

BUSHFIRE AND YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL OR PRESCHOOL

Information about our approach to managing bushfire risk in government schools and preschools.



Government
of South Australia

Department for Education

Bushfire and your child's school or preschool

This brochure provides you with important information about our approach to managing bushfire risk in government schools and preschools. We want to ensure parents and caregivers are well prepared for a bushfire emergency.

You can help us prepare for the fire danger season by:

1. familiarising yourself with the information contained in this brochure
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 site 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.

Bushfire risk ratings

A bushfire 'risk rating' is applied to all schools and preschools in designated bushfire-prone areas.

The 4 bushfire 'risk rating' categories are:

- **R1** (extreme to very high risk)
- **R2** (high risk)
- **R3** (medium to low risk)
- **NR** (negligible risk).

The bushfire risk ratings are assigned based on each school or preschool's 'bushfire attack level' (BAL).

A BAL measures a site's potential for exposure to ember attack, radiant heat and direct flame in the event of a bushfire emergency.

The BAL is calculated by specialist consultants who analyse information such as the location, surroundings or construction of the site, previous bushfire history and other relevant factors.

Some R3 or NR schools or preschools are determined to have a 'high bushfire risk' **on catastrophic fire danger days** due to their proximity to R1 or R2 sites.

Fire danger season and bushfire preparation

All government schools and preschools have a site emergency management plan. Schools and preschools with a risk rating of R1 and R2 are also required to have a bushfire response plan, however this is not mandatory for R3 or NR schools. During the months of August and September each year, R1 and R2 sites are required to prepare for the annual fire danger season. Generally the fire danger season starts on 1 November and ends on 30 April.

Pre-season bushfire preparations at schools and preschools include:

- undertaking a bushfire preparation audit to ensure the site is bushfire ready
- managing vegetation to reduce bushfire fuel loads on and around the site
- updating the site emergency management plan and bushfire response plan.

In addition, there are processes to ensure school bus and taxi services have appropriate plans in place in the event of a bushfire affecting their usual routes.

Schools and preschools practice their emergency procedures throughout the year and before the fire danger season. R1 and R2 sites work hard to ensure all staff and students understand what to do in the event of a bushfire emergency.



**Find your school's risk rating at
www.education.sa.gov.au**



Total fire ban days

During fire danger season, the Country Fire Service (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 2 classifications of total fire ban:

- extreme
- catastrophic.

Schools may be required to take special measures on these days to make sure they are ready to respond to a bushfire threat. The bushfire threat flowchart is a handy guide to what schools and preschools may need to do on the respective fire ban days, depending on their own risk rating.

The flowchart can be found on the Department for Education's website: **www.education.sa.gov.au**





Catastrophic fire danger days

If the CFS gives advance notice of a forecast catastrophic fire danger day, schools and preschools in the relevant fire ban district(s) that have a bushfire risk rating of R1 or R2 will be directed to **close automatically**. A list of these sites is available on the Department for Education's website: www.education.sa.gov.au

Some R3 or NR schools or preschools in **close proximity to an R1 or R2 site** will also be directed to close. These sites are determined to have a 'high bushfire risk' on catastrophic fire danger days due to their proximity to a higher risk school.

On a catastrophic fire danger day, no persons are permitted on sites rated R1, R2 or identified as 'high bushfire risk' in the affected fire ban district.

This includes staff, contractors and non-departmental services. In addition, all school transport services (including bus and taxi services) in the affected fire ban district(s) will be cancelled.

Schools and preschools that are risk rated as R3 or negligible risk that have **not** been identified as being in close proximity to an R1 or R2 site will remain open as usual, but are required to be vigilant because of the increased danger posed if a bushfire began burning under those conditions.

If your child's school or preschool 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 enables 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 or preschool is closed, even if your own plan does not involve leaving the area. It is not advisable for children to be left at home on days of catastrophic fire danger.

If the CFS elevates an existing fire danger rating to catastrophic on the day, all schools, preschools and transport services will remain **open** and operate as normal unless otherwise advised. However, all after school activities (out of school hours care or school sports) scheduled to operate at R1, R2 or identified 'high bushfire risk' schools and preschools in the relevant fire ban district(s) will be cancelled.



Keep your contact details up-to-date with your child's school or preschool.



School closures

On rare occasions, it may be necessary for the department to direct any school or preschool to close because of bushfire activity and or an increased bushfire threat level. The decision to close schools and preschools is not taken lightly because of the known impact on parents, caregivers and local communities. Consequently, a formal direction to close is only issued under predefined circumstances or when there is a genuine concern that schools will be endangered by a bushfire event if they remain open.

When a site has been directed to close, **no person is permitted to be on site**. This means that all services, including vacation care, rural care, long day care and out of school hours care and any scheduled activities by private user groups, will also be cancelled.



