

BUSH FIRE POLICY- VICTORIA

Bushfires are an inherent part of Australia’s environment. Bushfires can significantly impact on lives, property and the environment. The basic factors that determine whether a bushfire will occur include the presence of fuel, oxygen, and an ignition source. The intensity and speed the bushfire will spread depends on the current temperature, fuel load (fallen bark, leaf litter, small branches), fuel moisture (dry fuel will burn quickly, damp or wet fuel may not burn at all), wind speed, and slope angle.

Emergency management arrangements for fire safety differ within each state and territory and are determined by the State Emergency Services or combined emergency service agencies. This policy reflects information related to Education and Care Services located in Victoria.

The National Law requires early childhood education services to ensure that every reasonable precaution is taken to protect children from any harm or hazard likely to cause injury, including bush fires. Regulations 97 and 168 (2) of the Education and Care Services National Regulations require that every early childhood education and care service in Australia has an emergency and evacuation policy and procedure which includes:

- a risk assessment to identify the potential emergencies that are relevant to the service
- instructions for what must be done in the event of an emergency and evacuation procedures
- an emergency and evacuation floor plan and
- the rehearsal of emergency and evacuation procedures every 3 months.

This policy outlines the strategies and procedures the Service will adhere to in the event of a bush fire, including information about Service closure during an emergency evacuation and forms part of our Service’s **Emergency Management Plan (EMP)**. The EMP records the emergency management arrangements to ensure every reasonable precaution to protect children, staff and visitors from harm and hazard is maintained at all times.

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD (NQS)

QUALITY AREA 2: CHILDREN’S HEALTH AND SAFETY		
2.2.1	Supervision	At all times, reasonable precautions and adequate supervision ensure children are protected from harm and hazard.
2.2	Safety	Each child is protected.

2.2.2	Incident and emergency	Plans to effectively manage incidents and emergencies are developed in consultation with relevant authorities, practiced and implemented.
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QUALITY AREA 7: GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP

7.1.2	Management Systems	Systems are in place to manage risk and enable the effective management and operation of a quality service.
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EDUCATION AND CARE SERVICES NATIONAL REGULATIONS

12	Meaning of serious incident
51	Conditions on service approval (safety, health and wellbeing of children)
89	First Aid Kits
93	Administration of medication
97	Emergency and evacuation procedures
98	Telephone or other communication equipment
168(2)(e)	Policies and procedures are required in relation to: Emergency and evacuation
168	Education and care services must have policies and procedures
170	Policies and procedures are to be followed

RELATED POLICIES

Administration of First Aid Policy Emergency and Evacuation Policy Family Communication Policy Health and Safety Policy	Incident, Injury, Trauma and Illness Policy Supervision Policy Work, Health and Safety Policy
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PURPOSE

We aim to ensure every reasonable precaution is taken to protect children and staff from harm and hazards likely to cause injury, including potential injury from bushfires. The potential for extreme fire conditions varies greatly throughout Australia, both in frequency and severity. Each state and territory have varying mandatory regulations for implementing policies and procedures for being safe in areas where bushfires occur. Our Service will adhere to the regulations outlined by the Department of Education (Victoria) and be familiar with relevant legislation and other special requirements such as building regulations, traffic restrictions or emergency announcements that may apply to the area our service is located.

SCOPE

This policy applies to children, families, staff, educators, management, approved provider, nominated supervisor, students, volunteers and visitors of the Service.

IMPLEMENTATION

It is vital for the Service to be informed and prepared for bush fire conditions and respond appropriately during periods of high fire danger or local bush fire activity. This policy, and related procedure, is to be implemented should a bush fire threaten our Service. During peak bush fire season, the nominated supervisor will monitor fire ratings through relevant authorities on a daily or hourly basis and communicate with all stakeholders as required. We are aware of the Australian-Fire Danger Rating System (AFDRS) and have appropriate fire safety equipment installed and maintained at all times. Our *Emergency Management Plan* (EMP) ensures all staff are trained to use fire safety equipment and through regular training, understand evacuation procedures in case of an emergency.

DEFINITIONS

The Australian climate is frequently hot, dry, and susceptible to drought. The widely varied fire seasons are reflected in the continent's different weather patterns. For most of southern Australia, the danger period is summer and autumn.

A 'Bush fire prone area' is an area of land that can support a bushfire or is likely to be subject to bushfire attack. Bush fire prone maps are prepared by local councils and governments within each state and territory. Baseline data for bushfire prone areas is referred to as Bushfire Attack Level (BAL).

[Bushfire at-risk register \(BARR\)](#): a register listing schools, kindergartens and childcare facilities within Victoria. This register is managed through the Department's emergency and natural disasters area.

