BUSHFIRE POLICY - VIC

Bushfires are an inherent part of Australia's environment. Bushfires can significantly impact lives, property and the environment. The basic factors that determine whether a bushfire will occur include the presence of fuel, oxygen and an ignition source. The intensity and speed at which the bushfire will spread depend on the current temperature, fuel load (fallen bark, leaf litter, small branches), fuel moisture (dry fuel will burn quickly, damp or wet fuel may not burn at all), wind speed and slope angle.

Emergency management arrangements for fire safety differ within each state and territory and are determined by the State Emergency Services (SES) or combined emergency service agencies. This policy reflects information related to Education and Care Services located in **Victoria.**

This policy outlines the strategies and procedures the Service will adhere to in the event of a bushfire, including information about Service closure during an emergency evacuation and forms part of our Service's **Emergency Management Plan (EMP).** The EMP records the emergency management arrangements to ensure every reasonable precaution to protect children, staff and visitors from harm and hazard is maintained at all times.

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD (NQS)

QUALITY AREA 2: CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND SAFETY		
2.2	Safety	Each child is protected.
2.2.1	Supervision	At all times, reasonable precautions and adequate supervision ensure children are protected from harm and hazard.
2.2.2	Incident and emergency management	Plans to effectively manage incidents and emergencies are developed in consultation with relevant authorities, practised and implemented.
2.2.3	Child safety and protection	Management, educators and staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities regarding child safety, including the need to identify and respond to every child at risk of abuse or neglect.
QUALITY AREA 7: GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP		
7.1.2	Management systems	Systems are in place to manage risk and enable the effective management and operation of a quality service that is child safe.
7.1.3	Roles and responsibilities	Roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, and understood, and support effective decision-making and operation of the service.

EDUCATION AND CARE SERVICES NATIONAL LAW AND NATIONAL REGULATIONS	
S.2A	Paramount consideration—safety, rights and best interests of children
S.51	Conditions on service approval
S.167	Offence relating to protection of children from harm and hazards
S.174	Offence to fail to notify certain information to Regulatory Authority
S. 216D	Regulatory Authority may close services because of emergency event [VIC]
4	Definitions: "multi-storey building" and "storey"
12	Meaning of serious incident
89	First aid kits
93	Administration of medication
97	Emergency and evacuation procedures
98	Telephone or other communication equipment
168	Education and care services must have policies and procedures
170	Policies and procedures to be followed
175	Prescribed information to be notified to the Regulatory Authority

RELATED POLICIES

Administration of First Aid Policy Emergency and Evacuation Policy Family Communication Policy Health and Safety Policy	Incident, Injury, Trauma and Illness Policy Supervision Policy Work, Health and Safety Policy

PURPOSE

We aim to ensure every reasonable precaution is taken to protect children and staff from harm and hazards likely to cause trauma and injury, including potential injury from bushfires. The potential for extreme fire conditions varies greatly throughout Australia, both in frequency and severity. Each state and territory has varying mandatory regulations for implementing policies and procedures for being safe in areas where bushfires occur. Our Service will adhere to the regulations outlined by the Victorian Early Childhood Regulatory Authority (VECRA) and be familiar with relevant legislation and other special requirements, such as building regulations, traffic restrictions or emergency announcements that may apply to the area where our Service is located.

SCOPE

This policy applies to children, families, staff, educators, management, approved provider, nominated supervisor, students, volunteers and visitors of the Service.

IMPLEMENTATION

It is vital for the Service to be informed and prepared for bushfire conditions and respond appropriately during periods of high fire danger or local bushfire activity. This policy, and related procedure, is to be implemented should a bushfire threaten our Service. During peak bushfire season, the nominated supervisor will monitor fire ratings through relevant authorities on a daily or hourly basis and communicate with all stakeholders as required. We are aware of the Australian Fire Danger Rating System (AFDRS) and have appropriate fire safety equipment installed and maintained at all times. Our Service is committed to ensuring that children's safety, rights and best interests are the paramount consideration in all decisions, actions and practices. Our *Emergency Management Plan* (EMP) ensures all staff are trained to use fire safety equipment and through regular training, understand evacuation procedures in case of an emergency

DEFINITIONS

The Australian climate is frequently hot, dry, and susceptible to drought. The widely varied fire seasons are reflected in the continent's different weather patterns. For most of southern Australia, the danger period is summer and autumn.

A '**bushfire-prone area'** is an area of land that can support a bushfire or is likely to be subject to bushfire attack. Bushfire-prone maps are prepared by local councils and governments within each state and territory. Baseline data for bushfire-prone areas is referred to as Bushfire Attack Level (BAL).

Bushfire At-Risk Register (BARR): a register listing schools, kindergartens and early childhood services within Victoria assessed to be most at risk of bushfire. These are fire risk categories 0, 1, 2, and 3. Those with a lower fire risk (category 4) are listed on the Department of Education's Category 4 list. This register is managed through the Department's emergency management.

