

BUSHFIRE INFORMATION KIT

# BUSHFIRE INFORMATION BOOKLET

The NSW Government and our community share a responsibility to ensure everything possible is done to prevent bushfires.

This booklet is an important part of the Rural Fire Service bushfire prevention and awareness community education and information program, and is being distributed to all households, businesses and community services.

Although emergency services will do everything within their capacity to manage emergencies such as bushfires, they cannot guarantee that in all instances they will be on hand to assist. We must all take an active role in being informed and prepared.

To help you prepare this bushfire information booklet is divided into three sections:

**Before – things you can do to prepare yourself and your home in the lead up to the bushfire season and a potential bushfire.**

**During – things you can do to protect yourself and your home during a bushfire.**

**After – what to do after the fire has passed.**

Each of these sections is an important part of your preparation and response to the threat of a bushfire.

*Please read this booklet and complete the household bushfire plan on page 19 with the occupants of your home and put it in a safe place where everyone can find it quickly.*



**General Information:**

1800 NSW RFS (1800 679 737)

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## BUSHFIRE INFORMATION BOOKLET 1

To help you in understanding how to protect yourself and your home it is important to understand how a bushfire attacks.

# HOW A BUSHFIRE ATTACKS

## Embers (burning debris)

A fire front may not reach your home. However, embers (burning debris) carried by strong winds may cause your home and property to catch fire.

The strong winds associated with bushfires may cause bits of burning vegetation and other flammable material, such as fencing and particles of wood to travel long distances ahead of a fire front. A lot of unburnt combustible material (e.g. dry leaves) is also carried by the wind with these embers.

This material quickly collects on and around the home and can cause many small fires that may develop and involve the home. This can occur before, during, and for a long period after the main fire has passed and is the main cause of house ignition.

## Radiant heat

While extreme heat radiating from a fire usually lasts for only a few minutes, this heat can be sufficient to fracture glass and ignite materials outside a building. There is no scientific evidence of internal materials igniting from radiation. The intensity of the heat depends largely on the amount and location of combustible items (e.g. wood, grass, paper) around your property or in proximity to an adjacent house that is burning.

## Direct flame contact

Direct flame contact from the fire front can occur when there are flammable materials such as wood piles, shrubs and trees, building materials, etc. close to the house, hence the flames actually 'touch' a building. Flames from secondary items (e.g. sheds, timber fences, adjacent homes) can also impact on the building if they are close by.

## Wind

Strong winds usually accompany a bushfire and can add to the fire's intensity and can carry embers. In some cases the force of the winds can damage a building. The force of wind-driven debris or suction may break windows or remove parts of the walls or roof. This assists the embers in entering the building and igniting combustible elements inside.

# HOUSEHOLD BUSHFIRE EMERGENCY PLAN

Every home is different. That's why every household needs to develop their own *Household Bushfire Emergency Plan* (see pages 18 & 19).

Here are some issues that you should consider:

There is a space provided on page 19 (inside the back cover) to write your plan:

- decide whether you should stay or go. Consider the safety of children, the elderly, those with disabilities, and your pets. If you are a person with a disability, frail-aged, or have special needs, talk to your family, neighbours or carers about how they can help you with your plan, or contact your local RFS Brigade for advice;
- if you have special needs, consider these when writing your plan. Involve relatives, friends and others in your plan and response;
- help relatives, neighbours and friends with special needs to prepare their plans;
- decide on a 'safe' meeting place and how you will find each other if separated;
- decide whether you will move your pets and other animals to a safer place;
- consider what important documents and personal effects you want to protect, and where you will store them to find them quickly;
- consider how well-prepared you are for an emergency and what you need to do to better prepare your home;
- understand the impact a power failure would have on your plans, e.g. cordless phones, or automatic garage doors that may not work;
- be aware that communications may be difficult during an emergency e.g. your mobile phone may not work; and
- check you have adequate home contents and building insurance.

