

# What you need to know about Community alerting sirens in Victoria

## Introduction

Victoria's community warning system will be enhanced this summer with the addition of community alerting sirens in selected Victorian communities. Sirens are an additional method of warning the community about significant emergencies such as fire, hazardous material incidents, floods and severe storms. Sirens will be available for community alerting in 39 towns and communities across the state including 23 communities in the Dandenong Ranges.

During this period, the local emergency services such as CFA brigades, VICSES and other emergency services will work with communities, in conjunction with the Fire Services Commissioner, to test processes and improve the overall understanding of the use of sirens. It is important to test the use of sirens before any broader rollout of sirens in other appropriate Victorian locations.

Sirens are only one way to warn communities of significant emergencies. Other methods include telephone trees, door knocking, emergency services' websites, the telephone-based emergency alert system, emergency broadcasters such as ABC radio, other community radio stations and the Victorian Bushfire Information Line.

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## What is a community alert siren?

Community alert sirens are any fixed sirens used to alert the community of an emergency that may directly affect that community. For the purpose of the pilot program, these may be either CFA brigade sirens or community-owned sirens. Privately owned and operated sirens (e.g. industry sirens) are not included in the pilot.

## What hazards do community alert sirens cover?

Sirens could indicate a fire, flood, severe storm or hazardous material emergency. This means that community members need to know where to go for information on particular emergencies. This includes the CFA and VICSES websites.

## When will a community alerting siren be activated?

When an emergency is likely to have an immediate or life-threatening impact, a warning is issued. These warnings will automatically activate the community alert siren. This means people must seek further information so they can decide what action they will take.

## What does a community alert siren mean?

If a siren sounds for up to 90 seconds it indicates a CFA brigade is responding to an incident nearby. A continuous siren for five minutes means that there is a significant emergency and you must seek further information because it may affect you.

## What do I need to do if I hear a community alert siren sound in my community?

If a siren sounds for five minutes, you must seek further information immediately from a source such as the emergency services' websites, the Victorian Bushfire Information Line or emergency broadcasters such as community radio stations, ABC Radio or Sky News.

For example, if it is raining heavily check the VICSES or the Bureau of Meteorology website for river and creek flood warnings. If it is hot and windy, check the CFA website or listen to emergency broadcasters for warnings and information. On high fire danger days make sure you monitor conditions and know where to get the information you need. Knowing how to respond to a community alerting siren should also be linked into local and household emergency plans, including bushfire survival plans.

## Does a siren mean I should automatically evacuate?

No. If a community alert siren sounds for five minutes, residents must immediately seek further information from a source such as the emergency services' websites at [www.cfa.vic.gov.au](http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au) or [www.ses.vic.gov.au](http://www.ses.vic.gov.au), the Victorian Bushfire Information Line 1800240667, VICSES Information Line 132500, ABC local radio, Stereo 974, ...continued overleaf

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UGFM - Radio Murrindindi, Plenty Valley FM, commercial radio stations, or SkyNews television. It is not signaling evacuation but telling residents that there is an emergency in the area that may directly impact and to seek further information.

### **Where will sirens be used to alert the community this summer?**

Initially, 46 sirens in 39 locations will be upgraded and be available for use, as part of a pilot program to test the processes and community understanding of using sirens for community alerting. This includes 23 communities across the Dandenong Ranges.

Sirens in the following towns and communities will be activated as part of the pilot during December and January: Lavers Hill, Wye River, Lorne, Cockatoo, Gembrook, Mt Martha, Noojee, Boolarra, Yinnar, Loch Sport, Kinglake, Kinglake West, Flowerdale, The Basin, Belgrave, Belgrave South, Belgrave Heights, Clematis, Emerald, Olinda, Kallista, The Patch, Kalorama, Mt Evelyn, Menzies Creek, Monbulk, Sassafras, Ferny Creek, Selby, Upwey, Upper Ferntree Gully, Silvan, Narre Warren East, Macclesfield, Blackwood, Greendale, Euroa, Myrtleford and Steels Creek. Some locations will have more than one siren.

### **When will these community alerting sirens be ready for use?**

The upgrades to sirens should be completed in December and January. The community will be kept updated as works progress.

### **When will the remaining sirens across the state be used for community alerting?**

Not all CFA sirens are suitable or in an appropriate location to be used for community alerting. Each siren requires a technical upgrade before use. There will be a phased approach to upgrading community alerting sirens across Victoria.

### **What are the limitations of community alert sirens?**

Sirens are not a stand-alone means of warning the community and do not replace the need for people to monitor the conditions around them, particularly on high fire danger days. Sirens are one way to alert communities to seek more information.

A number of factors will limit who will hear the siren including adverse weather conditions, knowledge of what a siren means, topography, whether it is loud

enough to wake people sleeping and any hearing impediments. Additional ways of alerting people include telephone trees, door knocking, emergency services' websites and emergency broadcasters.

### **How will the community alert sirens be activated in an emergency?**

Every significant fire, severe storm or flood is managed by an incident controller. They are responsible for issuing warnings to the community. When an emergency is likely to have an immediate or life-threatening impact, a warning is issued. These warnings will automatically activate the community alert siren. This means people must seek further information so they can decide what action they will take.

### **Our community is not part of the pilot - how do we get a new or additional siren?**

While the pilot locations have been chosen and the work is underway, there will be broader implementation of community alert sirens from 2013. Communities interested in a community alerting siren should approach their local brigade or Municipal Emergency Management Committee seeking support.

The new community alert sirens policy includes simplified guidelines for establishing a new community or additional community alert siren. The guidelines are available on the Fire Services Commissioner's website [www.firecommissioner.vic.gov.au](http://www.firecommissioner.vic.gov.au).

### **Where can I get more information?**

More information about community alerting sirens is available at [www.firecommissioner.vic.gov.au](http://www.firecommissioner.vic.gov.au). Community members can provide feedback about the siren pilot program to a dedicated email address [sirens@firecommissioner.vic.gov.au](mailto:sirens@firecommissioner.vic.gov.au).

For information on warnings and incidents during emergencies emergency services' websites at [www.cfa.vic.gov.au](http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au) or [www.ses.vic.gov.au](http://www.ses.vic.gov.au), the Victorian Bushfire Information Line 1800240667, VICSES Information Line 132500, ABC local radio, Stereo 974, UGFM - Radio Murrindindi, Plenty Valley FM, commercial radio stations, or SkyNews television.

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[www.firecommissioner.vic.gov.au](http://www.firecommissioner.vic.gov.au)