The Australian Fire Danger Rating System (AFDRS) describes the potential level of danger should a bushfire start. This rating is standardised across all Australian states and territories. The higher the fire danger rating, the more dangerous the conditions. The AFDRS uses 4 tiers of fire danger from *Moderate (green)* to *Catastrophic (red)*. The AFDRS is maintained and updated by emergency

services in each state or territory.

Emergency Management Plan (EMP): identifies the nature and range of possible emergencies and hazards to which children and staff may be exposed and the response and procedure in the event of an emergency. Effective planning and preparation of the EMP within the workplace ensures optimal response to emergencies should they occur. A risk assessment to identify potential emergencies that impact the Service forms the basis of the EMP.

THE APPROVED PROVIDER/MANAGEMENT/NOMINATED SUPERVISOR WILL:

- ensure that obligations under the Education and Care Services National Law and Education and Care Services National Regulations are met
- ensure all actions prioritise children's safety, wellbeing and best interests as the paramount consideration
- ensure educators, staff, students, visitors and volunteers have knowledge of and adhere to this policy and relevant procedures
- ensure all new employees, students and volunteers are provided with a copy of this policy as part of their induction process
- ensure the *Emergency Management Plan* (EMP) is updated regularly and is inclusive of Emergency and Evacuation policies and procedures
- prepare a separate Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEP) for a member of staff or child who has additional needs.
- consult with relevant authorities for guidance and advice on the management of bushfire risk and emergencies
- establish an Incident Management Team (IMT) to lead the implementation of the Emergency and Evacuation Plan (e.g., Chief Warden, planning officer, communications officer, operations officer) or in smaller services, assign multiple roles for educators/staff
- ensure a back-up communication device is kept in a permanent location and is always available in an emergency. Example: a designated fully charged service-supplied mobile phone
- conduct a risk assessment to identify a potential bushfire risk to the Service
- review the risk assessment at least **every 12 months** and following any incident
- ensure the risk assessment considers
    - prevention measures the Service will take before and during the bushfire period
    - procedures to be taken when there is a bushfire in the local district, including onsite (shelter-in-place) and offsite evacuation procedures

- response measures the Service will take if confronted with a bushfire hazard or emergency
- identified evacuation assembly areas and evacuation routes (it is recommended that the plan contains 2 external (off-site) evacuation assembly areas if practical to do so)
- emergency communication arrangements in case of power outages (e.g., a designated landline, Emergency Positioning Indicator Radio Beacon (EPIRB), satellite phone, or service-supplied mobile phone).
- the use of a battery-operated radio in its shelter-in-place location or emergency kit
- what assistance will be required to evacuate children at the Service, including non-ambulant children and infants, with consideration for multi-storey buildings
- whether the identified evacuation place is safe for children, considering factors such as accessibility, size, shelter and its facilities
- educators' responsibilities in preparing children for evacuation, such as putting on children's shoes and gathering their medication and medical management plans (e.g., for children with medical conditions).
- what to do with sleeping children, babies or children with additional needs during the evacuation
- what mechanisms are in place to ensure the transfer of real-time information, such as weather forecasts, bushfire activity, site closures and emergency operations
- how families will know where to locate their child if evacuated
- procedures to ensure children are only released to persons authorised to collect them
- mechanisms to ensure visitors and contractors are aware of the Service's emergency response procedures
- location of flammable substances/materials (gas storage bottles and fixed tanks) - ensure these are secured and controlled

- determine if the Service is listed on the Bushfire At-Risk Register (BARR) or on the at risk of grassfire register Category 4 list
- ensure current emergency and evacuation floor plans are in prominent positions (i.e., near exits including along evacuation routes) of the Service with clear instructions for what to do in an emergency
- ensure exit signs are displayed above emergency exits, emergency exits are free from debris and obstructions and are easy to open
- ensure emergency rehearsals, including a bushfire rehearsal and shelter-in-place on site are

practised with educators and children **every 3 months** [see *Bushfire Response Procedure*], and keep a record of each rehearsal

- ensure the Service and educators are prepared for bushfire conditions and are prepared to respond quickly and appropriately during high fire danger periods
- cancel any outdoor activities on days where the air quality due to bushfire smoke may cause harm to children [see *Bushfire Response Procedure*]
- ensure all fire safety equipment is installed and maintained regularly- (fire extinguishers, fire panels, smoke detectors, long hoses with nozzles, buckets etc.)
- ensure all fire safety equipment is easily accessible, has clear signage with operating instructions displayed, and is clear of vegetation or debris
- ensure all outdoor taps are in working order
- communicate with staff, educators, and families about bushfire preparation information and provisions
- discuss the *Bushfire Response Procedure* at team meetings and make any amendments as required
- ensure local emergency services have current contact details, including a mobile number for emergency contact after hours
- ensure clear and effective communication procedures during an emergency are rehearsed to test their effectiveness in an emergency
- organise and communicate with off-site evacuation sites about emergency arrangements
- ensure the weather forecast, warnings and alerts, including the Australian Fire Danger Rating System (AFDRS), are checked daily through the Bureau of Meteorology or Country Fire Authority
- provide a backup communication device, such as a battery-operated radio for emergencies
- ensure gutters are cleaned out and free from dry leaves and other debris
- trim trees to 2m from the Service building
- ensure boundaries, outdoor areas and driveways are clear of dry grass, long grass, dead vegetation, thick and continuous shrubs, leaves, dead limbs/trees and other combustible materials
- consult with neighbouring properties or the local council if neighbouring properties pose a fire risk
- ensure driveways are accessible for fire emergency vehicles, clear of overhanging branches and archway structures
- ensure rubbish and recycling bins are secure with closed lids, emptied on regular basis and located away from the Service's shelter-in-place location