## BUSHFIRE INFORMATION BOOKLET 3

### Put together an emergency kit:

**Torches** with spare batteries;

**Candles** and matches or lighter - to provide light in the case of a power failure;  
AM/FM battery powered **radio** and spare batteries to keep in touch with local emergency bulletins;

**First aid kit**;

**Essential medication**;

**Fire extinguisher and fire blankets**;

**Protective clothing for everybody in the house**

including leather shoes or work boots, a broad brimmed hat, natural fibre clothing, gloves and goggles covering your body as much as possible;

**Bottled drinking water** to reduce the risk of dehydration, and long-life energy food;

**Emergency contact details**;

**List and organise location of valuables.**



# SHOULD YOU STAY OR SHOULD YOU GO?

Everyone is different. Making the choice of whether to stay or go during a bushfire is a personal one that you should discuss with other members of your household.

**If you have made a decision to stay, and you are thoroughly prepared, you should stay with your home in the event of a bushfire.**

Research conducted following major bushfires in Australia has concluded that most buildings lost in bushfire situations are the result of initially small fires started by embers.

People whose houses are well prepared and, who themselves are fit, able and prepared and who take shelter in their homes while the fire front passes have an excellent chance of surviving a bushfire and saving their homes.

**If you decide to go, or to have some members of the household leave the home, you must depart early, well before the fires reach your vicinity.**

Last minute evacuations from bushfires contribute to the majority of casualties because people may be caught in exposed situations.

People such as the very young, the elderly, people with disabilities, those who feel they would not cope with the trauma of fire, and those who have not taken sufficient measures to protect their homes should leave if there is sufficient time to do so. There is information in this booklet regarding things to consider if you, or someone you know, have special needs.

If you need further information, advice or assistance regarding these issues call your local RFS Office.

If you need more information to help make the right decision for your household, please read the Australasian Fire Authorities Council protocols.

The document is available from [www.ausfire.com](http://www.ausfire.com) or write to:

**5/340 Albert Street  
East Melbourne VIC 3002  
Telephone 03 9419 2388  
Fax: 03 9419 2389  
email: [afac@afac.com.au](mailto:afac@afac.com.au)**

## BUSHFIRE INFORMATION BOOKLET 5

Your decision to stay or go should be discussed and decided with other members of your household well in advance of any bushfire threat.

# CHECK LIST

**Yes or No** Do you understand the local bushfire risk and how to prepare your house for this risk?

**Yes or No** Have you removed things that can burn from around your home?

**Yes or No** Do you have basic firefighting equipment (hoses, metal buckets, protective clothing etc.)?

**Yes or No** Do you have access to an alternative water source (filled bath, wheely bin, pool, pond, etc.)?

**Yes or No** Are you physically fit and mentally prepared to cope with the stress of firefighting?

**Yes or No** Do you have plans to assist members of your household, pets or livestock who need assistance in the event of a fire?

**If your answer to all these questions is yes, then you can have greater confidence in your decision to stay with your home.**

If some of your answers are no, you may plan to go:

- consider any special needs, such as transport, essential medications, small children's needs and other support you may need;
- plan what you would take in a small case containing essential personal documents, photos and other prized possessions;
- prepare your pets and protect your home (see pages 12 & 13);
- plan an evacuation route - consult a local map and decide on at least two alternative routes you could take if you have to evacuate quickly - listen to the local radio stations to check road closures in case of an emergency; and
- if you plan to go - GO EARLY.

# PREPARE YOUR HOME FOR THE BUSHFIRE SEASON

- walk around your home and identify potential fire risks (e.g. timber deck, open sub-floor spaces, openings in the structure);
- remove rubbish, dry timber, wood piles and vegetation so they are away from your home;
- mow long grass;
- clear undergrowth from fences;
- clear roof and gutters of leaves and twigs on a regular basis, especially in summer;
- trim branches so they are not overhanging your home;
- screen vents into the roof space and underfloor space with fine mesh wire; and
- replace damaged or missing roof tiles.