Australian Fire Danger Rating (AFDRS): provides an indication of the possible consequences of a fire. This rating is standardised across all Australian states and territories from September 2022. The higher the fire danger rating, the more dangerous the conditions. The AFDRS uses four tiers of fire danger from *Moderate* to *Catastrophic*. The AFDRS are maintained and updated by emergency services in each state or territory.

Emergency Management Plan (EMP): identifies the nature and range of possible emergencies and hazards to which children and staff may be exposed and the response and procedure in the event of

an emergency. Effective planning and preparation of the EMP within the workplace ensures optimal response to emergencies should they occur. A risk assessment to identify potential emergencies that impact the service form the basis of the EMP.

THE APPROVED PROVIDER/ MANAGEMENT/ NOMINATED SUPERVISOR WILL:

- ensure the *Emergency Management Plan* (EMP) is updated regularly inclusive of Emergency and Evacuation policies and procedures (see Appendix 2 for further information about inclusions)
- consult with relevant authorities for guidance and advice on the management of bushfire risk and emergencies
- establish an Incident Management Team (IMT) to lead the implementation of the Emergency and Evacuation Plan- (e.g., Chief Warden, planning officer, communications officer, operations officer) or in smaller services, assign multiple roles for educators/staff
- ensure a back-up communication device is kept in a permanent location and is always available in an emergency. Example: designated fully charged mobile phone
- conduct a risk assessment to identify a potential bush fire risk to the Service
- ensure the risk assessment considers-
 - prevention measures the Service will take prior and during the bush fire period
 - procedures to be taken when there is a bush fire in the local district including onsite (shelter-in-place) and offsite evacuation procedures
 - response measures the Service will take if confronted with a bush fire hazard or emergency
 - identified evacuation assembly areas and evacuation routes (it is recommended that the plan contains two external (off-site) evacuation assembly areas if practical to do so)
 - emergency communication arrangements in case of power outages- designated landline, Emergency Positioning Indicator Radio Beacon (EPIRB), satellite phone, designated mobile phone
 - the use of a battery operated radio in its shelter-in-place location or emergency kit
 - what assistance will be required to evacuate children at the service (including non-ambulant children and infants, consideration for multi-story buildings)
 - whether the identified evacuation place is safe for children- (consider shade, location)
 - when evacuating children, if the weather is hot, do the children need footwear?
 - what to do with sleeping children, babies or children with addition needs during the evacuation?

- what mechanisms are in place to ensure the transfer of real-time information, such as weather forecasts, bush fire activity, site closures and emergency operations
 - how parents will know where to locate their child if evacuated
 - procedures to ensure children are only released to persons authorised to collect them
 - mechanisms to ensure visitors and contractors are aware of the service's emergency response procedures
 - location of flammable substances/materials (gas storage bottles and fixed tanks)- ensure these are secured and controlled
- determine if the Service is listed on the Bushfire-At-Risk-Register or on the at risk of grassfire register (category 4)
<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/health/Pages/bushfirerisk.aspx>
 - ensure a current emergency and evacuation floor plan of the service and instructions for what to do in an emergency are clearly displayed in a prominent position near each exit of the service
 - ensure exit signs are displayed over emergency exits, emergency exits are free from debris and obstructions and are easy to open
 - ensure emergency drills, including a bush fire drill and shelter-in-place on site are practiced with educators and children every 3 months [see *Bush Fire Response Procedure*]
 - ensure a record is kept of each emergency evacuation drill practiced
 - ensure the Service and educators are prepared for bush fire conditions and prepared to respond quickly and appropriately during high fire danger periods
 - ensure all fire safety equipment is installed and maintained regularly- (fire extinguishers, fire panels, smoke detectors, long hoses with nozzles, buckets etc. See: Appendix 1: Fire and Safety Equipment)
 - ensure all fire safety equipment is easily accessible, has clear signage and operating instructions displayed and are clear of vegetation or debris
 - ensure all outdoor taps are in working order
 - communicate with staff, educators, and families about bush fire preparation information and provisions
 - discuss *Bush Fire Response Procedure* at team meetings and make any amendments as required
 - ensure local emergency services have current contact details, including mobile number for emergency contact after hours
 - ensure clear and effective communication procedures during an emergency are rehearsed to test its effectiveness in an emergency
 - organise and communicate with off-site evacuation sites about emergency arrangements

