

# Emergency Management (Bushfires)

## Off-site Activities

Procedure 1 | Issued 16/12/09  
Revised 10/2/10

### Audience

This procedure is designed primarily for government schools, principals and school staff involved in or responsible for emergency management and off-site activities.

It is in addition to information contained in the *Victorian Government Schools Reference Guide* section [4.4.2.3 Excursion emergency management](#).

Bushfire preparedness is not just a concern of rural and regional schools. Metropolitan schools will also be affected because their students or staff may attend activities or excursions in bushfire prone areas, or travel through bushfire prone areas for these activities.

### Background

This procedure is part of the *Emergency Management Procedure Manual (Bushfires)* (the “manual”) which has been provided to ensure that the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) takes appropriate action when there is a heightened risk of bushfire as indicated by the National Fire Danger Rating.

The manual seeks to provide guidance to ensure that all schools, children’s services, off-site activities and school bus routes are managed appropriately and coordinated in the event of a “Code Red”, “Extreme” or “Severe” fire danger rating being forecast. .

### Definition – Off-site Activities

*Off-site Activities* are any activities that take place outside of a school site. Some examples are:

- camps (whether held at residential campsites or at campsites such as National Parks)

- excursions (such as interstate trips, day trips, school sleep-overs, or weekend excursions)
- sporting activities (such as orienteering, cross country running, swimming carnivals, inter-school competitions etc.)
- other school-organised activities that students are participating in off the schools grounds (such as Vocational Education Training in Schools (VETiS) or work experience).

### Requirements

The *Safety Guidelines for Education Outdoors* must be followed for all school council approved excursions:

[www.education.vic.gov.au/management/schooloperations/edoutdoors/](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/management/schooloperations/edoutdoors/)

Schools must ensure that they update the Student Activity Locator (SAL) online database by completing the Notification of School Activity form (edumail password required) for all camps and excursions:

[www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/forms/school/sal/](http://www.eduweb.vic.gov.au/forms/school/sal/)

This allows the Emergency and Security Management Unit (ESMU) to quickly locate and identify the activities that are potentially affected by incidents and take action if required to ensure their safety.

Accurate completion of the SAL database is critical. If schools do not complete the SAL, including providing emergency contact details, then this could compromise safety and lives.

Ideally the database should be updated at least three weeks prior to the activity or as soon as an activity has been organised.

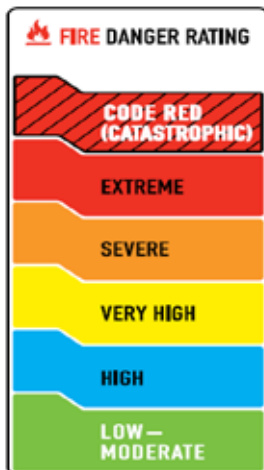
If assistance with the database is required schools may contact the Emergency and Security Management Unit on (03) 9589 6266.

## National Fire Danger Ratings

Victoria has adopted the 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. It provides information on:

- The sort of bushfire behaviour that could be experienced on that day
- The type of threat bushfires may pose to life and property on any day given the forecast weather conditions.

The Fire Danger Rating scale below, alerts communities to danger so they can take action.



Further information about the Fire Danger Rating Scale is available on the CFA website at:

<http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/residents/summer/firedangerratings.htm#rating>

This procedure deals only with emergencies related to bushfires not to extreme weather incidents. Please refer to other guidance material on emergencies and critical incidents where necessary.

## Bushfire Warnings

The Department receives warnings of Code Red fire danger days. In some cases the Department will receive up to three days notice, but given the variable nature of weather, schools should anticipate receiving less notice.

## Emergency Management (Bushfires)

These warnings are based on Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) Weather Districts. There are nine (9) districts in Victoria as per the diagram below:



Further information is available at:

[www.cfa.vic.gov.au](http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au) or [www.bom.gov.au](http://www.bom.gov.au) or can be obtained through the Victorian Bushfire Information Line (24 hours) on 1800 240 667.

In the event of a Code Red or Extreme Fire danger warning the Department will notify principals via mobile phone and email and through the Department's website at: [www.education.vic.gov.au/bushfires](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/bushfires), in order to share this information and warnings with our school communities to ensure the safety of staff and students.

These messages will include reminders about the requirements in relation to reviewing off-site activities and cancelling, re-scheduling, recalling or continuing the activities, in response to such warnings.

## Need more information or assistance?

Further information may be obtained, as outlined below:


For further policy advice schools should contact the Office for Government School Education via [community\\_stakeholders@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:community_stakeholders@edumail.vic.gov.au) or contact their local Regional Office.

