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Bushfire and Grassfire Preparedness Policy



Help for non-English speakers

If you need help to understand the information in this policy please contact Language Loop -
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POLICY

This policy outlines actions schools and early childhood services must take in relation to bushfire and grassfire risk.

SUMMARY

- All registered schools, as a component of their registration, must comply with the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) Guidelines on Bushfire Preparedness.
- Schools and early childhood services must ensure they understand their bushfire and grassfire hazard exposure, their risk and the actions that they need to take for their emergency management planning, preparedness, ongoing situational awareness and response.
- Schools on the department's Bushfire At-Risk Register (BARR) and assessed to be at the greatest risk of fire need to understand the corresponding pre-emptive actions that are required on days of elevated fire danger (High or Extreme fire danger rating (FDR) based on risk categorisation) in their local government area.
- All schools and early childhood services on the Department's Bushfire At-Risk Register (BARR), and schools and early childhood services listed at risk of grassfire (Category 4), must close on all days declared Catastrophic FDR for their fire weather district.
- All bus routes which travel through fire districts declared Catastrophic FDR will be cancelled.
- All BARR schools need to understand their risk categorisation and how this determines whether they are also required to relocate or close on a Severe or Extreme Fire Danger Rating day in their Local Government Area.

- In the event of exposure to an immediate bushfire or grassfire threat, all school principals and approved providers/facility managers (or their delegates) have the authority to enact their Emergency Management Plan.
- The Department and the Country Fire Authority have collaborated to provide guidance to schools and early childhood services on the Bushfire-at-Risk Register on preparing for the risk of bushfire and grassfire.

DETAILS

Bushfire and grassfire risk management

The Department's Bushfire and Grassfire Preparedness policy is informed by expert advice from the emergency sector, including the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO).

Schools and early childhood services around Victoria are at varying risk from bushfire and grassfire:

- Every school and facility should consider if they are located near bushland or grassland, placing it at increased risk of bushfires or grassfires. Information and resources are available from the Country Fire Authority.
- All registered schools, as a component of their registration, must comply with the VRQA's Guidelines on Bushfire Preparedness (VRQA Guidelines).
- In addition, the Department maintains a register of the schools and early childhood services most at risk of bushfire — the BARR. The Department also maintains a list of schools and early childhood services at a lower level of risk of bushfire and grassfire (Category 4).
- Schools on the BARR have additional preparedness requirements under the VRQA Guidelines.

In the event of exposure to an immediate bushfire or grassfire threat, all school principals or facility managers (or their delegates) have the authority to enact the school or facility's EMP.

Schools and early childhood services at risk of grassfire

The Department maintains a list of schools and early childhood services most at risk of grassfire, refer to Schools and early childhood services at risk of grassfire (Category 4). This list is reviewed annually.

Schools and early childhood services on this list must close on days that are forecast by the Bureau of Meteorology as at Catastrophic FDR in their fire weather district and cancel their bus routes

All schools and early childhood services located near grassland must record their grassfire response procedures in their EMP, and Government schools are to utilise the online EMP portal to do this. Refer to Emergency and Critical Incident Management Planning.

Schools and early childhood services on the Bushfire At-Risk Register

The Department maintains a register of the schools and early childhood services most at risk of bushfire — the Bushfire At-Risk Register (BARR).

When listed in the BARR, the school:

- is categorised based on its bushfire risk
- must meet requirements for bushfire preparedness in the VRQA Guidelines

- may be required, based on its BARR category, to enact their pre-emptive action plan (being either their pre-emptive relocation, learning from home, or closure plan) on High or Extreme FDR days in their local government area (LGA)
- must close on days forecasted by the Bureau of Meteorology as Catastrophic FDR in their fire weather district and cancel any bus routes
- receives bushfire-specific compliance advice for their Shelter-in-Place building.

Bushfire preparedness for schools at bushfire risk

Schools and early childhood services located near bushland must record their bushfire response procedures in their EMP, and Government schools must use an online EMP portal to do this.

The VRQA Guidelines include specific requirements in relation to infrastructure and site maintenance, emergency management planning, information sharing and training that BARR schools must comply with as a condition of their registration.

Arrangements for schools at highest bushfire risk

Schools in Categories 0, 1 and 2 must have one of the following pre-emptive action plans, based on their specific context and fire risk:

- Relocation pre-emptive action plan – relocation of the school to operate on a safer school site
- Learning from home pre-emptive action plan
- Closure pre-emptive action plan

Relocation is always the preferred option to ensure safety for staff and students and the continuity of education, however this is not always possible for every school. Where relocation is not feasible then a learning from home plan should be considered to continue education where it is safe to do so.

- If relocation is not a feasible option, identified highest risk BARR schools will be approved by their regional director to develop a learning from home or closure plan.
- Your school's pre-emptive action plans must be developed in consultation with regional emergency management staff, reviewed by your senior education improvement leader (SEIL) and approved by your regional director

After approval by your regional director, your plan must be monitored each year to ensure it is still up to date. Any changes to your plan will need to be reviewed and approved by your regional director by 1 September each year, in line with your annual update to your school's EMP.

Pre-emptive actions will be triggered for Category 0 schools on a forecasted High and Extreme FDR day in their LGA, and for Category 1 and 2 schools on a forecasted Extreme FDR day in their LGA.

Ahead of the fire danger period, these schools must:

- engage and involve their school community in bushfire preparedness planning
- identify a host location
- develop a bushfire preparedness pre-emptive relocation, learning from home or closure plan for approval from their regional director – refer to the [Resources tab](#) for template plans.