**Where possible eliminate leaf litter in gutters, or consider 'leaf free' gutters or metal guards.**

**Avoid structures built of combustible materials attached directly to the house.**

**Box in or screen eaves and vents with metal flywire.**

**Consider installing a sprinkler system.**

**Plan what you will use to block your gutters**

**Regularly prune and clear dead material from under shrubs and trees.**

**Check that roof coverings fit tightly with no openings so that sparks cannot enter.**

**Provide good access to water supplies.**

## BUSHFIRE INFORMATION BOOKLET 7


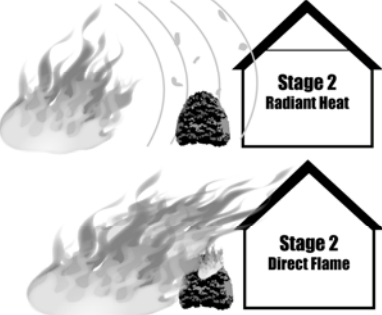

Be aware of materials in your yard that may burn.

Consider fitting shutters or metal screens to windows.

Consider removing mulch close to your home.

Maintain a clear area immediately around the house with paving, short lawn or low ground cover.

# 3 Ways Houses are set Alight

	<p><b>Embers (sparks)</b></p> <p>Embers (sparks) are the main cause of houses catching alight during bush fires. Extreme fire weather days are accompanied by strong to gale force winds, which carry burning debris. Embers therefore gain entry to houses through broken windows or gaps in and around walls or roof cladding and ignite the contents. Embers also lodge on and ignite horizontal timber decking, guttering, steps and window sills. They can be blown up against and ignite timber used for supports, underfloor battens, posts and steps.</p>	<p><b>ACTION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have a Bushfire Survival Plan.</li> <li>• Have a portable battery operated AM/FM radio to receive information during the fire.</li> <li>• Don't enter the bush if smoke or fire is in the area.</li> <li>• Stay calm and report all fires on 000!</li> <li>• Check if elderly neighbours need assistance.</li> <li>• If possible, block your gutters and fill with water.</li> <li>• If you choose to self-evacuate, do so early.</li> <li>• If ordered to evacuate by the police you must obey, so have pets and valuables packed and ready to go.</li> <li>• Wear long sleeves and long pants, natural fibres and sturdy footwear.</li> <li>• Close all windows and doors, block spaces beneath doors with wet towels or blankets.</li> </ul>
	<p><b>Radiant Heat + Direct Flame</b></p> <p>The hotter a fire the greater the amount of radiant heat and the faster the fire will spread by radiation.</p> <p>Direct flame impact usually occurs when something combustible is near the house, eg. shrubs, wood piles or outbuilding.</p>	<p><b>ACTION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wear long sleeves and long pants made from natural fibres and sturdy footwear</li> <li>• Have eye and breathing protection available for everyone</li> <li>• Keep a torch and portable AM/FM radio at hand, in case power fails, to monitor weather</li> <li>• Turn off gas and power</li> <li>• Hose down walls, gardens etc before the fire arrives</li> <li>• Block downpipes and fill gutters with water</li> <li>• Fill all sinks, baths etc with water to use on spot fires in case mains water supply or domestic electric water pumps fail</li> <li>• Bring hoses/fittings and other fire suppression tools inside, so they can be used later</li> <li>• Close all doors and windows and block gaps with damp towels</li> <li>• Move flammable curtains and furniture away from windows</li> <li>• Shelter in a part of the house most distant from approaching fire front until fire has passed then actively put out spot fires</li> <li>• Once fire front has passed, go outside to check for spot fires and ember attack</li> </ul>
	<p><b>After the Fire Has Passed</b></p> <p>Ember attack is the biggest threat to houses. This can last for several hours after the fire front has passed. Unattended houses are very susceptible during this stage. People who have relocated can return during this stage. Experience shows that people and houses that are well prepared will survive the passage of a bush fire.</p>	<p><b>ACTION</b></p> <p>It is the owner's responsibility to secure the site following a fire.</p> <p>After the fire has passed and for several hours after the fire front has passed, patrol your property and put out spot fires started by flying embers.</p>

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- Sturdy ladder Garden sprayer to suppress small fires
- Sturdy gardening gloves
- Natural fibre protective blanket
- Metal buckets
- Torch with spare batteries
- Wide brimmed hat
- Rakes, shovels and mops
- Adequate hoses with nozzles
- Natural fibre long pants or overalls
- Sturdy leather boots or shoes



# PREPARE YOURSELF FOR THE BUSHFIRE SEASON

## PROTECTIVE CLOTHING

Protective clothing should be worn by everyone - not just those fighting the fire.