- ensure the Australian Fire Danger Rating System (AFDRS) is checked daily. Australian Government Bureau of Meteorology <http://www.bom.gov.au/?ref=hdr> or Country Fire Authority <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/warnings-restrictions/total-fire-bans-and-ratings>
- provide a battery-operated radio for emergencies
- ensure gutters are cleaned out and free from dry leaves and other debris
- trim trees to 2m from the Service building (best practice recommendation)
- ensure boundaries, outdoor areas and driveways are clear of dry grass, long grass, dead vegetation, thick and continuous shrubs, leaves, dead limbs/trees and other combustible materials
- consult with neighbouring property/land owners or local council if neighboring properties pose a fire risk
- ensure driveways are accessible for fire emergency vehicles, clear of overhanging branches and archway structures
- ensure flammable items are removed from the Service
- ensure broken or unused equipment are disposed of and not stored at the service
- ensure rubbish bins are secure with closed lids, emptied on a regular basis and located away from the service's Shelter-In-Place location
- consider the service's Shelter-In-Place location ensuring it can accommodate all children and staff, with access to toilets and water
- ensure flammable items are removed from the Service
- ensure all emergency exits are clear and accessible at all times
- conduct an 'emergency first aid kit / backpack audit' to ensure emergency contact information and supplies are current (*see Appendix 3 for suggested inclusions*)
- ensure all records of attendance of children, staff and volunteers are accurate each morning
- ensure current emergency phone numbers are near the phone, including emergency services and the Regulatory Authority [insert details for each state/territory] *and* in the contacts of designated mobile phones
- monitor the bush fire situation when the rating is above **High** through internet or radio
- ensure the *VicEmergency* app (CFA emergency services) is installed on designated Service mobile phones
- upon advice from relevant authorities (Department of Education or Fire Authority) not accept children for care on days when there is a catastrophic danger rating
- cancel any outdoor activities on days where air quality due to bushfire smoke may cause harm to children [see Bush Fire Smoke Procedure]

- be prepared for **Code Red or Catastrophic** fire ratings and consequent closure of the service if listed on the BARR or at risk of grassfire (Category 4) in **Victoria**
- notify the Regulatory Authority in the event of any closures or damage to premises within 24 hours or as soon as possible via the NQA ITS or email if there is no access to phones
- at a reasonable time after the incident has occurred, consider asking emergency services to review the service's incident response.

EDUCATORS WILL:

- assist in the development and review of the Service's Emergency Management Plan (EMP)
- examine the Service grounds during their daily indoor and outdoor safety checks to ensure flammable and/or combustible materials (e.g., dead leaves and bark, chemicals) have been removed
- ensure they are familiar with the daily Australian Fire Danger Rating System (AFDRS)
- ensure the emergency first aid kit / backpack is organised and stored in an area that is easily accessible
- become familiar and confident with the Service's emergency evacuation policies and procedures
- participate in emergency drills, including *Bush Fire Response* procedures at least every 3 months
- become familiar with the Service's emergency exits
- be aware of the designated assembly area
- eliminate all papers around the Service, including artwork, posters, displays and emptying garbage bins if advised that bush fires are in the local district
- keep up to date with professional development and training about bush fires and emergency evacuation procedures
- be familiar with their role and responsibilities in the event of a bush fire.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT/REFLECTION

Our *Bush Fire Policy* will be reviewed on an annual basis in consultation with children, families, staff, educators and management.

VICTORIA

- Early Childhood Services at the highest risk of fire danger are placed on the Department's Bushfire At-Risk Register (BARR).
<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/health/Pages/bushfirerisk.aspx>

- Inclusion on this register is a trigger for Early Childhood Services to pre-emptively close on days declared **Code Red** in their Bureau of Meteorology district
- Emergency Management Plan resources: <https://www.vic.gov.au/emergency-management-early-childhood-services?Redirect=1#emergency-and-evacuation-requirements---all-early-childhood-services>
- See [Bushfire and Grassfire Preparedness](#) for further information
- For information regarding emergency closures and relocations: <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/health/pages/closures.aspx>
- Fire Danger Rating updates: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/warnings-restrictions/total-fire-bans-and-ratings>
- Country Fire Authority: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/home>

RESOURCES

ACECQA [Managing Emergency Situations in Early Education and Care Services](#)

[Australian Government Department of Education](#) – Emergency and natural disaster assistance

[Be You](#) resources- Bushfires and mental health

Department of Education Victoria [Emergency Management Plan 2022-2023 Template](#)

Department of Education and Training- Victoria [Bushfire and grassfire readiness checklist](#)

[Emerging Minds](#) Bushfire preparedness for your family

SOURCES

Australian Children’s Education & Care Quality Authority. (2014).

Australian Government: Geoscience Australia. Community safety: Bushfire:

<http://www.ga.gov.au/scientific-topics/hazards/bushfire>

Community Early Learning Australia. [Bushfire advice for children’s services](#)

Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010. (Amended 2023).

[Education and Care Services National Regulations](#). (2011). (Amended 2023).

Guide to the National Quality Framework. (2017). (Amended 2023).

National Council for Fire and Emergency Services (afac). 2022. <https://www.afac.com.au>

Revised National Quality Standard. (2018).