Arrangements for highest risk schools will be as follows:

- Category 0 schools – will relocate, undertake learning from home arrangements or close in accordance with their pre-approved plan on a day of forecast High and Extreme FDR for their LGA
- Category 1 schools – will relocate, undertake learning from home arrangements or close in accordance with their pre-approved plan on a day of forecast Extreme FDR for their LGA
- Category 2 schools – will relocate, undertake learning from home arrangements or close in accordance with their pre-approved plan on a day of forecast Extreme FDR for their LGA.

Before enacting a pre-emptive action plan, schools must:

- notify staff, parents and carers, outside school hours care and other site users, for example, contractors
- complete the [Enacting your pre-emptive action plan \(relocation, learning from home, or closure\) checklist \(DOCX\)](#)
- make alternate arrangements for camps and excursions that are due to depart or arrive at the school on the day of the relocation.

These arrangements are not applicable to Catastrophic FDR days as the department implements a pre-emptive closure plan for all schools on the BARR and Category 4 list.

Schools on the BARR, regardless of categorisation, may still apply to their regional director to have alternate arrangements for their school due to elevated fire danger forecast which will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. These schools, in the first instance, should discuss their plans with their regional manager, operations and emergency management.

Catastrophic FDR days

Schools and early childhood services on the BARR and Category 4 list regardless of risk category, must close and cancel their buses on days forecasted by the Bureau of Meteorology as Catastrophic FDR in their fire weather district. All other buses which travel through the Catastrophic FDR fire weather district will also be cancelled.

Catastrophic FDR is the highest level of fire danger. These are the most dangerous conditions for a fire and if a fire starts and takes hold, lives are likely to be lost. Catastrophic FDR days will be forecast for the whole of a fire weather district.

The department will be advised of a Catastrophic fire danger rating through the Bureau of Meteorology forecasts. The region will:

- **Upon receiving a forecast indicating the potential for a Catastrophic FDR day:** advise schools and early childhood services who may be affected to prepare.
- **The day before forecast conditions (following 4pm forecast):** notify relevant schools and early childhood services that the following day is forecast to be a Catastrophic FDR day, and they need to pre-emptively close in accordance with their Emergency Management Plan (EMP).
- **Day of forecast conditions (following 5:30am forecast):** If the forecast changes or there is a late escalation to Catastrophic, affected schools and early childhood services will be contacted to

confirm arrangements. This may include closure or re-opening of facilities depending on if the forecast increases or decreases.

Ahead of the fire danger period, schools and early childhood services on the BARR and Category 4 list must:

- advise their school and parent/carer community and all site users of the arrangements for the summer that the school or early childhood facility will be closed on any Catastrophic FDR day in their fire weather district, and nobody is to be on site that day
- include pre-emptive closure procedures in their emergency management plan
- complete the activities outlined in the [bushfire/grassfire readiness checklist schools \(DOCX\)](#) or [bushfire/grassfire readiness checklist early childhood \(DOCX\)](#)
- notify bus travellers and parents/carers that no school bus services will operate to or from a school closed on a Catastrophic FDR day in their fire weather district.

Note: Schools and early childhood services not on the BARR or Category 4 list will remain open, unless they are directly threatened by fire or another emergency.

Schools and early childhood services on the BARR and Category 4 list must do the following before closing on a Catastrophic FDR day:

- notify staff, parents/carers and all other site users (including school-based contractors*, outside school hours care, extracurricular activities and programs) that the school or early childhood facility will close and nobody is to be on site that day (schools may consider using the template letters and newsletter content, for this purpose, refer to the [Resources tab](#))
- check proposed camp and excursion venues located in forecast Catastrophic FDR fire weather districts and update the [Student Activity Locator](#) with cancellations or changes
- notify bus travellers, parents, bus operators and client schools of potential and confirmed cancellation of bus routes.

Schools are strongly encouraged to download the [Vic Emergency app](#) to maintain situational awareness, including notification of any forecasts of Catastrophic FDR days in their fire weather district.

All school and early childhood facility closures as well as bus service cancellations are published on the department website – refer to [Closures and bus service cancellations](#).

*This policy does not apply to construction sites separately cordoned off from the school site under the control of a Victorian School Building Authority (VSBA) contractor. For further information email: vsba@education.vic.gov.au

Shelter-In-Place building

All schools (regardless of their BARR status) must nominate a building or buildings on the school site that can provide temporary accommodation until emergency services arrive and/or as a building of last

resort if there is insufficient time to evacuate. The school must identify the Shelter-In-Place in their EMP and follow the process described to request changes to nominated SIP buildings.

Planned burning

Planned burning is conducted throughout the state to reduce the risk to communities from future bushfires. For more information about the location and timing of planned burns for the next ten days, you may contact the Victorian Bushfire Information Line on 1800 240 667 or visit the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning.

RELATED POLICIES

- Emergency and Critical Incident Management Planning
- Excursions
- Leave — Bushfire, Flood or Other Severe Weather Event
- Shelter-in-Place Buildings

COMMUNICATION

This policy will be communicated to our school community in the following ways:

- Available publicly on our school's website
- Discussed at staff briefings/meetings as required
- Included in our staff handbook/manual
- Discussed at parent information nights/sessions
- Included in transition and enrolment packs
- Included as annual reference in school newsletter
- Made available in hard copy from the school office upon request

REVIEW CYCLE

Date Implemented	October 2022
Author	
Approved By	Glenrowan Primary School Council – October 2024 Winton Primary School Council – October 2024
Responsible for Review	Principal
Review Date	October 2025