You should wear:

- long-sleeved natural fibre shirts or tops, such as wool or cotton (synthetic fibres melt and can burn from radiant heat);
- natural fibre long pants or overalls, such as wool or cotton;
- protect yourself from smoke - by covering your face with a mask or damp natural fibre cloth;
- sturdy leather boots or shoes;
- goggles to protect your eyes from smoke and embers;
- broad-brimmed hat, woollen balaclava or hard hat; and
- sturdy garden gloves, not rubber or synthetic.

## BASIC HOUSEHOLD FIREFIGHTING EQUIPMENT

Useful equipment for firefighting can include:

- long hoses that reach all parts of the house and garden;
- ladders (inside and out) which are long enough to allow you to check roof cavity and eaves;
- metal rakes, shovels, mops and buckets to extinguish sparks and spot fires;
- garden backpack sprays which are useful for putting out small spot fires;
- wet towels - to be placed under doors and windows to prevent embers from entering the house; and
- a supply of bottled drinking water to prevent dehydration.

## LEARN BASIC FIRST AID

- learn first aid by attending one of the recognised courses conducted by organisations such as the Red Cross, St John Ambulance or Parasol EMT;
- keep a well stocked first aid kit accessible at all times; and
- have a basic first aid reference book on hand.

**DANGER** – Protect yourself, bystanders and the patient from danger.

**RESPONSE** – Check for consciousness by shaking the shoulder and asking “are you alright”. If no response do the following:

**AIRWAY** – Place the patient on their side and clear the airway by removing any foreign matter from the mouth.

### CALL 000 – ASK FOR AN AMBULANCE

**BREATHING** – Check for breathing. If absent commence mouth-to-mouth resuscitation. Turn patient onto back and open airway by lifting jaw upwards at point of chin and tilting head well back. Keep one hand on jaw, use other hand to pinch nostrils and keep head tilted back. Seal your mouth over patients and give five full breaths within ten seconds. Check chest rises and falls each time. Children (1-14 years) use less force than for adults. Babies (0-1 years) do not tilt head back. Place your mouth over baby’s mouth and nose and use a ‘puff’ of air from your cheeks.

**CIRCULATION** – Is there a pulse? The most readily available pulse is the carotid, located next to the Adams apple.

Pulse and breathing present or return – keep patient on side and observe airway, breathing and pulse until ambulance arrives.

Pulse present but patient NOT breathing – mouth-to-mouth resuscitation until Ambulance arrival, at rate of one breath every four seconds watching for rise and fall of chest. For children and babies 1 breath/puff every three seconds.

**NO PULSE** – give 5 full breaths. If still unable to detect a pulse start Cardio Pulmonary Resuscitation (CPR) - Position heel of one hand on lower half of breastbone and grasp wrist with your other hand. Children (1-14 years) use heel of one hand. (Babies 0-1 year) use two fingers in middle of chest.

Give 15 chest compressions at depth of 4-5 cms. Continue CPR at ratio of **two breaths to 15 chest compressions** – (four sets/minute). Check for pulse every two minutes. Children (1-14 years) compress 2.5-5cm. Compress faster at 6 sets/minute). For babies (0-1 years) compress 2-3cm and 8 sets/minute.

If second person available, get them to take over CPR when you tire.

## FUEL REDUCTION

Fuel reduction is about the removal or reduction of combustible vegetative material to reduce bushfire risk. This is achieved through various means including hazard reduction burning. Fuels naturally build up over time and without active management have the potential to accumulate to such an extent that fire control is difficult or under some conditions impossible.

The community will be advised if hazard reduction burns are planned in their area through the media, through Local RFS Websites and in some cases through letterbox drops if you are adjacent to the area to be burnt.

