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Section One

Your Bushfire Plan: the Basics

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Do I need a plan?

You don't have to live in the country to be at risk of fire. Fires can occur where the suburbs meet the bush or in urban areas where houses have grass, bushland or parkland around them.

If you live near areas that have significant amounts of bush, forest, long grass, or coastal scrub, then you need to plan ahead for the fire season.

Victoria is one of the most fire-prone areas in the world and it is inevitable that fires will occur every year in parts of the state. Fire – by its very nature – is unpredictable and difficult to control especially on hot, dry, windy days. On these days, a fire may start near you.

Not everyone thinks clearly in an emergency. A written, and preferably well-practised plan, will help you remember what needs to be done during a crisis.

What leaving early means

'Leaving early' means being away from high-risk areas before there are any signs of fire.

In other words, leaving early is a precaution you take *just in case* there is a fire – because in some conditions, any fire that starts is likely to be uncontrollable.

Leaving early does not mean waiting for a warning or a siren. It does not mean waiting to see or smell smoke. And it certainly does not mean waiting for a knock on the door.

Why you should leave early

Because fires can start and spread very quickly in some conditions, leaving early is by far the safest option for anyone in a high-risk bushfire area. Many people have died trying to leave their homes at the last minute.

Even a fire that is kilometres away could be at your door in minutes. In certain conditions, embers can travel many kilometres in front of a fire and a grassfire can travel faster than you can run. Wind changes are unpredictable and can rapidly change the direction or size of a fire.

Driving in a bushfire is extremely dangerous, and potentially life threatening. A drive that would normally take five minutes could take two hours. Road closures, traffic jams, collisions, smoke, fallen trees and embers are all real possibilities.

In a bushfire, people may be confused, disoriented and physically or psychologically stressed. In these conditions, making good decisions becomes very difficult.

The *Defending Your Property* section of this booklet can help you decide whether or not you are capable of defending your property – and tells you about the risks and preparations involved.

DEFENDING YOUR PROPERTY

Planning to stay and defend is a big decision. Defending a home requires at least two fit and determined adults, at least 10,000 litres of water and appropriate firefighting hoses and pumps.

For some, defending a property is a back-up option (if they are trapped by fire). Others will plan to leave early on some days and stay and defend on others, linking their decisions to the Fire Danger Ratings. For many others, staying to defend is not an option under any circumstances.

Most homes in high-risk bushfire areas are not defensible on Code Red days.

When you should leave

The decision about when to leave is the most important decision you will make.

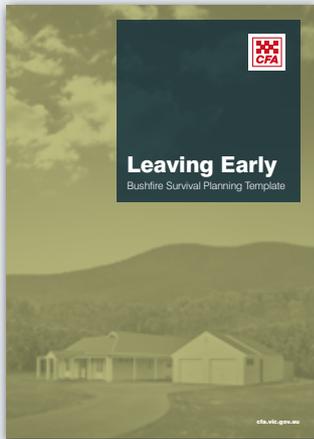
You will need to carefully read the information about Fire Danger Ratings earlier in this booklet and consider your household's level of risk. The Fire Danger Rating should be your trigger to enact your plan.

It is also important to recognise that fires can start and spread on any day during summer, but also during spring and autumn. It's up to you to monitor warnings and stay aware of your surroundings – for instance, emergency services sirens or the smell of smoke in the air – right through the fire season.

IMPORTANT NOTE Do not expect a fire truck at your property during a bushfire.

Do not rely on a warning. It is your responsibility to know when to leave.

How to plan



Just as every family or household is unique, every fire plan will be different. There are many ways you can go about your planning – but the information and templates in this booklet are designed to put you on the right track.

At an absolute minimum, talk through the ten decisions below with your household. Review these points before each fire season and don't put it off until later.

Before the fire season

Key decisions to make with your family

- 1 Which Fire Danger Rating is your trigger to leave?
- 2 Will you leave early that morning or the night before?
- 3 Where will you go?
- 4 What route will you take – and what is your alternative in the event that a fire is already in the area?
- 5 What will you take with you?
- 6 What do you need to organise for your pets or livestock?
- 7 Who do you need to keep informed of your movements?
- 8 Is there anyone outside your household who you need to help or check up on?
- 9 How will you stay informed about warnings and updates?
- 10 What will you do if there is a fire in the area and you cannot leave?

REMEMBER...

to decide who will do what as part of your plan.

Your destination and journey

It's up to you to decide on a suitable place to go when you leave early on a fire risk day. If you do not have friends or relatives in low-risk areas who you can visit, consider community facilities such as libraries, shopping centres, swimming pools or cinemas.

If you don't have a car you will need to plan carefully to organise transport.

Why write down your plan?

Would you remember a plan that's just in your head if you're surrounded by smoke, heat and flames?

A written plan will take the pressure off you, and avoid arguments and delays.

In Victoria the bushfire season is long, and a written plan will help reduce uncertainty and anxiety. Having a written plan will reduce the stress and disruption to your family routine on every occasion you need to leave early – even if there is no fire.

Use the tear-out template included in this booklet to help you write down your plan.

REMEMBER: Any bushfire plan – written or not – is better than no plan.

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

Bushfires can start at any time and your plan needs to take into account the unexpected. For instance, what if you have teenage children home alone, children at a friend's place or you don't have access to the family car? Can you incorporate these different situations into your plan?

Talk to neighbours, family and friends about different scenarios and how you could help each other – simple things like exchanging contact numbers can make all the difference.

Practical checklist – ensure you're ready

Take care of simple, practical actions before the fire season so you are ready to leave or seek shelter quickly, calmly and safely.

- 1 Pack an Emergency Kit with essential items and keep it in a handy place.
- 2 Scan important documents and photos onto a memory stick.
- 3 Purchase a battery-operated radio, powerful torch and extra batteries.
- 4 Save important contact numbers in your mobile phone. Include family, friends and the Victorian Bushfire Information Line. Have a spare mobile phone that you keep fully charged for emergencies.
- 5 Set aside protective clothing (long-sleeved, made from natural material like cotton) for each member of the family. Put woollen blankets in your car.
- 6 Practise packing your car so you know how long it will take.
- 7 Mark your primary routes, alternative routes and petrol stations on hard copy maps.
- 8 Make firm arrangements with anyone you plan to visit when you leave early.
- 9 Talk to neighbours or nearby friends about how you might help each other.
- 10 Don't forget pets and horses – include pet transport containers in your Emergency Kit. Know where you can move your horses to if they won't be safe on your property.

Your Emergency Kit



SHARE YOUR BUSHFIRE PLAN

Once you have prepared your plan, it is a good idea to share the details of your plan with family, friends and neighbours. Doing so will save them a lot of distress when there is a bushfire, as they will know that you are prepared and where to find you.



PETS

Remember to prepare for your pets as well. Make sure your pet is wearing an identification tag and add the following items to your Emergency Kit:

- › suitable transport carriers or leash
- › any medications
- › dietary supplements
- › food and drinking water
- › a familiar item (toy, bed, treats) to help reduce stress.

