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Shelter in Place Buildings Policy



Help for non-English speakers

If you need help to understand the information in this policy please contact Language Loop - 03 9280 1955

PURPOSE

This policy outlines the requirement for all schools to nominate a building(s) on the school site that provide a last resort temporary shelter-in-place option during an emergency event, and its design and expected performance criteria.

SUMMARY

- All schools must nominate a building or buildings on their school site that provides a last resort temporary sheltering option against the hazards and threats most likely to impact the school. This building known as Shelter-in-Place building(s) will be used:
 - in the event that evacuation from the site is no longer a viable option
 - until either the emergency has passed, or a more suitable alternative is available or
 - as an assembly point prior to evacuation
- All schools must identify the Shelter-in-Place building(s) in their Emergency Management Plan and on their evacuation diagrams.
- Shelter-in-Place building(s) must meet performance criteria outlined in this policy based on the school's risk profile. There are
 - additional considerations to protect from ember attack for schools that have an identified grassfire or bushfire risk, and
 - additional performance criteria for schools identified to be on the Bushfire At-Risk Register to protect from ember attack and associated consequential fires
- Some Victorian schools are also designated Neighbourhood Safer Places which are buildings or land that are intended to be used as a refuge of last resort during the passage of a bushfire, for persons whose primary bushfire plans have failed.
- Some Victorian schools accommodate a Community Fire Refuge prescribed in legislation which provides a place of last resort for the local community in the event of a bushfire threatening the area, when all other plans have failed.

DETAILS

Shelter-in-Place buildings

All schools regardless of whether they are listed on the Bushfire At-Risk Register (BARR), must nominate a Shelter-in-Place building or buildings (SIP) on the school site that provide a last resort temporary shelter option until either an emergency has passed, or a more suitable alternative is available.

In the event of a fire in the landscape, a SIP may be used as a central assembly point prior to evacuation or as a last resort when evacuation from the site is no longer a viable option. Leaving early is always the best option.

Schools must identify the SIP (or where none has been nominated, a suitable alternative) in their Emergency Management Plan (EMP).

The location of the SIP (or alternative) must be added in evacuation diagrams, printed and displayed in each building in the school.

Schools are advised to consider including at least one SIP emergency drill per year.

SIP performance criteria

The selection of a SIP needs to be based on existing accessible facilities.

The following performance criteria should inform the choice of SIP on the school site, with additional criteria required, as the school's risk of bushfire or grassfire increases.

ALL SCHOOLS

All schools with a nominated SIP must ensure:

- all students, staff and visitors present on the site at the outset of the emergency can be accommodated
- requirements under the National Construction Code (NCC) are met with respect to safe departure or evacuation from the SIP, based on the maximum school population that might occupy the building
- access to toilets and water from within the building is considered
- access for emergency services to the SIP
- safety equipment (such as fire-fighting services and equipment) is in proper working order and meets the relevant Essential Safety Measures (ESM) maintenance requirements applicable to the age of the building
- the location of the SIP and the EMP is shared with co-located early childhood services and alternative education facilities (and vice versa)
- that at the time of construction, or where there is any substantial renovation to the existing SIP, works comply with the NCC and are independently certified as such by a building surveyor. If the VSBA are managing a project for the school, they will organise this certification. If the school is managing a project itself, they will need to ensure that the works are certified

SCHOOLS WITH BUSHFIRE OR GRASSFIRE IDENTIFIED AS A THREAT OR HAZARD IN THEIR EMP RISK ASSESSMENT

In addition to the performance criteria for all schools, the following should be applied for schools with bushfire or grassfire identified as a threat in their EMP risk assessment. The SIP must:

