

Media release

From the Premier of Victoria

Thursday, 15 October, 2009

SCHOOLS IN HIGH RISK AREAS TO CLOSE ON CODE RED DAYS

Government schools and children's services in high-risk areas will close on a day declared a Code Red (Catastrophic) Fire Danger Rating this fire season.

The Premier John Brumby today announced that a register of schools and children's services that would need to close on a Code Red (Catastrophic) Fire Danger Rating day would be finalised in the next two weeks.

He said ahead of a Code Red (Catastrophic) Day, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) would issue immediate warnings to staff, parents and children through its website and through individual schools and children's services.

The schools and children's services include those in the 52 areas identified by fire authorities as being at high risk this fire season as well as some schools outside those areas that may also be deemed at high risk due to geographic and environmental factors.

"The task for us all is to work together to make our state as fire-safe and as fire-ready as possible so that lives can be protected," Mr Brumby said.

"Our Government has adopted the new nationally agreed Fire Danger Rating scale to help individuals and communities to understand the fire risk in their area on any given day. Clear warnings and clear directions are the best possible protection for Victorians from a fire threat.

"We have taken the decision that on a day which is declared a Code Red (Catastrophic) Fire Danger Rating, the safest option for schools identified as being at high risk this fire season is to close and we want clear systems in place for the fire season so that every school community that may be affected is fully informed."

The register is being finalised by DEECD in consultation with individual schools and fire authorities and will allow the pre-emptive closure of schools on a Code Red (Catastrophic) day following the Fire Danger Rating declaration by the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM).

The BOM will declare in advance the Fire Danger Rating for each day and in each weather district in consultation with fire agencies.

If a Code Red (Catastrophic) Fire Danger Rating is declared, the DEECD will issue a list of planned school closures immediately after receiving notification from the BOM of the Fire Danger Rating.

Mr Brumby and Education Minister Bronwyn Pike today visited Bunyip Primary School to join

students in fire preparation activities, including a school fire drill, as part of the first-ever dedicated Fire Action Week. The school was among those that closed temporarily in the aftermath of Black Saturday.

Ms Pike said the pre-emptive list of schools that would close on a Code Red Day followed a detailed assessment and audit process into the preparedness of all government and non-government schools and children's services following the February fires.

"There are more than one million children, teachers and staff in government and non government schools and children's services throughout Victoria and we are taking strong action to do everything we can to protect their safety in the event of a fire," Ms Pike said.

"This is about putting clearer systems in place for school communities so that they know what to do on a Code Red (Catastrophic) day and is part of our commitment to work with communities to help them prepare for the fire season."

The Government is also working closely with non-government and independent schools to achieve a consistent approach.

Ms Pike encouraged all Victorians to get involved in Fire Action week activities in their communities.

"There are just 12 days until the start of the fire season and after 13 years of drought conditions remain dry across Victoria, despite the recent rain. We want this week to be a big statewide working bee and we want everyone to pitch in and help get our State prepared," she said.

"We are urging all Victorians, no matter where you live or what your fire experience has been, to get fire ready – identify your risk, prepare your fire plan, clean up your properties and get involved in your local fire preparation activities."

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