



Bushfires and your child's Independent school or preschool

2020/2021



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This guide provides you with important information about managing bushfire risk in independent schools and preschools. We want to ensure parents and caregivers are well prepared for a bushfire emergency. You can help to prepare for the fire danger season by:

1. familiarising yourself with the information contained in this guide
2. talking to your children about what will happen if a bushfire occurs when they are at school or preschool
3. reading all bushfire information provided to you by your child's school, preschool, vacation care, rural care, long day care and out of school hours care, including their emergency management plan
4. making a personal bushfire survival plan for your family and letting your child's school or preschool know if this will affect your child's attendance
5. making sure your emergency contact details are updated and made available to your school or preschool before the start of the fire danger season.



Fire danger season and bushfire preparation

Generally, the fire danger season starts on 1 November and ends on 30 April. The Country Fire Service (CFS) (www.cfs.sa.gov.au) officially announces the specific dates of each fire danger season every October via their website and notification services.

Schools in bushfire prone areas are particularly encouraged to begin preparations for the upcoming fire danger season from August which may include:

- reviewing the latest version of the relevant CFS Bushfire Management Area Plan (BMAP)
- undertaking a bushfire preparation audit to ensure the school is bushfire ready
- managing vegetation to reduce bushfire fuel loads on and around the school
- reviewing and updating relevant policies and procedures
- reviewing processes to ensure school buses and taxi services have appropriate plans in place in the event of a bushfire affecting their usual routes.

Schools and preschools should also practice their emergency procedures throughout the year and before the fire danger season to ensure all staff and students understand what to do in the event of a bushfire emergency.



Total fire ban days

During fire danger season, the CFS advises the public of total fire ban days. The rating is forecast by the Bureau of Meteorology each day and is an early indicator of the potential danger, should a bushfire start. A fire danger rating is not a predictor of how likely a bushfire is to occur, but how dangerous it could be if it did occur.

There are 3 classifications of total fire ban:

- severe
- extreme
- catastrophic.

Schools may take special measures on these days to make sure they are ready to respond to a bushfire threat.



Catastrophic fire danger days and school closures

On rare occasions, an Independent school may decide it is necessary to close because of bushfire activity and/or an increased bushfire threat level. The decision to close a school is not made lightly because of the known impact on parents, caregivers and local communities.

If your child's school is open, but their bus or taxi service has been cancelled, you will need to make your own travel arrangements. If your child is unable to attend because of the transport cancellation, you will need to advise the school.

The closure of schools and preschools on days of forecast catastrophic fire danger is intended to enable families in the district to enact their personal bushfire survival plan more easily.

It is important that you have arrangements in place if your child's school is closed, even if your own bushfire survival plan does not involve leaving the area.

It is not advisable for children to be left at home on days of 'catastrophic' fire danger.



Notifying parents and caregivers

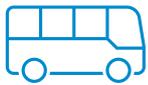
Independent schools are responsible for notifying parents and caregivers of an impending closure.

Since the type of notification method(s) used will vary from one school to another, it is important that you understand how your school or preschool will communicate this information to you.

It will not always be possible for the site to provide information to you during operating hours and it may be necessary for them to contact you via telephone, text message or through social media and smartphone applications.

It is imperative that you know and understand how your school or preschool will communicate emergencies to you and that they have up-to-date contact information.

Parents and caregivers should only take action in relation to official notifications from their school or preschool and should contact the school should they require clarification or further details.



School excursions and camps

All schools and preschools take into consideration risks associated with the fire danger season when planning any excursions or camps. This includes monitoring daily weather conditions to determine if any planned activities will be cancelled due to fire danger ratings.

If a bushfire is burning on the day of an intended camp or excursion and is likely to threaten the destination or return to the school, the excursion will be cancelled.

If a bushfire is impacting on a camp or excursion that is already underway, the school and preschool will liaise with the CFS to determine the most appropriate action to take. Parents and caregivers will be contacted by their child's school or preschool to inform them of any action or changes that will be taken as a result.



What you can do to prepare for the fire danger season

Have a personal bushfire survival plan and discuss it with your children. Keep it up-to-date and make sure that all family members know what to do.

If your bushfire survival plan affects your child's attendance at school, preschool, vacation care, rural care, long day care and out of school hours care, you need to let the school or service know.

Visit the CFS website for more information on how to develop your own plan.

Know your child's school or preschool bushfire response plan and:

- give your child's school, preschool, vacation care, rural care, long day care and out of school hours care your up-to-date contact details (mobile phone number, email address and alternative contact number)
- review the list of key contacts and people authorised to collect your child on your behalf
- like the CFS, State Emergency Service (SES), South Australia Police (SAPOL) and your child's school or preschool on Facebook and other social media
- bookmark the CFS, SES, SAPOL and the school's websites so you can easily access them in an emergency
- identify your local radio station that broadcasts bushfire event information
- practice your bushfire survival plan with your family
- talk to your child about what will happen if a bushfire emergency occurs.



In the event of a bushfire emergency

If a bushfire is approaching, the safety of children and other occupants at the school or preschool is the highest priority.

In these situations, schools and preschools will:

- move students to a designated bushfire shelter or other suitable location
- fill available containers with water
- close windows, doors and turn off the air conditioning
- remain inside with students until the main fire front has passed
- listen to local radio, monitor the CFS website
- work with the CFS to manage the situation and stay informed about changing conditions.

You may also receive advice from your school or preschool advising you that they have taken emergency precautions because of a potential bushfire threat.