- be positioned as far away as practicable from locations most at risk of bushfire (for example, forests, bushland and trees) both within the school and beyond the school boundary
- have adequate building surroundings that allow safe evacuation from the SIP to the next safe shelter option identified in the EMP
- not present an unacceptably high risk of catching fire
- not provide an unacceptably high level of toxic smoke into the SIP building or SIP exit or evacuation routes
- minimise flammable elements including combustible material within 10 metres of the building, such as plastic equipment, rubbish skips, recycling bins, wood piles, gas cylinders and plants with the potential to produce localised flame contact with any vulnerable part of the building and
- have access to a static water supply, that is, properly maintained hydrant, booster systems or tank water supply that ensures fire crews have adequate means to defend the SIP if they can attend

Where the SIP does not meet these criteria, the school's EMP must include alternate bushfire safety actions within their bushfire or grassfire response procedure, developed in consultation with the local fire brigade.

SCHOOLS LISTED ON THE BUSHFIRE AT-RISK REGISTER (BARR)

In addition to the performance criteria for schools with bushfire or grassfire identified as a threat or hazard in their EMP, for schools that are on the BARR, the SIP must:

- have enough exit doors that are not able to externally combust or require passage over combustible surfaces or decking with exits that allow for the timely exit of the building under bushfire conditions with consideration of the potential rate that the building could lose tenability in a bushfire
- have non-combustible external building elements and attachments
- consider specific building design details which limit the likelihood of ignition and limit the rate at which the building loses tenability (related to the effective evacuation or exit time) in a bushfire, such as avoiding:
 - hidden, unoccupied or unmonitored combustible building cavities or rooms
 - combustible external façade materials
 - attached buildings and building elements that are not built to the same requirements (a significant structure that is located near a SIP can present a higher ignition threat to the building than an ember attack. Radiant heat and/or flames from a nearby burning structure may be enough to ignite a building. It is recommended that a registered fire safety engineer is engaged to analyse the risks and provide appropriate advice)
- continue to be maintained at the same standard as stipulated in the SIP assessment guidelines. The annual maintenance of the SIP is the responsibility of the school with any changes beyond the annual maintenance approved by the Department's VSBA Operations and Programs Branch at rfeproject@education.vic.gov.au or phone 03 7022 2221
- meet ESM maintenance and maintenance of exits and paths of travel based on when the building was built and may consider upgrades (funded by the school) that would align with newer construction dates
- have no combustible material within 10 metres of the building such as plastic equipment, rubbish skips, recycling bins, wood piles, gas cylinders and plants with the potential to produce localised flame contact with any vulnerable part of the building
- choose plants with low flammability and locate them correctly

Where the SIP does not meet these criteria, the school's EMP must include alternate bushfire safety actions within their bushfire or grassfire response procedure.

Under the VSBA's Rolling Facilities Evaluation Project, a Bushfire Attack Level (BAL) and condition assessment including identification of required maintenance works is undertaken every five years, with a desktop BAL assessment halfway through the 5 year cycle. If the rating is higher in comparison to the original, an on-site BAL assessment and SIP assessment may be undertaken.

Schools that require a BAL report, for building(s) as part of an overall risk assessment, outside this timeframe can request this from the VSBA or use a Bushfire Planning and Design (BPAD) accredited level 2 or 3 bushfire consultant found on the Fire Protection Association Australia website (or in a very limited number of circumstances, direct support from the Country Fire Authority may be requested).

Changing the nominated SIP

It is essential that all school EMPs accurately identify their current SIP (if they have one).

Schools on the BARR should not change their SIP unless there are extenuating circumstances. In these circumstances, the school must contact their regional Manager, Operations and Emergency Management, who will liaise with the Department's Security and Emergency Management Division and the VSBA prior to providing advice back to the school. In changing a designated SIP building, works may be required to ensure this building meets the Department's SIP assessment guidelines. Schools are liable for any capital costs incurred to change a SIP building.

