

Department of  
Sustainability and  
Environment

# fire ready victoria strategy 2004-2007



# program overview

Fire Ready Victoria is a three-year strategy to increase awareness of the risk of bushfires and the level of preparedness of the Victorian community for bushfire. It is targeted towards those living, working and visiting areas of Victoria with a high bushfire risk.

Fire Ready Victoria is a joint strategy of the Victorian fire services – CFA, DSE and MFB.

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## 1. background

### Why Fire Ready Victoria?

Victoria has days of extreme fire danger every summer. Fire is a natural part of the Australian environment and the fire services believe people who live in bushfire areas need to accept and manage the risk around them.

Accordingly CFA has conducted major community education programs each summer since 1997/98 when the Bushfire Blitz program of summer street corner meetings began. Other programs such as Community Fireguard and an extensive media campaign have also been conducted. These have been well supported and ongoing research has recognised them to be effective. DSE and MFB have supported these programs and also conducted their own activities to promote fire safety messages.

Key recommendations of the Victorian Bushfire Inquiry, conducted following the fires in North East Victoria and Gippsland in January 2003, identified the need for a joint agency, Statewide awareness, education and information campaign to increase personal and household self reliance (recommendations 13.53, 13.54).

Over the next three years CFA, DSE and MFB will work together to increase the public's awareness and understanding of the bushfire risk and to improve the level of preparedness and safety of all Victorians living in, or visiting those parts of Victoria where bushfires occur.

Each agency will contribute to **Fire Ready Victoria** with its own activities as well as participating in joint programs.

## 2. objectives

### What do we aim to achieve?

**The specific objectives of the Fire Ready Victoria strategy are:**

- To increase awareness that fire is a natural and inevitable process and of its role in the Australian environment;
- To raise awareness amongst residents of high bushfire risk areas, including those living in the urban fringe areas of outer metropolitan Melbourne, of the importance and benefit of taking action to mitigate the local risk of bushfire;
- To increase understanding of how to mitigate risk and the adoption of preparedness measures amongst residents of high bushfire risk areas;
- To increase understanding that fuel reduction burning is carried out to mitigate risk and to reduce impact of wildfire; and
- To promote awareness amongst residents and tourists visiting high bushfire risk areas, of available sources of information immediately prior to and during the onset of bushfire.

# 3. scope

## About the program

**Fire Ready Victoria** is a joint strategy of CFA, DSE and MFB. Other agencies such as the Office of Gas Safety will participate as supporting partners to the strategy.

The program consists of a number of activities, some of which are delivered by individual agencies and others as joint activities by the fire services.

### 3.1 Key messages

#### What do we want to say?

Key messages will be delivered to the community in a variety of ways, from meetings targeted to residents living in high bushfire risk areas, to a more broad scale media campaign. These messages include that the community need to:

- Understand that bushfire in Victoria is an inevitable natural event;
- Understand that fire has helped shape the Australian environment for thousands of years and is essential to the survival of many plant and animal species;
- Understand and comply with fire restriction regulations that prevent occurrence of unplanned fires;
- Have an understanding of the fire risk in their area and how fire may impact on their community;
- Develop self-reliance and appropriate preparedness to enable them to deal effectively with the threat of fire;
- Have a well-defined bushfire survival plan, including a decision about whether they are willing and able to stay and defend a prepared property or to leave before threatened by a fire and road travel becomes hazardous;
- Be aware of how to access information during times of emergency and know how to respond effectively if threatened by fire;
- Understand how lack of periodic fire increases risks to communities and the environment;
- Be aware that fire management, which includes the prevention, suppression and the use of prescribed burning, is a process that effects all Victorians;
- Understand that reducing risks requires partnerships between government land management agencies, fire services and the community;

- Understand that the affects of using prescribed fire, (e.g. smoke affects) are not as great as the impact of wildfire on the community;
- Understand that if they live in, holiday or visit fire prone areas they must recognise the risk and take responsibility.

### 3.2 Program components

#### How can we be heard?

CFA, supported by DSE and MFB, will deliver street corner and community meetings targeted to residents living in high bushfire risk areas. These locations have been identified on a Statewide basis using a common understanding of risk as it relates to bushfire. One of the aims of this activity is to generate interest in establishing local community action through programs such as Community Fireguard.

#### 3.2.1 Street corner meeting

One and a half hour interactive meeting focussing upon local hazard, targeted towards residents who have not previously been involved in bushfire safety programs and those who wish to increase their understanding of bushfire behaviour and risk. The meetings are conducted on street corners where people can learn about the bushfire risk in their local environment, house survival and practical local intervention.

#### 3.2.2 Community meeting

One and a half hour meeting located at a community venue or hall in areas where the population density is not suited to other activities. Focus is on basic bushfire behaviour, personal safety, house survival and recognition of local risk, with emphasis on promoting residents' involvement in Community Fireguard groups.

#### 3.2.3 Community Fireguard (CFG)

Facilitated community development targeted towards developing existing groups and forming new groups. The program aims to build self-reliant communities that have the knowledge, skills and understanding to manage their bushfire risk.

#### 3.2.4 DSE Community information forums

A series of community information forums about DSE fire prevention and protection activities, including the prescribed burning program, will be held throughout the State in both spring and autumn. DSE will also be supporting CFA regionally in the delivery of street corner and community meetings.

## 4. media & public relations

The media campaign has several components.