- consider the Service's onsite (shelter-in-place) and off-site location ensuring it is accessible and can accommodate all children and staff, with access to toilets and water
- ensure all emergency exits are clear and accessible at all times
- conduct an emergency evacuation kit review every 6 months to ensure emergency contact information and supplies are current
- ensure all records of attendance of children, staff, visitors and volunteers are accurate each morning
- ensure current emergency phone numbers are near the Service phones, and in the contacts of designated service-supplied mobile phones, this includes contacts for the emergency services and the regulatory authority
- monitor the bushfire situation when the rating is *High (yellow)* or above through the internet or radio
- ensure the VicEmergency app is installed on designated service-supplied mobile phones
- be prepared for closures of the Service on days when *Catastrophic (red)* Fire Danger Rating System (AFDRS) is issued in the VIC Fire Area or upon advice from relevant authorities (e.g., VECRA or the Country Fire Authority), and if required, close the Service and remain closed until further advice
- inform families of emergency closures as soon as practicable to ensure the immediate collection of children
- advise families, in the event of a planned closure, as reasonably practicable through SMS/social media/phone calls/email to provide details of the planned closure, including the period of closure
- notify the regulatory authority in the event of any closures or damage to premises within 24 hours or as soon as possible via the NQA ITS or phone if there is no access to the internet
- at a reasonable time after the incident has occurred, consider asking emergency services to review the Service's incident response.

EDUCATORS WILL:

- assist in the development and review of the Service's Emergency Management Plan (EMP)
- examine the Service grounds during their daily indoor and outdoor safety checks to ensure flammable and/or combustible materials (e.g., dead leaves and bark, chemicals) have been removed
- ensure they are familiar with the daily Australian Fire Danger Rating System (AFDRS)
- ensure the emergency evacuation kits are organised and stored in an area that is easily accessible

- become familiar, confident with, and implement the Service's emergency evacuation policies and procedures
- participate in emergency rehearsals, including *Bushfire Response* procedures, at least every 3 months
- become familiar with the Service's emergency exits, routes, and assembly area/s
- eliminate all papers around the Service, including artwork, posters, displays and empty-garbage and recycling bins if advised that bushfires are in the local district
- keep up to date with professional development and training about bushfires, emergency equipment and emergency evacuation procedures
- provide age-appropriate learning experiences that teach children about bushfire safety, fostering safety and emotional support
- be familiar with their role and responsibilities in the event of a bushfire.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT/REFLECTION

Our *Bushfire Policy* will be evaluated and reviewed on an annual basis or earlier if there are changes to legislation, ACECQA guidance or any incident related to our policy. Feedback will be requested from children, families, staff, educators and management, and notification of any change to policies will be made to families within 14 days.

RELATED RESOURCES

Bushfire Response Procedure Emergency Evacuation Kit Checklist Emergency Evacuation Procedure	Emergency Evacuation Record Fire and Safety Equipment Checklist Potential Emergencies Risk Assessment Action Plan

RESOURCES

Australian Government Department of Education – Help in an emergency

Be You resources – Natural disaster response

Country Fire Authority: https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/home

Country Fire Authority Fire Danger Rating updates

Department of Education Victoria. Emergency Management Plan (EMP) Template

Department of Education Victoria. Managing bushfire and grassfire risks in early childhood services

Emerging Minds – Educators' resource pack: Supporting children after bushfires

SOURCES

Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority. (2026). *Guide to the National Quality Framework*
Australian Government: Geoscience Australia. Community safety: *Bushfires*
Community Early Learning Australia. (2020). *Bushfire advice for children's services*
Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010
Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011
Victoria State Government. Emergency management in early childhood services

REVIEW

POLICY REVIEWED BY	[NAME] Amy Flockhart	[POSITION] office admin	[DATE] 18/06/2026
POLICY REVIEWED	JUNE 2026	NEXT REVIEW DATE	JUNE 2027
VERSION NUMBER	V7.06.26		
MODIFICATIONS	• annual policy review • no major updates- spelling of *bushfire* updated throughout policy • edits for clarity and consistency: e.g., some points are now combined; language changed to reflect the Australian Fire Danger Rating System (AFDRS) • additional information re: paramount consideration and service-supplied device • sources updated as required • hyperlinks checked and repaired as required		
PREVIOUS MODIFICATIONS			
JUNE 2025	• annual policy maintenance • sources checked and updated as required		