Be aware some schools enforce school closure on high bushfire risk days.
- Discuss the day's activities and the Bushfire Survival Plan with the family and neighbours.
- Check the Bushfire Survival Plan activities for each member of the family.
- Ensure mobile phone and radio batteries are charged.
- Listen to the radio for updates.
- Bring pets close to the house.
- Ensure all taps and hoses are ready.
- Prepare drink containers.
- Watch and smell for smoke.

It is likely that the first physical sign of fire in your area will be smoke – or even flames near your property.

Use your senses: What can you see? What can you smell? What can you hear?



Eileen Schöll



Rhys Smith

Stage one – before the fire arrives

Up to 30 minutes before the fire arrives, your home may be under ember attack and the threat of spot fires.



What to do

- Dress in protective clothing to protect yourself from radiant heat.
- Bring pets inside.
- Shut all windows and doors to prevent smoke and flames from entering the house.
- Move furniture away from the windows to prevent it catching alight if sparks enter the house through a broken window.
- Inside your home protect windows with woollen blankets, foil or cross with tape.
- Put a ladder under the inspection hatch and have a torch nearby for checking the ceiling space for embers.
- Fill the bath, buckets and containers with water to provide a water supply in the house for putting out any small fires. Include a dipper with each.
- Place water-filled containers and mops at vulnerable spots around the building and in each room.
- Soak towels and woollen blankets with water, ready to put out any spot fires that might start inside the house.
- Place wet blankets or towels around window and door edges inside the house to stop smoke and embers from entering the house.
- Hose down the side of the house facing the fire and the garden area close to the house.
- Block downpipes and fill gutters with water.
- Bring indoors all doormats, outdoor furniture, hanging baskets, plastic pots or any flammable objects.
- Clear gateways, driveways, doorways and around windows.





- Put vehicles in a solid garage or move them to a cleared area. Close the vehicles and the garage. Put any flammable material into non-flammable containers.
- Patrol your property and watch vigilantly for any embers.

If you come under threat from a shower of embers

- Activate your sprinkler system, if you have one.
- Shut off gas and electricity (depending on the situation).
- Wet lawns on the side of the house facing the fire.
- Watch for embers in the ceiling space.
- Watch your property; don't go beyond your garden to fight spot fires.
- Drink water frequently.

At this stage you are protecting your house.

If numerous spot fires start around you, you are in a dangerous situation and should seek shelter.

Stage two – during the fire

A fire usually takes from five to 20 minutes to pass; however, during Black Saturday this stage took up to 45 minutes. This is the most dangerous stage for people. During this time you and your property will be under threat of ember attack, spot fires, radiant heat, smoke and direct flame contact.

Your task is not to fight a towering fire front but to put out sparks, embers and spot fires that land and ignite near your home. You should seek shelter if the conditions are dangerous.



Reuters

What to do

- Go inside when it becomes too hot to stay outside. The skin on your ears and hands will alert you that conditions have become too hot to survive outside. Your home will protect you from radiant heat while the fire front passes through.
- While inside you must be actively defensive: extinguishing small fires and embers, and checking roof spaces and other likely gaps for ember attack.
- Take all firefighting equipment inside with you, including tap-fittings and hoses.
- Stay inside your house while the fire front passes and listen to the radio for fire reports.
- Close internal doors but maintain a watch on fire progress outside.
- Drink water regularly.
- Check the ceiling space frequently.
- Continuously check for spot fires inside the house.
- Loosen clothing to cool off when possible.
- Never go outside while a flame front is passing.

Sheltering in your house

The best place to shelter in your house is in a room that:

- is located away from the direction of the fire
- has a window or vent so you can see what is happening outside, but is not directly under or in front of a window that may shatter with heat and flame
- has at least two exits, for example, a window and a door.
- At this stage your house is protecting you

If your house catches fire

If your house catches fire during the passage of the main fire front, keep doors and windows closed and move to rooms that are furthest from the fire.

If you are unable to extinguish what has now become a house fire, go outside on to burnt ground after the fire front has passed. Make sure you are well covered to ensure your protection from radiant heat. Keep well away from the radiant heat and smoke that the house fire is generating.

