

BUSHFIRE SURVIVAL GUIDE

Victoria is one of the most bushfire prone regions in the world. Bushfires kill and the only way to ensure your safety is to be well away from the threat.

Proper planning and safety procedures can reduce the risk to your life. This guide is a brief explanation of how you can protect you and your family.

Preparing your property

Everyone in Victoria who lives near bush, grassland or the coast needs to prepare their property for bushfire. Regardless of whether you plan to leave early before bushfire threatens or want to stay to actively defend, you need to prepare your property.

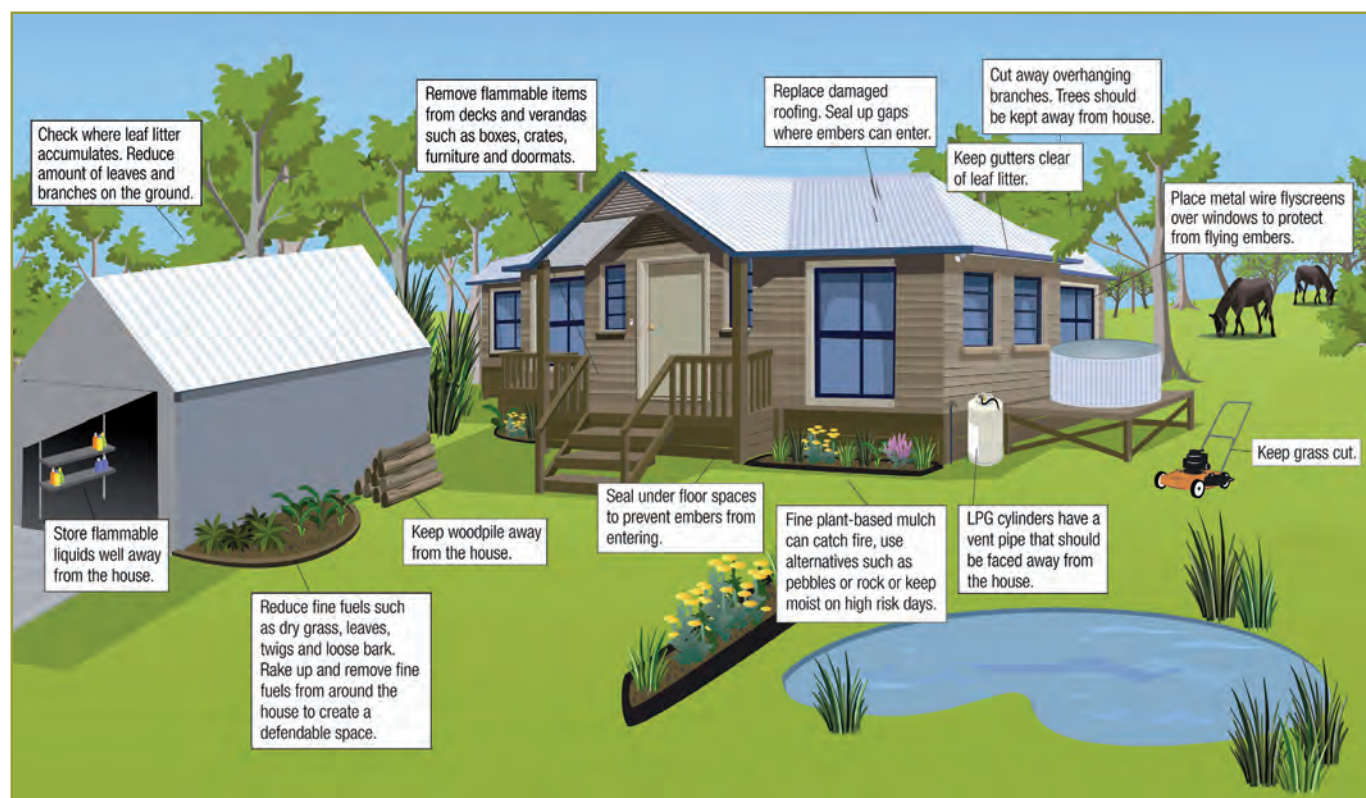
A well-prepared house with adequate defensible space has a greater chance of surviving a bushfire. Property preparation can help to reduce a bushfire's intensity and the impact it will have on your house.

In order to prepare your property for bushfire you will have to consider:

1. If you have adequate defensible space and how you will manage the vegetation
2. How your house is best maintained and what improvements can be made.