Travelling to the school to collect your child could put you and your child at risk. There may be reduced visibility on roads from smoke along with road closures in place that you are not aware of before you leave. It is also important to keep roads and access points clear for emergency services.



During a bushfire emergency

Consider these important points before you make a decision:

- If your child has been moved to the school's bushfire shelter, they are accounted for and supervised. If you were to remove them from this location, would you have a safer place to go? Is the route safe?
- Is your child safest at the bushfire shelter?
- What instructions did the school or preschool give?
- What information has the school or preschool provided to you?
- Did the school or preschool actually recommend that you collect your child?



Frequently asked questions

Is my school's bushfire shelter also the local community bushfire shelter?

No. A bushfire shelter is purely designed to house the children and staff in the event of an imminent bushfire threat. If your town has a community refuge, it will most likely be a town hall or other locally identified building. Check with your local CFS for the location of your community bushfire refuge.

A neighbour told me a grass fire is burning near my child's school or preschool. Should I collect my child?

If a fire is burning near your child's school or preschool, the school will enact their bushfire response plan or emergency management plan. This will include moving to a bushfire shelter or other suitable location to ensure all children and staff are safe. If a fire is burning in the area, you need to seriously consider whether you should travel through the affected area to get to the school or preschool. Your child is being cared for by the school or preschool and collecting your child from the relative safety of a bushfire shelter may put you and your child at unnecessary risk from actual bushfire or reduced visibility from smoke.

In addition, there may be road closures in place that you are not aware of. Roads and access points need to be kept clear for emergency service responses.

How will I be notified if a bushfire is affecting my child's school or preschool?

Each school or preschool determines its own method of notifying parents of an active emergency, so it is important that you are aware of the system used by your child's school or preschool.

Your school or preschool may have a dedicated SMS system, use social media or smartphone applications and will likely use these mediums to communicate during an emergency. However, you should consider the possibility that these systems may not operate effectively if there is a power outage or a loss of telecommunications infrastructure in the area.

I've just received an SMS from my child's school or preschool advising me a fire is impacting on the school or preschool, what should I do?

The school or preschool will enact its bushfire response plan or site emergency management plan and move all children and staff to a bushfire shelter or other safe location. This is most likely the safest place for your child to be at that moment. It is not a good idea to access the school or preschool until the fire danger has passed. If you do attend the school or preschool and attempt to remove your child, staff may ask you to stay with your child at the shelter. Do not expose yourself or your child to unnecessary risk by attempting to drive through active bushfire conditions.

I live in a bushfire prone area and as part of my personal bushfire survival plan, I keep my child at home with a parent during extreme weather conditions. Do I need to tell anyone?

You need to advise your child's school, preschool, vacation care, rural care, long day care and out of school hours care service if your child is not going to be in attendance that day. This helps the school or preschool to manage their resources and keep account of all students in attendance on the day.

My child is currently on school camp or excursion and a bushfire has started close to the area. What will the school do to keep my child safe? What should I do?

If a bushfire or grass fire starts and is impacting on a camp or excursion that is already underway, the school and preschool will take advice from the CFS. You will receive information from your child's school or preschool to inform you of any action or changes that will be taken as a result.

It is not advisable to collect your child from the camp or excursion as it may put you and your child at risk.

My child is scheduled to go to school camp or excursion today and I am worried about the risk of a bushfire as there are forecast extreme weather conditions. What should I do?

Schools will reconsider any planned camps or excursions if weather conditions have the potential to put children and staff at risk, and will monitor daily weather conditions to determine if any activities will be cancelled. Your child's school will advise you if any planned camps or excursions will be cancelled.

If a planned camp or excursion hasn't been cancelled and you believe there is a risk, you should talk to your school's leadership to discuss your concerns.



Parent checklist

Have you given your emergency contact details to your child's school or preschool, including the names and contact details for people authorised to collect your child from school or preschool?

Have you received and read the information provided to you by your child's school or preschool, including their bushfire response plan or emergency management plan?

Do you have your own personal bushfire survival plan in place? Does it consider how you will manage different scenarios and consider school, preschool, school transport, vacation care, rural care, long day care and out of school hours care? You need to practice enacting your plan in advance.

Have you talked to your children about what will happen if a bushfire occurs when they are at school or preschool?

If your personal bushfire survival plan affects your children's attendance at school or preschool or other related service, have you let your school or preschool know?

Are your family and caregivers ready for a bushfire emergency?



Contact information

SA CFS	www.cfs.sa.gov.au
CFS Bushfire Information Hotline	1800 362 361
Emergency Services	000
South Australian Police	131 444
Alert SA	www.alert.sa.gov.au
Bushfire information for the deaf, hard of hearing or speech impaired	133 677 then ask for 1800 362 361

If you are deaf, hard of hearing or have a speech impairment, contact the CFS through the National Relay Service:

TTY users phone 133 677 then ask for 1800 362 361

Speak and listen users phone 1300 555 727 then ask for 1800 362 361

Internet relay users connect to the NRS then ask for 1800 362 361

To report a fire or emergency access TTY 106 (TTY users only)

If you want to make a call using Auslan to someone who speaks English and uses an ordinary phone, video relay is the call option for you.

Send an SMS on your mobile phone to 0423 677 767 asking for 1800 362 361.

TTY 106 is a dedicated text-based emergency relay service with direct access to fire, police and ambulance services. It can only be contacted through a TTY machine, not from a mobile phone or ordinary phone