- Do not return inside the house for any reason.

Stage three – after the fire front

Many hours, sometimes days, after the fire front has passed, properties continue to be at risk from ember attack and smouldering fuel. People should extinguish small fires, embers and check roof spaces and other likely ember attack gaps.



Tim Carrafa

What to do

- After the fire front has passed, leave your personal protective clothing on and go outside again as soon as it is safe.
- Water down the outside of the house, including the roof, and look out for small fires around your house.
- Remain alert, drink water.



Simon Dallinger

Continue to look out for small fires and embers

- Check for embers inside the roof, under floorboards, under house spaces, on verandahs and decking, on timber window ledges and door sills, on roof lines, in garden beds and mulch, and in garages and outbuildings.

At this stage you are protecting your house

Firefighting strategies

Warning: do not use water to extinguish electric, gas, petrol, kerosene or fat/oil fires. Fire extinguishers suited for the purpose can be used if available.

Water is best for extinguishing spot fires, but dry suppressants (for example, dirt) can be used to conserve water for emergencies.

- Aim water or dirt at the burning surface, not the flames.
- Remove fuel from the fire's path.
- Keep near an escape route to a safe patch of ground (bare earth or blackened ground).
- Rake sparks towards the burning fuel.
- Beat burning material with a wet bag, wet mop or green leaves if your water supply is limited.
- Do not stand in dense vegetation.
- Do not turn your back on the fire.
- Do not stamp out flames.
- Make sure embers and small fires are out, and recheck in case they reignite.
- Conserve your energy; drink plenty of water.
- Stay alert.
- If your clothes catch fire: stop, cover, drop and roll.
- Shield yourself from radiant heat.

If trapped outside

You should not get trapped if you stay within your defensible space and seek shelter inside your house when conditions become too hot or smoky. The following actions apply if you venture too far and get caught.

- Turn your hose or knapsack on yourself.
- If you can see a clear way, move downhill towards the side and rear of the fire.
- Do not run uphill.
- Do not try to escape along a gully.
- Do not try to outrun the fire.
- Do not go through flames higher than hip height (about 1.5 metres).
- Only go through flames if:
 - you can see over the flames
 - a clear safe area is two or three steps away
 - your face and any exposed body parts are covered
 - your shoes will protect both the top and soles of your feet.
- Shelter in a culvert, cave, ditch or behind rocks on burnt or bare ground.
- Clear all vegetation from the shelter.
- Lie down and cover yourself with a woollen blanket/thick coat for protection from radiant heat.
- Cover your nose.
- Limit your breathing rate, and breathe close to the ground.



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Sean O Toole

If caught in your car

- Find a safe house and seek shelter if possible.
- Find a cleared open area that is greater than 10 metres around and above the vehicle, for example, a golf course, sports oval, quarry, dam, rocky ground, sand or fallow paddock.
- Park the car facing towards the oncoming fire front.
- Turn the lights on.
- Turn off the engine: cars stall very easily in bushfires due to vaporisation in the carburettor.
- Close the doors, windows and all vents.
- Turn off the air conditioner or switch it to recirculate only.
- Ensure you are wearing protective clothing.
- Get down below the windows and cover yourself with woollen blankets.
- Continue to sip water.
- Stay in the car until there is blackened ground indicating the fire has moved on.

While you are in the car

- The car will become increasingly hotter and it may be rocked by strong winds.
- Smoke will enter the vehicle and as interior components become hotter they may start to give off toxic gases.
- The windows may break due to heat or from flying debris.
- The tyres and parts of the bodywork may catch alight.
- The fuel tank is unlikely to explode in the time needed to shelter in the car, although it may “vent” (particularly for LPG).

If you are forced out of the car by intense heat and toxic gases

- It will only be safe if the fire front has passed and the ground and undergrowth are blackened.
- Tree trunks may still be on fire. Flames burning disconnectedly on trees are less dangerous.
- Cover yourself completely with a woollen blanket.
- Use the vehicle as a radiant heat shield.
- Do not lie on bitumen.

After the fire and starting recovery

It may be some time before you are permitted to return to your home.

