

COMMUNITY FIREGUARD

A bushfire safety program



What is Community Fireguard?

Community Fireguard (CFG) is a community development program designed by CFA to help reduce the loss of lives and homes in bushfires. It assists community groups to develop bushfire survival strategies that suit their level of risk, lifestyle, environment and values.

Surviving major bushfires

History shows that bushfires are extremely dangerous. If residents take responsibility for their bushfire safety and prepare themselves, they can reduce their risk.

While a community can do many things to improve safety and minimise loss from major bushfires, even well-prepared properties can become undefendable under certain conditions.

CFA acknowledges the complexities of bushfire management, and assists Community Fireguard groups to develop survival strategies that consider various scenarios.

Community Fireguard groups

Community Fireguard groups are formed when residents of a local area choose to participate in the program. Groups are made up of neighbours or residents living in a shared bushfire risk environment. The program is suitable for all residents in bushfire risk areas, whether they are planning to leave early or stay to actively defend. It is for new residents or for those who have lived in the area a number of years. By working together with support from CFA, groups can develop survival strategies.

Neighbours are often the first, and sometimes the only, assistance that residents can count on during a major bushfire. CFA cannot guarantee

every person and home with individual assistance during a major bushfire and recognises that many people may have to face a fire without the support of CFA. By planning ahead, and actively participating in a CFG group, residents are able to develop strategies for themselves – strategies that have local ownership. Groups make decisions about the best way to protect themselves that fits their bushfire risk, lifestyle and environment.



Groups learn about personal survival

Community Fireguard facilitators

CFA employs facilitators to deliver the Community Fireguard program across the state. Facilitators help groups to become established and provide support, technical information and resources. They assist groups to gather relevant information and develop Bushfire Survival Plans.

Community Fireguard program

The Community Fireguard program has four core sessions:

- Introduction to the program and fire behaviour
- Understanding personal survival
- Understanding house survival
- Developing personal and household bushfire survival plans.

As part of these sessions, groups can go on street or property walks to help them identify risks and

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assess bushfire safety. Another key activity is to look at available fire protection equipment.

Importantly, the program is locally specific to street and individual property level.

Most groups will cover the core information in four to five meetings over 12 months. However, groups vary in experience and understanding so meetings are planned to meet the needs of the group. Once the core program is completed groups are encouraged to meet annually supported by CFA.

Involvement in the program is voluntary but participants are encouraged to make an on-going commitment and attend all meetings. New residents are welcome to join an established Community Fireguard group.

Benefits of participating

Research conducted after Black Saturday 2009 shows those residents who were regular members of CFG groups and actively participated were more likely to reduce their losses and have better emotional recovery following a bushfire.

There are many benefits to being an active member of a CFG group including:

- Knowledge and understanding essential for developing a Bushfire Survival Plan
- Understanding property preparation
- Sharing of knowledge and bushfire experiences with others
- Physical and emotional support from neighbours during a bushfire
- Improved emotional recovery after a bushfire
- Building strong social networks with neighbours.

Additional activities

Every group focuses on its own special needs.

Some additional activities and strategies may include:

- Organising neighbourhood working bees
- Becoming familiar with each other's properties and fire fighting equipment in groups where a shared response is planned
- Making plans with the more vulnerable community members
- Establishing a telephone tree, a two-way radio network or a group email list to facilitate communication within the group
- Working out new ways to share information, such as the use of social network websites – Facebook and Twitter or RSS feeds through the CFA website
- Organising the bulk buying of personal protective clothing and equipment.

Groups draw on the support of Community Fireguard facilitators as required.

Participants are not CFA volunteers

It is not the role of Community Fireguard groups to become volunteer groups for CFA. There is no expectation that Community Fireguard Groups or individual participants will:

- Become CFA volunteer firefighters
- Engage in active fire fighting, beyond the protection of their own home and immediate surrounds
- Advise or direct others how to respond to the threat of fire
- Take responsibility for the safety of others in the group or wider community
- Guarantee to warn others of an impending threat of fire.

For more information about the Community Fireguard Program or to find out how to establish a CFG group phone VBIL 1800 240 667 or go to www.communityprograms.cfa.vic.gov.au.

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CFA Headquarters: 8 Lakeside Drive, East Burwood VIC 3151
T: +61 3 9262 8444 | **F:** +61 3 9264 6200
E: feedback@cfa.vic.gov.au | **W:** www.cfa.vic.gov.au
CFA Postal Address: PO Box 701, Mount Waverley VIC 3149



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