Further information regarding prescribed burning can be obtained from the RFS Website.

If you are concerned about fire or visible smoke,  
**report your sighting to the fire services on 000.**

## BE AWARE OF THE CONDITIONS

Being aware of conditions and possible threats will help you to decide when to activate your household bushfire plan:

- be alert to weather that produces bad fire days (i.e. hot, dry, windy days); and
- listen to your local radio station during days of extreme fire danger.

## TOTAL FIRE BANS

For public safety, a Total Fire Ban is declared for days when fires are likely to escape and be difficult to contain. Extreme fire danger is caused by a combination of dry vegetation and hot, dry, windy weather.

The Bureau of Meteorology provides advice on forecast weather conditions and fire danger ratings during the Bushfire Danger Period.

The RFS Commissioner declares Total Fire Bans based on this advice and other information. This decision is generally made at around 5pm each afternoon during the Bushfire Danger Period and the Total Fire Ban applies for the following day, starting from midnight and lasting 24 hours.

During a Total Fire Ban, no fire may be lit in the open. This also applies to incinerators and barbeques which use solid fuel, e.g. wood or charcoal. A gas or electric barbeque may be used under the following conditions:

- it is under the direct control of a responsible adult;
- the ground within three metres of the barbeque is cleared of all materials which could burn; and
- there is a continuous supply of water available at all times.

## WHAT TO DO IF YOU HEAR THE STANDARD EMERGENCY WARNING SIGNAL (SEWS)

The SEWS signal sounds like a wailing siren and will be broadcast on local radio and television stations. It will draw your attention to an urgent safety message. Following the signal there will be an important message:

- pay immediate attention;
- listen to the announcement; and
- follow any instructions given.

If your area has been identified as being under threat activate your household bushfire plan if you have not already done so. If you have decided to evacuate leave now.

## PREPARE YOUR PETS

### Domestic

Decide if your animals should stay or go. If they go, move them to a safe place early. If your animals stay with you:

- keep them indoors - their instincts about dangerous conditions may cause them to run away;
- keep them in a quiet room with food and water, preferably laundry, bathroom or toilet;
- if they have to be left outside do not tie them up; and
- have pet carrying packs ready.

### Livestock

Move animals to a closely grazed or ploughed paddock with drinking water and steel fencing if possible. Last minute preparation can leave you and your animals in danger.

# PROTECT YOUR HOME

Whether you decide to go or stay, you should:

- close vents, windows and doors;
- remove curtains from windows;
- protect your home from embers and smoke by blocking gaps from the inside with wet towels or draft stoppers;
- turn off the gas supply. Know where your household gas service control valve is located, and how to turn it off (note do not turn on gas supply without first consulting a professional);
- remove furniture from near doorways and walls and put it in the centre of the room;
- block down pipes and fill gutters with water;
- hose down flammable external walls, gardens, wooden fences and decks;
- put door mats inside;
- move outdoor furniture away from the house;
- ensure that any gas cylinders are turned off;
- store flammable liquids away from the house;
- cover trash packs and move them away from the house; and
- if you need your car and your garage door is automatic, take your car out of the garage before the power is interrupted and close your garage door.

## HAVE AN ALTERNATIVE WATER SUPPLY

During a fire, water pressure is likely to be lost or minimised. For an alternative water supply:

- fill buckets, bath, laundry tubs, basins and wheely/garbage bins for a water supply to extinguish small fires with a bucket or mop;
- if available, water tanks, swimming pools and dams are ideal water sources; and
- do not get into a bath, pool or dam as these can heat up dangerously during a fire.