General feedback in relation to ease of use or suggested changes can be forwarded to: [bushfires@edumail.vic.gov.au](mailto:bushfires@edumail.vic.gov.au)

The Emergency and Security Management Unit (ESMU) operates a 24 hour / seven days per week emergency and security communication and coordination centre for the Department. The contact number is (03) 9589 6266. It provides the mechanism for ensuring that all Departmental resources are available to assist schools and regions when responding to emergency matters.

## Guidance Checklist

This checklist is one tool that can assist schools, but schools should note that it may be necessary to undertake activities in addition to this checklist.

Phase	Checklist	✓
<b>Pre-activity planning</b>		
	<p><b>Important note:</b> the procedures that follow assume at least 24 hours warning will be provided for a CODE RED fire danger day.</p> <p>While every effort will be made to provide 24 hours warning, <u>less notice may be provided</u>. Schools must prepare for this contingency in their pre-activity planning:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ when planning an <b>overnight excursion</b> in a bushfire prone area, contingency transport arrangements should be made to ensure that the activity can be recalled or relocated if a CODE RED, fire danger rating is forecast for the area the excursion is in, and less than 24 hours warning has been provided.</li> <li>→ if it is safe to do so students and staff should be transported out of the affected area the night before a day of forecast CODE RED fire danger or, if unavoidable, early on the morning of the CODE RED day,</li> </ul>	
<b>Procedures for a CODE RED fire danger warning</b>		
 <p>72 hours (3 days) before</p>	<p>A <u>warning</u> is issued by the Department to all Principals, predicting a CODE RED fire danger day:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ schools must monitor CFA, DSE and DEECD websites and media services in order to make decisions around the cancellation, change of routine, rescheduling or recall of off-site activities (including camps and excursions)</li> <li>→ schools must ensure that off-site activities in areas affected by a predicted CODE RED fire danger day are cancelled, rescheduled, relocated or recalled if it is safe to do so.</li> </ul> <p>In addition, all principals should undertake the following steps, where appropriate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ contact teachers in charge of current excursions or camps to advise of the bushfire threat and to decide appropriate action</li> </ul>	

- ensure that all staff are aware of the weather warnings, particularly any teachers in charge of planned off-site activities
- check if anyone else is using a camp owned, operated or managed by the school
- recognise that whilst the school may not be in the affected area their students, volunteers and staff may be, or may be travelling through an affected area, or their school may own, operate or manage other facilities that are in the affected area
- review any risk assessment and emergency response plans completed in accordance with the [Safety Guidelines for Education Outdoors](#)
- consult with the camp operators or activity providers about their emergency management plans – this may include other relevant parties such as other schools involved in the same activity or event
- consult with local emergency services such as CFA, MFB or Victoria Police if necessary
- examine what transport options are available or needed if relocation is required, check [www.vicroads.vic.gov.au](http://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au) for road closures or [www.transport.vic.gov.au](http://www.transport.vic.gov.au) for public transport links
- update the SAL with any details or activities that they become aware of, that have not previously been entered
- use the letter templates in the *Bushfire Resource Kit (Schools)* (a CD which was provided to all schools in December 2009)
- advise the **Regional Director** of the proposed response and ask for further assistance if required.

Staff undertaking an off-site activity in an affected area, should:

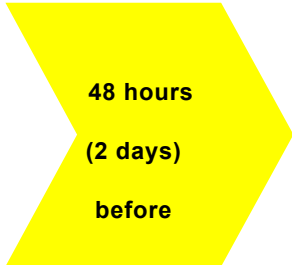

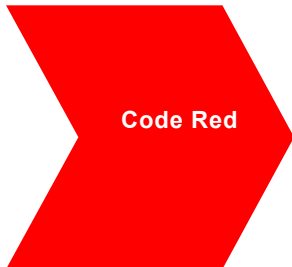
- contact the **Principal** and participate in the process described above
- remain calm, ensure that they do not heighten anxiety levels and seek to provide assurance to students, parents or other staff members
- monitor CFA, DSE and DEECD websites and media services for more information.

The school's **Regional Office** will:

- provide assistance, coordination and further information if necessary
- assist in coordination in the event that the activity location is within the boundaries of another Regional Office.

If or when contact is made with **Parents** (using parent notification protocols such as communication trees) they should be advised:

- that the Principal is the coordination person for all queries
- that the situation is being monitored and they will be informed of further arrangements once a decision has been made

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ of the response, once determined</li> <li>→ of collection points for students if necessary.</li> </ul>	
 <p><b>48 hours (2 days) before</b></p>	<p>A <u>warning</u> is issued by the Department to all principals, predicting a CODE RED fire danger day:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ schools undertake or continue with the steps outlined above, for the 72 hour warning, as appropriate.</li> </ul>	
 <p><b>24 hours (1 day) before</b></p>	<p>A <u>warning</u> is issued by the Department to all principals predicting or confirming a CODE RED fire danger day:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ schools must ensure that any off-site activities in areas affected by a predicted CODE RED fire danger day are cancelled, relocated or recalled if it is safe to do so</li> <li>→ schools undertake or continue with the steps outlined above, for the 72 hour warning.</li> </ul>	
 <p><b>Code Red</b></p>	<p>On a CODE RED fire danger day:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ schools must ensure that for any off-site activity that cannot be recalled, because it is not safe to do so, the teacher in charge is prepared to enact the relevant Emergency Management Plan in the event of a direct threat of fire</li> <li>→ schools must ensure that <u>all other</u> off-site activities in areas affected by the CODE RED fire danger day have been cancelled, re-scheduled, relocated or recalled.</li> </ul>	