Maintenance around the SIP

Maintenance is a shared responsibility between the school and the Department. However, schools are responsible for their own vegetation management. Schools with bushfire or grassfire identified as a risk in their EMP must undertake vegetation maintenance activities, particularly around their SIP, as per below guidance:

- the school site has been slashed or cleared of all flammable undergrowth such as dry grass and vegetation to the site boundary unless it is greater than 50 metres from buildings, evacuation routes and evacuation locations
- a fuel reduced zone must be established around buildings (20 metres as a guide) consistent with the following requirements:
 - grass must be short cropped and maintained during the declared fire danger period
 - all leaves and vegetation debris must be removed at regular intervals during the declared fire danger period
 - within 10 metres of a building, flammable objects must not be located close to the vulnerable parts of the building
 - plants greater than 10cm in height must not be placed within 3 metres of a window or glass feature of the building
 - shrubs must not be located under the canopy of trees
 - individual and clumps of shrubs must not exceed 5 square metres in area and must be separated by at least 5 metres
 - trees must not overhang or touch any elements of the building
 - the canopy of trees must be separated by at least 5 metres, and
 - there must be a clearance of at least 2 metres between the lowest tree branches and ground level
- remove dead vegetation and other flammable elements and prune lower limbs of established trees (check with local council before removing trees)
- the fuel reduced zone does not have plantings that are dense and typical of bushland settings (CFA's publication *Landscaping for Bushfire* provides information and ways to appropriately manage vegetation around buildings. Additional advice may be available from CFA Community Safety in regional offices and CFA Headquarters)
- trees or branches overhanging buildings and sheds have been removed or trimmed to a height of 2 metres from building rooflines and 2 metres clear of buildings
- all stockpiled leaves, pruning, dead limbs and trees and other combustible materials have been removed from the site
- thick, continuous shrubs or other vegetation contacting building walls or directly under windows have been removed and
- rooves and roof gutters are clear of leaves, twigs and branches

Community bushfire safety options on school premises

Neighbourhood Safer Places

There are a number of Victorian school sites where a building or land has been authorised by the Minister for Education to be a Neighbourhood Safer Place (NSP).

NSPs provide an option of last resort during the passage of a bushfire. They are typically open spaces, such as sporting ovals.

NSPs are intended to be used by persons whose primary bushfire plans have failed. They are places of relative safety only.

The NSP may or may not be the same location as the school SIP.

The NSP is assessed annually by 31 August by the municipal council to determine ongoing suitability to be a designated NSP.

Designated NSPs and assessment information can be found on the CFA Neighbourhood Safer Places website.

Community Fire Refuges

A Community Fire Refuge (CFR):

- is not a replacement for community members having their own bushfire survival plan. The safest option is to be out of the area on all days of severe, extreme or Code Red fire danger
- provides a place of last resort for the local community in the event of a bushfire threatening the area, when all other plans have failed
- offers a higher level of protection than a residential dwelling but does not guarantee survival. Like all last resort options, CFRs carry a risk of injury or death
- must comply with the performance and operational requirements and required prescriptive inputs for the public construction of CFRs in accordance with Ministerial Directions for public construction

Ferny Creek Primary School and Millwarra Primary School are the only Victorian schools that have a CFR in one of their school buildings. These buildings operate as their intended educational purpose, until activated as a CFR.

The CFR is only on standby for activation as a CFR on severe, extreme or Code Red days, when a fire is threatening the area. The decision to activate and permit entry to the CFR will be made by the incident controller of the bushfire.

If there is a serious threat from bushfire or grassfire and a Watch and Act warning or recommendation to evacuate is issued or as otherwise determined by the Incident Control Centre or State Control Centre, the community will be permitted to occupy the building as a fire refuge.

If the CFR is activated within school hours, the school's staff and students have priority access to the refuge and school staff will provide a safe space for students and the rest of the public. The site specific Community Fire Refuge Operating Procedures Manual maintained by Emergency Management Victoria outlines the operational procedures for the preparation, activation, opening and operation of the CFR during a fire event.

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 – November 2024 Winton Primary School Council – November 2024
Responsible for Review	Principal
Review Date	November 2025