Notifying parents and caregivers

The department informs schools and preschools of catastrophic fire danger days or potential bushfire threats as soon as the information is provided by the CFS. Schools and preschools have the responsibility to notify parents and caregivers of an impending closure.

Since the type of notification method(s) used will vary from one site 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, preschool or through the department's official information sources.



All school and preschool closures are coordinated by the department's Security and Emergency Management unit.

For more information on days of catastrophic fire danger ratings, including school closures and changes to bus and taxi services, contact the department's Emergency Information Hotline on 1800 000 279.



Keep in mind electronic systems may not work if there is a power outage or loss of telecommunications. If you suspect there is a bushfire and you have not heard from the school or preschool, please do not contact them directly as there may be a limit to available telephone lines. Contact the department's Emergency Information Hotline on 1800 000 279 who will get in contact with the school for you.



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 Security and Emergency Management unit 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

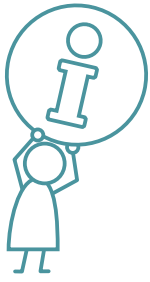
Have a personal bushfire survival plan and discuss it with your children. Keep it up-to-date and make sure that all family members know what to do. If your bushfire survival plan affects your child's attendance at school, preschool, vacation care, rural care, long day care and out of school hours care, 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 Department for Education pages on Facebook
- bookmark the CFS, SES, SAPOL and Department for Education 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.



If you live in a bushfire prone area it is important you have a bushfire survival plan for your household. Make sure you practice your plan with your family.



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 and work with the Security and Emergency Management unit 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.

Accessing emergency information

The Security and Emergency Management unit is responsible for coordinating and managing bushfires, major incidents and disasters affecting government schools and services.

Working in partnership with emergency services such as the CFS, Metropolitan Fire Service (MFS), SES and SAPOL, the Security and Emergency Management unit acts as a link between sites and the emergency management community.

In any bushfire situation, the unit also maintains the department's Emergency Information Hotline to provide advice to the community on:

- what is happening at your child's school or preschool
- any school closures in place (planned and actual)
- any changes to transport services such as the re-routing of school buses and taxis
- any new collection points for your child's school bus or taxis due to road closures
- when it is safe to collect your child
- when it is advisable to leave your child at the school or preschool due to a high level of risk to enter into the bushfire emergency zone or surrounding areas.

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?
- Have you contacted the Department for Education Emergency Information Hotline on 1800 000 279 for up-to-date information on the incident and the welfare of the site occupants?
- 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?

The Emergency Information Hotline operates during business hours, with an out of hours messaging service at other times. The hotline is the best source of current and up-to-date information on bushfire emergencies. Phone: 1800 000 279



Frequently asked questions

My child attends an R1 or R2 rated school and a catastrophic fire danger warning has been declared for the following day. Will their school be open?

No. Total fire bans are issued by the CFS for individual fire ban districts. If your child's school or preschool is in one of the fire ban districts that has a catastrophic fire danger day and it is identified as R1 or R2 it will be closed. If the school or preschool is considered 'high bushfire risk' due to proximity to an R1 or R2 site, it will also be closed.

This closure will extend to any vacation care, rural care, long day care and out of school hours care services that operate from the school or preschool. All after school sport and activities will also be cancelled for the day.

If the fire ban district that your child's school is located in does not have a catastrophic fire danger day declared, it will still be open as usual.

My child catches the school bus every day but his school is not a 'high bushfire risk' site. How does a catastrophic fire danger day affect me?

If your child takes school transport or uses a school taxi service and a catastrophic fire danger day is declared for that fire ban district, **all** school transport services will be cancelled and you will need to make alternative arrangements.

Does the transport cancellation policy apply to all districts? Surely the bushfire risk is not the same everywhere?

If your fire ban district **does not** have any R1 or R2 rated schools or preschools the transport cancellation policy will not apply.

What happens if the weather changes and during the day the CFS upgrade the fire danger warning from extreme to catastrophic?

All schools, regardless of their risk rating, will remain open and all transport services will operate as normal, unless otherwise directed. You may wish to enact your own personal bushfire survival plan, and may choose to collect your child early if necessary.

However, on the few occasions the risk rating is upgraded to catastrophic during the day, any vacation care, rural care, long day care and out of school hours care services will be cancelled. All after school sports and activities will also be cancelled for that day.

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 site 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.