Returning to your property after a fire can be particularly hazardous, and the loss of power and access to clean drinking water can pose several health risks.

- Do not return to the house until it is safe to do so. Check with the fire authorities to make sure your residence is safe to enter.
- Do not cut or walk past coloured tape that has been placed over doors or windows to mark damaged areas, unless local authorities advise that it is safe to do so.
- Return to your property during daylight hours and avoid hazards such as power and lighting.
- Leave children with a relative or friend on the first visit (the site may be unsafe or distressing).
- Check the outside of your home before you enter (look for loose power lines, broken or damaged gas lines, foundation cracks or other damage).
- Check for any significant external damage to the structure before going inside. If the house is damaged it may not be safe to enter.
- Carefully open the door. If it is jammed, do not force it open as it may be helping to support the structure. Find another way to enter your home.
- Shifting or unusual noises may be signals that the structure is unstable and could fall. Leave immediately.
- Wear protective clothing. Many people are injured during the clean-up process.
- If you smell gas, notify emergency authorities.
- Do not turn on the lights, light matches, smoke, or cause a spark.
- If there is no power, check to make sure the main breaker is on. Fires may cause breakers to trip. If the breakers are on and power is still not present, contact your utility company.
- If the power is out, use a torch to inspect for damage and for as long as the power remains out.
- Check for embers in the roof space and throughout the house. There may be burning embers that could reignite.
- Beware of animals such as rodents, snakes, spiders and insects that may have entered your home.
- Visually check the stability of the trees around your house. Any tree that has been weakened by fire may be a hazard. Winds are normally responsible for toppling weakened trees. The wind patterns in your area may have changed as a result of the loss of tree cover.

**Leave your house immediately if you hear shifting or other unusual noises.
They may be a signal that the structure could fall.**



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Chris Roche



Karlie Plowman

Food safety and power failure

- Throw away food, beverages and medicine that have been exposed to heat, smoke or soot.
- The loss of power supply can affect refrigerated or frozen foods. To keep foods cold for as long as possible, open the fridge and freezer doors only when necessary.
- Try to keep frozen food cold. If food is still cold to the touch (less than 5 °C), it is safe to use.
- If power is restored when frozen food is still cold to the touch (less than 5 °C), the food is safe to refreeze. Food that was in the freezer can be used if it still has ice crystals on it. If not, discard it.
- Once cold or frozen food is no longer cold to the touch, it can only be kept and eaten for up to four hours before it must be thrown out.

Emotional wellbeing

Bushfires and bushfire warnings are stressful and can use up more emotional energy than you realise. People put themselves in a survival state to deal with the challenges, which can cause symptoms of stress over a long period.

It is important to understand that stress is normal and natural, but it needs to be recognised so it does not cause further problems.

- Focus on staying as calm as you can, even as the emergency builds.
- Stick to your plan, unless there is a very good reason to change it.
- Monitor how other people in the household are feeling, and help them to stay calm.
- Tell them how you are feeling, and support each other.
- Use breathing techniques: breathe slowly and calmly.

On the road to recovery

After the crisis has passed, the following guiding principles will help set you up for a good recovery.

- Concentrate on restoring safety, routine and familiarity as soon as possible.

- Try to relax and stay calm.
- Get together with loved ones, friends or people you trust.
- Restore your connections to other people and the community.
- Talk about what you have been through.
- Talk about your reactions and your feelings; it helps move through them.
- Talk and listen to children and share your feelings. It is normal for children to regress to earlier behaviour patterns during the recovery period.
- Plan for quality time, rest, recreation and doing enjoyable things. This will help you to restore lost energy.
- Keep an eye on each other – we are all different and we can help people who feel overwhelmed or confused.
- Talk to others and seek help if you or other family members continue to feel bad, can't move on, feel numb or detached, and continue to be anxious and lack motivation.
- Recovery workers and medical practitioners can provide further avenues for support and assistance.
- People who receive support from family, friends or other support organisations generally recover better from stressful situations.
- Access to information and support will aid recovery for most people.

**After a fire, the landscape can appear barren.
This can heighten the sense of loss.**

