

Bushfires and Your Child's School: A Guide for Families



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This guide provides you with important information about managing bushfire risk in Independent Schools to ensure parents and caregivers are well prepared for a bushfire emergency.

Please help us prepare for the fire danger season by:

- familiarising yourself with the information contained in this brochure
- reading all bushfire information provided to you by your child's school
- talking to your children about what will happen if a bushfire occurs when they are at school
- making sure your emergency contact details are updated and made available to your school before the start of the fire danger season
- making a personal bushfire survival plan for your family and letting your child's school know if this will affect your child's attendance.

By taking the above steps it will help your school to keep your children as safe as possible.

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

2. | 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' and 'catastrophic' – and schools may take special measures on these days to make sure that they are ready to respond to a bushfire threat.

3. | '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 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.

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.

4. | Notifying parents and caregivers

Independent Schools are responsible for notifying parents and caregivers of an impending closure. It is important that you understand how your school will communicate this information to you. Your

school may contact you via telephone, text message or through social media and mobile applications.

It is imperative that you know and understand how your school will communicate emergencies to you and that they have your up to date contact information on record. Parents and caregivers should only take action in relation to official notifications from their school and should contact the school should they require clarification or further details.

5. | School excursions and camps

All schools should take into consideration risks associated with the fire danger season when planning any excursions or camps. This may include 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 travel routes the excursion or camp will be cancelled.

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

6. | 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, you need to let the school know.

Visit the CFS website www.cfs.sa.gov.au for more information on how to develop your own plan.

Know your child's school bushfire response plan and:

- give your child's school your up to date contact details including mobile phone number, email address and alternative contact numbers
- review the list of key contacts and people authorised to collect your child on your behalf
- like or follow the CFS, SES, SAPOL and your child's school 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
- practice your bushfire survival plan with your family
- talk to your child about what will happen if a bushfire emergency occurs.

7. | In the event of a bushfire emergency

If a bushfire is approaching, the safety of children and other occupants is the highest priority. In these situations, schools will:

- move students to a designated bushfire refuge 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 and monitor the CFS website
- work with the CFS to manage the situation and keep informed about changing conditions.

8. | During a bushfire emergency

Consider these important points before you make a decision:

- If your child has been moved to the school's bushfire refuge, 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 refuge?
- What information has the school provided to you?
- What instructions did they give?
- Did they actually recommend that you collect your child?