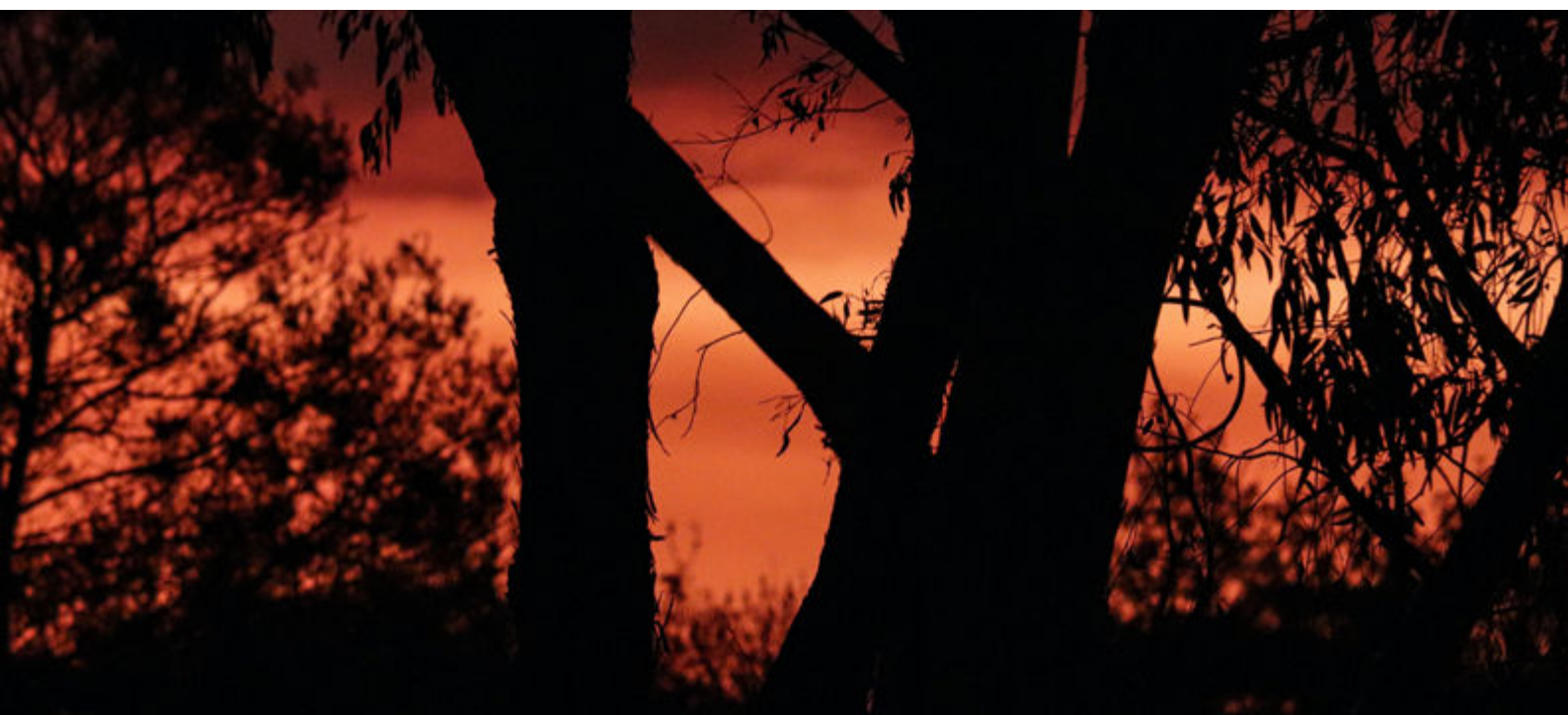
In addition, there may be road closures in place that you are not aware of. Roads and access points need to be kept clear for emergency service responses.

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.

If you suspect there may be an incident threatening your child's school or preschool, contact the **Department for Education's Emergency Information Hotline on 1800 000 279**. Schools and preschools need to keep their communication lines open so emergency services and the department can contact them to provide advice and assistance.



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.

If my child's school or preschool closes due to catastrophic fire danger ratings or because of current bushfire activity, can I still send them to vacation care?

When an R1, R2 rated or identified 'high bushfire risk' school or preschool is closed, this means there will be no services or activities undertaken on the site. This includes vacation care, rural care, long day care and out of school hours care. It is also extended to sports and extra-curricular activities that may be scheduled to occur after the standard school or preschool day.

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 Security and Emergency Management unit. 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. The Security and Emergency Management unit will work with emergency services to keep children and staff safe.

In these situations, contact the Department for Education's Emergency Information Hotline on 1800 000 279 for further information.

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 can choose to remove your child from the activity and keep them at home. If you choose this option, please ensure you inform the school. Alternatively, you can request your child attends school as normal on the day/s of the planned activity.

Tomorrow is my son's Saturday cricket match at our school oval but there is a forecast catastrophic fire danger day. Our school is identified as an R1 site, can we still go to the school to play our cricket match because it's on the weekend?

No. Regardless of what day of the week a forecast catastrophic fire danger day is announced, there are to be **no persons** on a school or preschool rated R1, R2 or that have been identified as 'high bushfire risk' in the affected fire ban district.

Who should I call for more information if a bushfire is near my child's school?

The Department for Education's Emergency Information Hotline on 1800 000 279.





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 site 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

Department for Education Emergency Information Hotline	1800 000 279
Department for Education website	www.education.sa.gov.au
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

The Department for Education's
Emergency Information Hotline

1800 000 279