# THINGS TO DO WHEN THE FIRE FRONT APPROACHES

- disconnect external hoses and take them inside while the fire front passes (usually 5 to 15 minutes);
- retreat inside away from radiant heat, smoke and flames;
- continually patrol the interior of your house to check for fires;
- drink water to ensure you don't dehydrate;
- stay away from windows – windows are a weak point in your home's defence against the fire;
- protect yourself from smoke - minimise smoke getting into the home. If there is smoke in the house, protect yourself by covering your face with a mask or damp natural fibre cloth;
- if you need to go outside, protect yourself with a damp woolen blanket;
- don't climb onto the roof if you can avoid it. Your roof can be hosed down or checked by standing on an appropriate portable ladder, which must be firmly secured. Roofs in older buildings may also be worn and brittle and unable to support the weight of a person (water on roofs before and during the fire is not useful despite popular belief); and
- restrict use of phones to essential calls only.



## THINGS TO DO AFTER THE FIRE FRONT HAS PASSED

- if it is safe, continue to check in and around the house for new fires as burning embers can continue to fall for many hours after the fire front has passed. Also, if possible, be vigilant of neighbouring houses;
- check inside the roof;
- quickly extinguish any fires which have started in, near or under the house or roof;
- check if anyone is injured - perform first aid and obtain medical help if required (protect yourself while you are doing this);
- listen to your battery-operated radio for emergency updates;
- if there is any further fire danger or your house begins to burn move to burnt ground outside the house; and
- remain in or near your house - wait for help.

## CONTACT OTHERS

- regroup your family;
- reassure family and friends; and
- nominate a family contact person to advise friends and relatives of your current situation.

# PROTECT YOURSELF FROM POTENTIAL HAZARDS AFTER A FIRE

- brick walls and damaged roof structures can collapse without warning, especially in windy conditions. Keep well clear until you are sure they are secure;
- wear sturdy shoes and gloves to protect yourself against glass, nails, smouldering debris etc;
- use a facemask or wrap a wet natural fibre cloth over your nose and mouth to reduce the inhalation of dust and ash;
- do not touch exposed electrical wires or powerlines;
- be aware that open sewerage pipes can be a health hazard;
- avoid taking children into the ruins, but if you do, supervise them at all times;
- keep the number of people entering your property to a minimum;
- pools with water in them must be fenced, otherwise they should be emptied; and
- temporary fences need to be mesh panels on concrete blocks standing about 1.8m high. These are available from hire companies.

# IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE BUSHFIRE

## TO SEEK ASSISTANCE

Phone 000 and clearly tell the operator your name, location and the service that you require — police, fire or ambulance.



# BUSHFIRE CHECKLIST

## **BEFORE THE BUSHFIRE SEASON** Prepare Your Household

- Write a household emergency bushfire plan
- Help relatives and neighbours with special needs to plan
- Advise family and friends of plans
- Get together an emergency kit
- Write down emergency contact details
- Prepare your property

### **On Days of High Fire Risk**

- Refer to your Bushfire Information Booklet
- Be aware of the conditions, including fire bans and alerts
- Prepare firefighting equipment and clothing
- Prepare your pets
- Prepare an alternative water supply

### **DURING** As the Fire Approaches

- Listen to your local radio for information and Standard Emergency Warning Signals
- If you have decided to evacuate, prepare your home and leave early
- Close vents, windows and doors
- Remove curtains
- Block gaps from the inside with wet towels or draft stoppers
- Turn off the gas supply
- Move furniture clear of windows
- Block gutters with rags or old tennis balls and fill with water
- Hose down external walls, garden, wooden fences and decks

### **When the Bushfire Arrives**

- Retreat inside from radiant heat, and move hoses inside
- Inspect the house regularly for spot fires
- Drink water

### **AFTER** After the Fire Front has Passed

- Patrol for fire outbreaks inside and outside
- Check inside the roof
- Extinguish any fires in or around the house
- Implement any required first aid
- Listen to your radio for emergency updates
- Contact family and friends

# HOUSEHOLD BUSHFIRE PLAN

**Stay or go?** (pages 4-5):

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**If going, where?** (page 2):

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**Pets?** (pages 2 & 12):

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**Documents?** (pages 2-3):

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**Insurance?** (page 2):

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**Emergency kit?** (page 3):

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**Home prepared?** (page 6-7):

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**Basic equipment and clothing?** (page 8-9):

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**Who does what before and during and after a bushfire** (pages 13-15):

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