



NEW BUSH FIRE CHANGES FOR COMING SEASON

As many of you would know, following the release of the Interim Report of the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, a number of nationally agreed changes have been adopted. Changes to the way messages are delivered to the community, Fire Danger Ratings and bush fire alerts are the first of the changes to be in place by 1 October. The Service has been an active participant in the working groups that developed these changes.

The system clearly outlines what residents should be doing in the lead up to the fire season, what they should be doing before a fire starts and after a fire starts.

PREPARE. ACT. SURVIVE.

These three words embody the key principles of how the community should prepare for and react to a fire event. The policy of Prepare, Stay and Defend or Leave Early is still good advice for a regular bush fire and will continue to underpin our messages to the community, however, there needs to be a clear understanding by the community of the potential consequences of deciding to stay and defend their property. In Extreme and Catastrophic conditions there is the very real likelihood for loss of life and property and the advice, therefore, would be to leave early.

PREPARE.

All residents in bush fire prone areas need to complete a Bush Fire Survival Plan well ahead of a fire occurring. All members of a household need to know exactly what they will do should a bush fire occur.

The decision of whether residents will Prepare, Stay and Defend or Leave Early needs to be made in this plan. If residents decide in their plan that they will leave early they need to identify when they will do this, where they will go and how they will get there. Leaving the day before or the morning of a Catastrophic fire day is the safest option.

Part of the Bush Fire Survival Plan is for residents to prepare their properties to survive the impact of fire even if their plan is to leave early rather than staying and defending.

If residents decide in their plan to leave early, then they also need to have a plan for what they will do if a fire occurs near their house and they are unable to leave.

Residents also need to know where to get information, which radio stations to listen to, which agency websites to review and which information numbers will have regular updates.

ACT.

Because fires can occur without any warning, residents need to be prepared to act with little or no warning.

Residents need to be prepared to act decisively the moment there is danger. Knowing the fire danger rating for their area and watching for signs of fire such as smoke and flames are a part of being prepared for a fire and require residents to take decisive action.

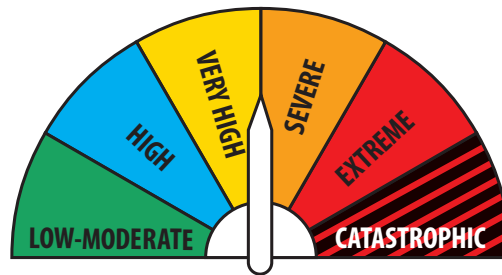
A Bush Fire Survival Plan needs to be put into place as soon as a source of danger exists. Residents need to act decisively not just "wait and see".

Residents need to look and listen for information on TV, radio, the internet, mobile phones and through speaking with neighbours.

SURVIVE.

The safest place to be is away from the fire as being involved in a fire could be one of the most traumatic experiences of a person's life.

Survival and safety depends on the decisions a resident makes and so they need to have a Bush Fire Survival Plan ready to be implemented the moment that decisive action is required.



NEW FIRE DANGER RATINGS

To help residents assess the level of danger to themselves and their families, a new Fire Danger Ratings system will be introduced.

The category of Extreme has been split into three separate categories to clearly communicate to the community what type of fire danger they can expect, should a fire occur.

The process for declaring a Total Fire Ban will remain based on the Fire Danger Index.

Severe (Fire Danger Index is 50-74)

Under Severe conditions fires will be uncontrollable and move quickly. Flames could be higher than roof tops of houses.

There is a chance that people may die and be injured. Some homes and businesses will be destroyed.

Leaving is the safest option for a resident's survival. A home will only offer safety if it and the resident are well prepared and the home is actively defended.

Extreme (Fire Danger Index is 75-99)

Under Extreme conditions fires will be uncontrollable, unpredictable and fast moving. Flames will be higher than the roof tops of houses.

There is a high potential for lives and properties to be lost. Only well prepared, well constructed and actively defended houses are likely to offer safety during a fire.

Leaving ahead of the fire is the safest option for the survival of residents

Catastrophic (Fire Danger Index reaches or exceeds 100)

Under Catastrophic conditions fires will be uncontrollable, unpredictable and fast moving. Flames will be higher than the roof tops of houses.

There is a very real likelihood that lives and properties will be lost. Even well prepared properties built to the highest bush fire protection standards may not be safe to shelter in during a fire as construction standards do not go beyond a Fire Danger Index of 100.

The best and safest option is to leave the day before or morning of Catastrophic fire conditions. It is not recommended that people stay and defend their homes under these conditions.



Advice

Watch and Act

Emergency Warning

BUSH FIRE ALERTS

Three new levels of bush fire alert messages will be used this fire season to provide the community with as much information as possible during a bush fire. Residents still need to be ready to act decisively at any time in case a fire threatens suddenly and without warning.

It is very important that residents do not solely rely on receiving an official message and always be aware of what is happening around them, so that they can make the safest decision possible for themselves.

Bush Fire Advice Message

An advice message will provide information on a fire that has started or is continuing to burn but is posing no immediate danger to residents or properties. This message is designed to provide general information to the community to keep them up to date with developments.

Bush Fire Watch and Act Message

A watch and act message indicates that there is an escalating fire danger situation. Residents need to be aware that a fire is approaching, the situation around them is changing and their lives may come under threat. They need to take decisive action to protect themselves and their family.

Bush Fire Emergency Warning Message

An emergency warning message indicates that residents are in danger and they need to take action immediately as they will be impacted by fire. This message may be used in conjunction with the Standard Emergency Warning Signal or the National Emergency Warning System.

In Coming Weeks...

More information will be distributed in the coming weeks outlining the rollout of the new fire danger signs and how warnings will be issued to the community. Information has also been prepared for the next issue of the Bush Fire Bulletin.