Phase 1 of the campaign will run from early November until mid-January and aims to increase community awareness of the key safety messages and encourage residents to attend program activities and/or to seek out further information by contacting the Victorian Bushfire Information Line or the CFA website.

Press advertising for this phase of the campaign will be targeted toward the placement of bushfire safety features, including editorial placement, in local and regional press. Media kits have been developed to assist with regional activity.

The key messages relate to developing realistic community expectations, particularly that:

- Residents may not receive a formal warning from fire services about the onset of wildfire;
- Residents may not get a fire truck to assist them in defending their homes; and
- High wildfire risk days are common every year in Victoria and residents should undertake preparedness measures and develop a bushfire survival plan.

DSE will place advertisements in metropolitan and regional newspapers informing the community about the prescribed burning program and the location of proposed burns during the spring and autumn prescribed burning seasons.

Phase 2 of the campaign will target residents and tourists in high bushfire risk areas and will promote the Victorian Bushfire Information Line and how to access up to date information and advice during bushfires.

This phase of the campaign will be timed to coincide with periods of extreme fire weather and is expected to run from early January until mid-March. It will utilise paid press advertising in major metropolitan daily papers as well as a radio campaign on both metropolitan and regional radio.

Additionally, phase 2 of the media campaign will target tourists and members of the ethnic community with messages about camping fire safety and fire safety while driving. It is scheduled to run on radio in times of peak tourism activity in the Christmas-New Year period and leading into major holiday weekends when fire danger is expected to be high.

The Office of Gas Safety will also participate in a joint campaign to promote fire prevention and safety in the use of gas barbecues and camping.

The Minister for Police and Emergency Services will launch **Fire Ready Victoria** in early December.

The ABC radio phone-in day will also be conducted at the beginning of summer. This day will feature interviews with key fire services' staff about bushfire preparedness, and also aims to promote the Victorian Bushfire Information Line to the community.

**Fire Ready Victoria** will also be supported by public relations activities in regional areas, including displays at field days, fairs and other community events.





## 4. media & public relations

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Publicity material including fridge magnets and bushfire survival information cards promoting the Victorian Bushfire Information Line will be distributed to residents and tourists in high bushfire risk areas. Brochures and posters will also promote key safety messages.

The revised Living in the Bush bushfire survival plan workbook and CD Rom will be given to residents who attend program activities to assist them to develop their own bushfire survival plan.

## 5. online information

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A comprehensive range of information is available at [www.cfa.vic.gov.au](http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au).

The Incident Updates section provides real-time information about CFA turnouts at fires and other incidents and outlines the incident's location, type and number of appliances in attendance. For large and significant fires, additional news articles provide the community with up to date information and advice about the fire situation.

Information about the **Fire Ready Victoria** program of street corner and community meetings, including a calendar indicating meeting locations, dates and times, is also available on the CFA website.

Brochures are available to download including the revised Living in the Bush bushfire survival plan workbook, Radiant Heat and Know Your Total Fire Ban District. Can I, Can't I brochures are available in English as well as 10 additional languages and include information on frequently asked questions such as having a barbecue on a Total Fire Ban Day.

The new Living in the Bush CD Rom is also available on the website (December 04), allowing residents to develop bushfire survival plans on-line, which they can save to their computer hard drive. Hyperlinks in the plan allow residents to log on to the CFA website to check whether it is a Total Fire Ban day or to find out about any incidents occurring near to them.

Information regarding fires and prescribed burns on public land is available at <http://www.dse.vic.gov.au/fires/>. Brochures on bushfire safety "Campfires and Barbeques", "Don't Get Caught in a Bushfire" and "Burning Off on Private Land", are available to be downloaded. The website also provides comprehensive information on Fire in the Environment, Fire Management and Fire Research. Further information regarding DSE can be obtained by phoning the DSE Customer Service Centre on 136 186.

## 6. information to the community during bushfires

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Providing up to date information to residents likely to be impacted by a bushfire is a high priority for the fire services, and forms an integral part of the **Fire Ready Victoria** strategy.

CFA and DSE have set up Information Units as part of the incident management arrangements to deliver accurate and timely messages to affected communities that support and encourage appropriate response and proactive measures by people threatened by bushfires.

Various dissemination methods are used including the Victorian Bushfire Information Line (1800 240 667 and 131599). The VBIL provides both recorded information and contact with call takers to respond to questions relating to the current fire situation.

ABC Radio, as an emergency services broadcaster, has made a commitment, irrespective of other programming priorities, to inform at risk communities of impending bushfire emergencies.

Other dissemination methods include the CFA and DSE websites (see above) electronic media, telephone trees and public meetings.

## 7. delivery

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**What do we plan to deliver?**

**Timing:** November 2004 – March 2005

Location and timing of activity will be determined based on local risk priorities. The first community activities will commence November 2004.

**Targets:**

Approximately 1200 community meetings and activities will be delivered to high risk communities across Victoria.

## 8. partnerships

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The agencies responsible for the implementation of **Fire Ready Victoria** will work to strengthen partnerships with key stakeholders including ABC Radio, local municipalities and community groups.

## 9. program monitoring

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Research will be conducted to monitor program implementation and provide benchmarks for future years of the strategy.

## 10. other contacts

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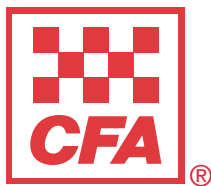
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