## Procedures for an EXTREME fire danger warning

72 hours

(3 days)

before

A warning is issued by the Bureau of Meteorology, to the public, forecasting an EXTREME fire danger day:

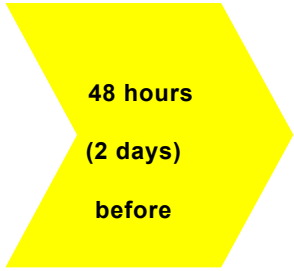


- schools must monitor CFA, DSE and DEECD websites and media services
- schools must continuously review whether it is necessary to cancel, change the routine, reschedule, or recall off-site activities in areas affected by a forecast EXTREME fire danger day.

In addition, all principals should undertake the following steps, where appropriate:

- contact teachers in charge of current excursions or camps to advise of the bushfire threat and to decide appropriate action
- ensure that all staff are aware of the weather warnings, particularly any teachers in charge of planned off-site activities
- check if anyone else is using a camp owned, operated or managed by the school
- recognise that whilst the school may not be in the affected area their students, volunteers and staff may be, or may be travelling through an affected area, or their school may own, operate or manage other facilities that are in the affected area
- review any risk assessment and emergency response plans completed in accordance with the [Safety Guidelines for Education Outdoors](#)
- consult with the camp operators or activity providers about their emergency management plans – this may include other relevant parties such as other schools involved in the same activity or event
- examine what transport options are available or needed if relocation is required, check [www.vicroads.vic.gov.au](http://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au) for road closures or [www.transport.vic.gov.au](http://www.transport.vic.gov.au) for public transport links
- update the SAL with any details or activities that they become aware of, that have not previously been entered
- advise the **Regional Director** of the proposed response and ask for further assistance if required.

Staff undertaking an off-site activity in an affected area, should:

- contact the **Principal** and participate in the process described above
- remain calm, ensure that they do not heighten anxiety levels and seek to provide assurance to students, parents or other

	<p>staff members</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ monitor CFA, DSE and DEECD websites and media services for more information</li> </ul> <p>The school's <b>Regional Office</b> will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ provide assistance, coordination and further information if necessary</li> <li>→ assist in coordination in the event that the activity location is within the boundaries of another Regional Office.</li> </ul> <p>If or when contact is made with <b>Parents</b> (using parent notification protocols such as communication trees) they should be advised:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ that the Principal is the coordination person for all queries</li> <li>→ that the situation is being monitored and they will be informed of further arrangements once a decision has been made</li> <li>→ of the response, once determined</li> <li>→ of collection points for students if necessary.</li> </ul>	
 <p><b>48 hours (2 days) before</b></p>	<p>A <u>warning</u> is issued by the Bureau of Meteorology, to the public, forecasting an EXTREME fire danger day:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ schools consider undertaking or continue with the steps outlined above, for the 72 hour warning.</li> </ul>	
 <p><b>24 hours (1 day) before</b></p>	<p>A <u>warning</u> is issued by the Bureau of Meteorology, to the public, forecasting or confirming an EXTREME fire danger day:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ schools must ensure that any off-site activities in areas affected by a forecast EXTREME fire danger day are cancelled, or recalled, <u>where it has been decided that it is necessary to do so</u></li> <li>→ schools undertake or continue with the steps outlined above, for the 72 hour warning.</li> </ul>	
 <p><b>EXTREME</b></p>	<p>On an EXTREME fire danger day:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>→ schools must ensure that for activities that are continuing, the teacher in charge is prepared to enact the relevant Emergency Management Plan in the event of a direct threat of fire</li> <li>→ schools have ensured that <u>all other</u> off-site activities in areas affected by the EXTREME fire danger day have been cancelled, re-scheduled, relocated or recalled.</li> </ul>	

## Procedures for a SEVERE fire danger warning

A warning is issued by the Bureau of Meteorology, to the public, forecasting a SEVERE fire danger day or a SEVERE fire danger day is current:

- schools must monitor CFA, DSE and DEECD websites and media services in order to make decisions around the cancellation, change of routine, rescheduling or recall of off-site activities (including camps and excursions)
- schools must ensure that for activities that are continuing, the teacher in charge is prepared to enact the relevant Emergency Management Plan in the event of a direct threat of fire.