If you have not already completed the Household Bushfire Self-Assessment Tool, it is advised you do so to determine the defensible space requirements for your property. There is a workbook version of the tool in the CFA Fire Ready Kit or you can go to www.cfa.vic.gov.au to complete the assessment online.

The illustration below provides an overview of the key preparation activities you can undertake before the bushfire season.



Leaving Early or Defending your Property

Bushfires kill and the only way to ensure your safety is to be well away from the threat. If you don't want to stay to defend your property, if your home is not well-prepared or if you don't have adequate defensible space, you need to leave before bushfire threatens.

If you live in a bushfire prone area you need to consider leaving early in the day of Severe or Extreme fire rated days. On a Code Red (catastrophic) rated fire danger day, the safest option is to leave the night before, or early in the morning.

While CFA will do its best to provide official warnings, you should not wait to receive a warning to leave. Bushfires can be threatening lives and homes within minutes of starting. Just because you don't receive a warning, does not mean there isn't a threat; and do not expect a fire truck.

If you choose to stay to defend, you must have adequate defensible space, be well-prepared and understand the complexities and the risks of your decision, including the very real chance you may be injured or killed.

Not all bushfires are the same and not all homes can be defended from bushfire. You should use the Household Bushfire Self-Assessment tool at www.cfa.vic.gov.au or in the CFA Fire Ready Kit to establish whether active defence is an option for you.

Whether you are leaving early or staying to defend your well-prepared property you must have a written Bushfire Survival Plan that every member of your family knows and understands. You can learn more about developing your Bushfire Survival Plan by obtaining the CFA Fire Ready Kit.

Fire Danger Ratings

Victoria has adopted new nationally agreed Fire Danger Ratings. A Fire Danger Rating is a prediction of fire behaviour, including how hard it would be to put out a fire once it starts. The new Fire Danger Rating Barometer will alert you to danger so you can take action. Fire Danger Ratings will be a feature of weather forecasts and alert you to the actions you should take in preparation for and on the day. It will be in newspapers, broadcast on radio, TV and on websites.

Radiant heat

Bushfires produce enormous amounts of radiant heat. Radiant heat is the same warmth you feel from a campfire, or the flame from a stovetop gas cooker but could be up to 50,000 times more intense in a major bushfire.

Without protection exposure to radiant heat can lead to heat stress, heat exhaustion, heat stroke and death. The best protection from radiant heat is distance – double the distance between you and the fire and the radiant heat will be reduced by four times. Radiant heat can be blocked by a solid object, such as a concrete wall or building, which creates a barrier between you and the bushfire. You need to cover-up all exposed skin with protective clothing. The protective clothing will provide a type of barrier between your skin and the heat.

Avoid being caught on the roads

Avoid driving in areas where there is fire activity as during a bushfire roads are extremely dangerous.

If you see smoke U-turn and drive away from it.

If you do get caught on the road this is a threat to life as your car offers very little protection from radiant heat.

To increase your protection:

- Park behind a solid structure to block as much heat as you can. If this is not possible, then pull over to the side of the road into a clear area, well away from debris that may ignite
- Wind up your car windows, close the vents, put on your hazard lights and headlights, leave the engine running and air conditioning on recirculate
- Get down as low as possible below window level
- Cover up with a woollen blanket until the firefront passes. If you have water, drink it
- Get out of the car once the fire has gone.

There are recommended actions for each level of fire danger:

Fire Danger Rating	Recommended Action
CODE RED (CATASTROPHIC)	If you live in a bushfire prone area the safest option is to leave the night before, or early in the morning.
EXTREME	The safest option is to leave early in the day if you live in a bushfire prone area and your Bushfire Survival Plan is to leave. Only stay if your home is well prepared, well constructed and you can actively defend it.
SEVERE	The safest option is to leave early in the day if you live in a bushfire prone area and your Bushfire Survival Plan is to leave. Only stay if your home is well prepared and you can actively defend it.
VERY HIGH	If you live in a bushfire prone area and your Bushfire Survival Plan is to leave, the safest option is to leave at the beginning of the day.
HIGH	Check your Bushfire Survival Plan.
LOW – MODERATE	Check your Bushfire Survival Plan.

This is only a brief overview of bushfire survival. CFA has produced the fire ready kit to help you understand your bushfire risk, prepare your property and develop a Bushfire Survival Plan based on your decision to leave early or actively defend your property. Obtain a copy of the CFA Fire Ready Kit by downloading it from www.cfa.vic.gov.au or phoning the Victorian Bushfire Information Line on 1800 240 667 to have a copy sent to you in the mail.