

# 3

## **Section Three**

### During a Fire: If You Cannot Leave

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As part of your plan, you need to decide what you will do if there is a fire in your area and you cannot leave. Remember that bushfires and grassfires can travel extremely fast and strike without warning. Many people have been caught out thinking they had more time to act before the bushfire impacted.



A bushfire can be a terrifying situation. Strong gusty winds and intense heat will make you tired quickly. Thick, heavy smoke will sting your eyes. It will be difficult to see and breathe. The roaring sound of the wind and the fire approaching will make it hard to hear. Embers will rain down causing spot fires all around you. Power and water may be cut off. You may be isolated. It will be dark, noisy and extremely physically and mentally exhausting.

Understanding what to expect and planning for what you will do can help you to cope.

The main cause of death in bushfires is radiant heat, so it is important to take shelter as the temperature associated with the fire rises.

**DO NOT** shelter in a dam, swimming pool, or a water tank except as an absolute last resort. Dams, swimming pools and water tanks leave your face, head and lungs exposed to radiant heat and smoke.

If sheltering within a house or a building, **DO NOT** get caught in an area with only one way out – for instance, a bathroom or a toilet. Rooms with only one exit can make escape impossible if that exit is blocked by flames and heat.



# Understand radiant heat

Radiant heat is the intense heat that radiates from a bushfire. It is like the heat you feel from a campfire, but can be up to 50,000 times stronger. In the right conditions, radiant heat can ignite exposed surfaces and crack or break windows.

Radiant heat is the biggest killer in a fire. The human body cannot absorb large amounts of radiant heat without its cooling system failing, leading to heat exhaustion and heart failure.

Radiant heat can be blocked by a solid object or barrier such as a concrete wall or building. This heat travels in straight lines, radiating out from a bushfire ahead of the flames and will bounce off solid objects, although it will travel through glass.

If you are caught outside in a fire, seek to protect yourself by:

- › covering up exposed skin.
- › being as far away as you can – by doubling your distance from the fire you reduce the radiant heat load by four.
- › getting behind a solid object or barrier.
- › staying away from windows as radiant heat can pass through glass.

The only sure way to survive a bushfire and avoid radiant heat is to leave early and be away from the threat.



## Cover up

Covering all exposed skin with clothing can offer some protection from radiant heat.

