

BUSHFIRES IN VICTORIA: INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS



Support material 8

Bushfires in Victoria

Victoria is one of the most bushfire prone areas in the world; we live on the second driest continent on earth and have very flammable plants and trees.

We need to reduce the risks of a fire happening, as well as being prepared for a bushfire when it happens.

Having the right fire preparation and safety procedures means we can deal with the risk of bushfires much more easily.

What is a bushfire?

A bushfire is a large fire that burns uncontrollably in forests, bushes, grasslands and shrubs. It often has bad effects on people, animals, property and the environment.

Why is Victoria prone to bushfires?

Victoria has:

- dry forests that catch fire easily
- hot, dry summers with strong winds
- remote and inaccessible areas of bush that can't be reached easily or quickly by firefighters and allow fires to gain in size and ferocity.

What causes a bushfire and what helps sustain it?

Bushfires can start from lightning strikes, sparks from machinery, cigarette butts, power lines or arson. Low humidity, heat and plenty of dry fuel make a fire more likely to start.

Once a bushfire has started dry fuel such as twigs, branches, leaves, trees and undergrowth can make it larger. Strong, dry winds fan the flames and allow embers to travel, spreading the fire and making it move quickly.

What effects do bushfires have?

Uncontrollable bushfires can put people at risk of injury or death. Native and farm animals can also be affected by smoke, fire and loss of their habitat.

Bushfires can damage houses, buildings, sheds, cars and equipment as well. After a fire, people may have to rebuild their homes and businesses.

Bushfires can also have positive environmental effects. A lot of the Victorian bush can grow back after a fire and is often healthier afterwards. Bushfires often cause trees to break open little capsules or pods with seeds that spread across the ground. These pods need the high heat from a bushfire to release their seeds. This allows new plants and trees to grow.

What have been some of Victoria's worst bushfire disasters?

- The 6 February Black Thursday fires, 1851
- The Black Friday fires, 1939
- The Black Tuesday disaster, 1967
- The Ash Wednesday fires, 1983
- Canberra Bushfires, 2003
- The Black Saturday fires, 2009

What is being done to help us prepare for bushfires?

CFA does a number of things that help us prepare for a bushfire.

- Assisting Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI) with controlled burning around homes, town centres and in the bush, which removes fuel like excess trees and dry leaves.
- Education programs for the community about how to prepare for a bushfire, and what to do in case of an emergency.
- Investigation of previous fires to find out how they started and how to help prepare for new fires.

How does CFA respond to bushfires once they begin?

When a bushfire starts, firefighters are sent out with trucks to put out the fire at its source. Airplanes and helicopters are also used to drop water and foam on fires.

Back burning is used to create breaks around a fire so that it has no fuel source to continue moving.

CFA alerts communities at risk of fire by messages on the radio, websites, community notice boards and SMS/telephone messages. People must activate their Bushfire Survival Plans (BSP) as soon as they know it is a high fire risk day in their area. A BSP is an agreed set of steps for all household members to take if there is a fire.