Victoria State Government Education and Training. Emergency management requirements:

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/regulation/Pages/emergencymanagementrequirements.aspx>

Victoria State Government Education and Training. Managing bushfire and grassfire risks in early childhood services. (2023). <https://www.vic.gov.au/managing-bushfire-grassfire-risks-early-childhood-services>

REVIEW

POLICY REVIEWED BY	TRACEY DAVEY	OPERATIONS MANAGER	JUNE 2023
POLICY REVIEWED	JUNE 2023	NEXT REVIEW DATE	JUNE 2024
VERSION NUMBER	V4.6.23		
MODIFICATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • annual policy maintenance • hyperlinks checked and repaired as required • minor formatting edits within text • Continuous improvement section added • Appendix 1 additional points 		
POLICY REVIEWED	PREVIOUS MODIFICATIONS	NEXT REVIEW DATE	
OCTOBER 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of policy against recommendations for bushfire/grassfire readiness checklist (Victoria) • Updated Australian Fire Danger Rating System information • Removal of requirement for services to submit their EMP to the regulatory authority 	JUNE 2023	
JUNE 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Policy Developed for ECEC services located in Victoria 	JUNE 2023	

APPENDIX 1

Management must ensure emergency equipment and maintenance testing is registered and kept up to date. All fire equipment must be clearly identified and operating instructions displayed.

FIRE AND SAFETY EQUIPMENT

	✓
Portable fire extinguisher/s, including correct colour code	
Fire blanket/s in kitchen and cooking areas	
Fire hose and reels	
Fire hydrants	
Water storage tank – check connections for fire appliances	
Fixed water pressure pumps	
Emergency generator/power system	
Water supplies and equipment	
Sprinklers (including any roof mounted and irrigation systems)	
Alarms	
First aid materials	
Fire blankets	
Communication systems	
Other e.g., Roller shutters on shelter-in-place location	
Nominated staff have been instructed in, and the operation of fire protection equipment practised	
Fire safety equipment, including hydrants are clear of vegetation and are easily accessible and visible	
The service has equipment to safely move children if necessary	
All fire protection equipment has clear signage and operating instructions are displayed.	

Department of Education (VIC) Early Childhood site bushfire readiness review checklist

APPENDIX 2

The purpose of the Emergency Management Plan is to ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of all staff, children and visitors at our Service in the event of an emergency.

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLAN inclusions

- Name and address of the Service
- Early childhood service facility profile (description of the service)
- Emergency contact details of Service (including designated mobile phone number)
- Incident Management Team structure and contact details and responsibilities
- Incident Management Team responsibilities- pre-emergency/during emergency/post-emergency
- Communication tree- Process for notifying, alerting and reporting emergencies
- Educators/staff trained in first aid (names and contact details)
- Emergency response procedures (on-site evacuation/relocation procedure; off-site evacuation procedure; lock down procedure; lock out procedure; shelter-in-place procedure)
- Arrangements for children/students and educators/staff with additional support needs
- Parent/family emergency contact details
- Evacuation diagram and procedures including assembly points and transportation arrangement if required to evacuate
- Essential services on premises- location of hydrants and water main
- A site-specific **Risk Assessment** identifying the particular emergency and hazards, assessing the risks they present and details on how your service will manage these.
- For **Bush Fire Policy** the Risk Assessment will detail-
 - prevention measures the Service will take prior and during the bush fire period
 - procedures to be taken when there is a bush fire in the local district
 - response measures the service will take if confronted with a bush fire hazard or emergency
- Emergency response drills schedule
- Emergency kit checklist
- Testing of equipment
- Response procedures for specific emergencies – indicate process for making decisions
 - warning staff and children

- evacuation
- shelter and assembly area
- location of designated emergency exits
- location of fire hoses/extinguishers/ fire blankets
- location of first aid kits
- Recovery measures to support the return to the Service and routines
- Notification to Regulatory Authority
- Trauma counselling and description

APPENDIX 3

EMERGENCY KIT CONTENTS CHECKLIST

Use the list below as a **guide** on what is required to maintain your Emergency Kit

EMERGENCY KIT CONTENTS	✓
Small portable First Aid kit	
Copy of Bush Fire policy & Emergency Management Plan	
Copy of Service's site plan identifying exits from building, safe spaces to shelter and assembly points	
Emergency contact details for children	
Emergency contact details for staff	
Details of additional/medical needs of staff and children	
Potentially required medications (e.g. EpiPen, asthma inhaler)	
Charged mobile phone/s	
Phone chargers to suit any mobile phone likely to be used in an emergency	
Fully charged UHF radio (remote locations) with charger	
Portable battery powered radio	
Torch and spare batteries	
Whistle/s	
Service keys	
Staff safety vests	
Bottled water and disposable cups	
Non-perishable snacks (such as biscuits/crackers, dried fruit, energy/muesli bars)	
Spare nappies, baby wipes, and gloves	
Tissues	
Sunscreen and spare hats	
Garbage bags	
Other	