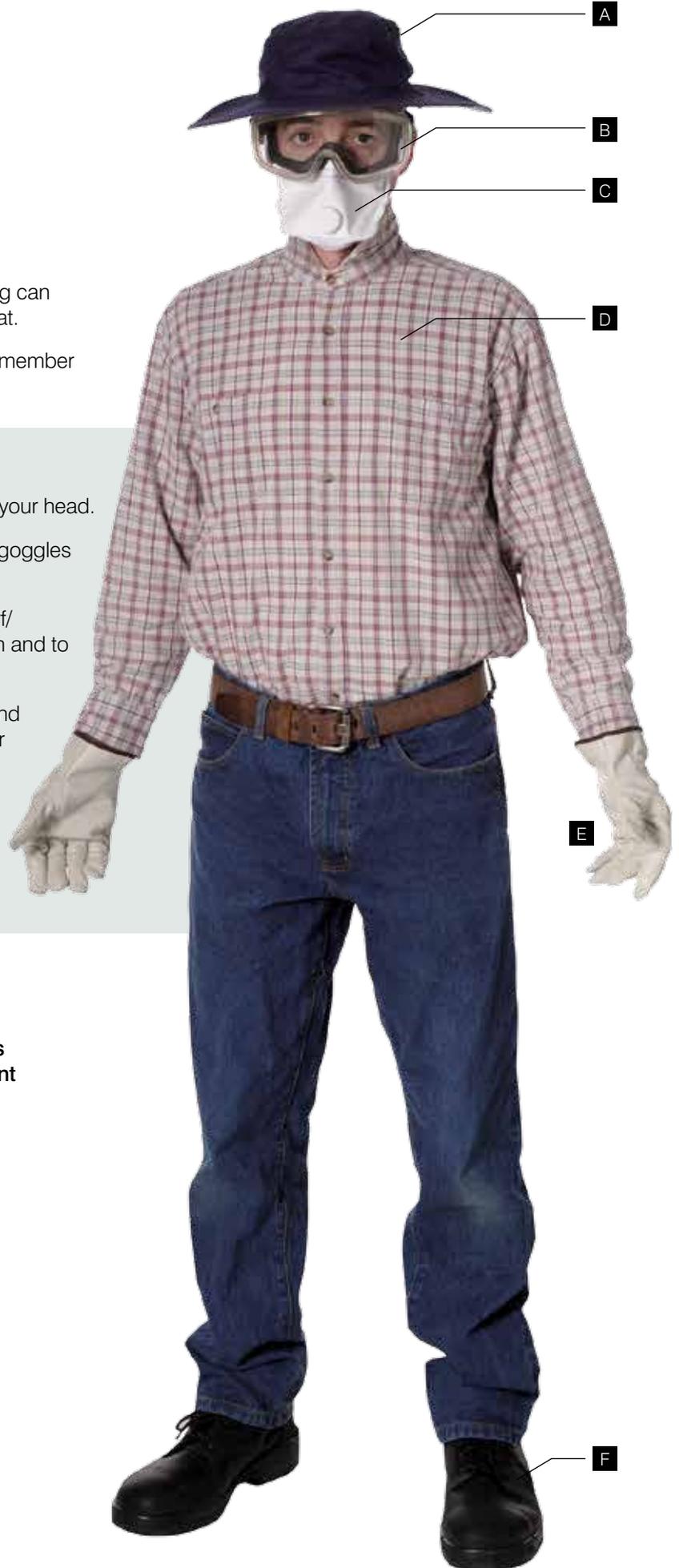
Have a set of clothing ready for each member of the family:

### Your kit

- A** A wide-brimmed hat to protect your head.
- B** Eye protection such as smoke goggles to shield your eyes.
- C** A 'P2' type mask or cotton scarf/ handkerchief for face protection and to filter smoke.
- D** A long-sleeved, collared shirt and long pants made from cotton or some other natural fibre.
- E** Tough leather garden gloves – not rubber or synthetic.
- F** Sturdy boots and wool or cotton socks.

Put these on as soon as you are aware of a fire.

**Wearing a t-shirt, shorts and thongs will expose you to dangerous radiant heat in a fire.**



# Sheltering from fire

## If you are caught in a building

If sheltering in a building during a bushfire, make sure you have more than one point of exit in every room used as a shelter. Most bathrooms are unsuitable to shelter in. They typically have only one door which can make escape impossible if that exit is blocked by flames and heat. Any place of shelter within a house or building should have two points of exit.

Most bathrooms also have frosted windows that do not let you see outside – during a bushfire it is critical to look outside and know what is happening.

If your house catches fire while you are inside, you will need to respond quickly:

- › Close the door to the room that is on fire.
- › Move to the other end of the house, closing all the doors behind you.
- › Do not get trapped in a room without an alternative exit.
- › Move outside to burnt ground as soon as you can.
- › Wherever possible, try to put a solid object between you and the radiant heat from the fire.
- › Drink water to prevent dehydration.

### EXPECT DISRUPTIONS TO SERVICES

Disruptions to telephone service, internet and mains power and water are common during a fire or on a fire risk day. Be prepared:

- › Don't rely on mains power and water.
  - Power failure will impact you and your use of:
    - › cordless phones.
    - › remote control garage doors, electric gates or similar devices.
    - › computer and the internet.
    - › air conditioners and coolers.
    - › electric pumps.
- › Don't rely on one source of information for warnings. Use multiple sources.

## If you are caught in a car

Take the following actions if you encounter smoke or flames and are not able to turn around and drive to safety.

### 1) Position the car to minimise exposure to radiant heat:

- › Park away from dense bush – try to find a clearing.
- › If possible, park behind a barrier such as a wall or rocky outcrop.
- › The car should ideally face towards the oncoming fire front.
- › Park off the roadway and turn hazard lights on. Car crashes are common in bushfires due to poor visibility.

### 2) To increase your chances of survival:

- › Stay in the car and tightly close windows and doors.
- › Cover up with woollen blankets and get down below window level – you need to protect yourself from radiant heat which will pass through glass.
- › Drink water to prevent dehydration.

### 3) As soon as you become aware that the fire front is close by:

- › Shut all vents and turn the air conditioning off to limit the circulation of toxic fumes caused by burning plastic.
- › Turn off the engine.

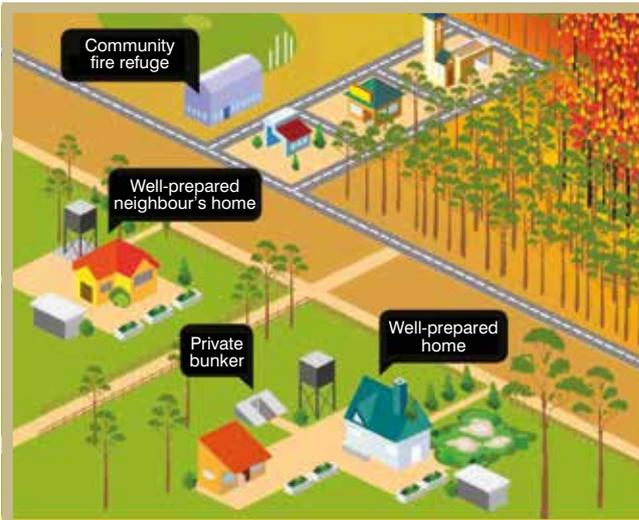
# Bushfire survival options



## Leave Early

- › When the Fire Danger Rating is **Code Red**, leaving early is always the safest option.
- › Leave early destinations could include homes of family and friends who live outside the risk area, a nearby town or other built-up area.

**Always the safest option**

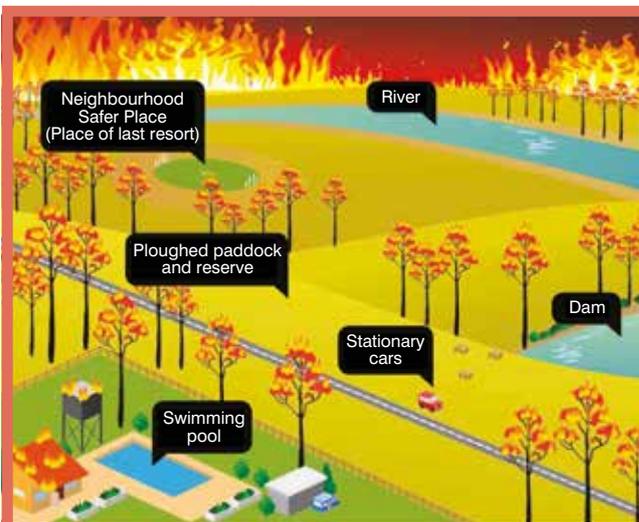


## Well Prepared

If leaving the high-risk area is no longer an option, there may be options close to where you are that could protect you. These include:

- › a well-prepared home (yours or your neighbour's) that you can actively defend on **Severe** and **Extreme** Fire Danger Rating days only
- › private bushfire shelter (bunker) that meets current regulations
- › designated community fire refuge.

**Your safety is not guaranteed**



## Last Resort

In situations where no other options are available, taking shelter in one of the below may protect you from radiant heat:

- › Neighbourhood Safer Place (Place of Last Resort)
- › stationary car in a clear area
- › ploughed paddock or reserve
- › body of water (i.e. beach, swimming pool, dam, river etc).

**High risk of trauma, injury or death.**

