

# BUSHFIRE POLICY- VIC

Bushfires are an inherent part of Australia’s environment. Bushfires can significantly impact on 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 the bushfire will spread depends 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 or combined emergency service agencies. This policy reflects information related to Out of School Hours Care (OSHC) Services in Victoria.

The National Law requires education and care services to ensure that every reasonable precaution is taken to protect children from any harm or hazard likely to cause injury, including bush fires. Regulations 97 and 168 (2) of the Education and Care Services National Regulations require that every education and care service in Australia, including OSHC Services, has an emergency and evacuation policy and procedure which includes:

- a risk assessment to identify the potential emergencies that are relevant to the service
- instructions for what must be done in the event of an emergency and evacuation procedures
- an emergency and evacuation floor plan, and
- the rehearsal of emergency and evacuation procedures every 3 months.

This policy outlines the strategies and procedures the OSHC Service will adhere to in the event of a bush fire, including information about closures 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	Plans to effectively manage incidents and emergencies are developed in consultation with relevant authorities, practiced and implemented.
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.
-------	--------------------	---

EDUCATION AND CARE SERVICES NATIONAL LAW AND NATIONAL REGULATIONS	
S. 51	Conditions on service approval (safety, health and wellbeing of children)
S. 167	Offence relating to protection of children from harm and hazards
S.174(2)(a)	Serious incident - Any emergency for which emergency services attended
S.174(2)(c)	Any incident that requires the approved provider to close, or reduce the number of children attending the service for a period
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(2)(e)	Policies and procedures are required in relation to: Emergency and evacuation
168	Education and care services must have policies and procedures
170	Policies and procedures are 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 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 have varying mandatory regulations for implementing policies and procedures for being safe in areas where bushfires occur. Our OSHC Service will adhere to the regulations outlined by the Department of Education (Victoria) and other special requirements such as building regulations, traffic restrictions or emergency announcements that may apply to the area our Service is located.

## SCOPE

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

## IMPLEMENTATION

It is vital for the OSHC Service to be informed and prepared for bush fire conditions and respond appropriately during periods of high fire danger or local bush fire activity. This policy and related procedure are to be implemented should a bush fire threaten our Service. During peak bush fire 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 *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 '**Bush fire prone area**' is an area of land that can support a bushfire or is likely to be subject to bushfire attack. Bush fire 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 childcare facilities within Victoria. This register is managed through the Department's emergency and natural disasters area.

**Australian Fire Danger Rating (AFDRS)**: provides an indication of the possible consequences of a fire. This rating is standardised across all Australian states and territories from September 2022. The higher the fire danger rating, the more dangerous the conditions. The AFDRS uses four tiers of fire danger from *Moderate* to *Catastrophic*. The AFDRS are 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 form the basis of the EMP.

### THE APPROVED PROVIDER/MANAGEMENT/NOMINATED SUPERVISOR WILL:

- ensure obligations under the *Education and Care Services National Law and National Regulations* are met
- ensure educators, staff, students, visitors and volunteers have knowledge of and adhere to this policy and procedure
- 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
- a separate [personal emergency evacuation plan](#) (PEEP) is prepared for a member of staff or child who has additional needs (not mandatory, best practice)
- consult with relevant authorities for guidance and advice on the management of bushfire risk and emergencies (including schools if the OSHC is located on school grounds)
- 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: designated fully charged mobile phone
- conduct a risk assessment to identify a potential bush fire risk to the OSHC Service
- review the risk assessment at least every 12 months and following any incident
- ensure the risk assessment considers-
  - prevention measures the OSHC Service will take prior and during the bush fire period
  - procedures to be taken when there is a bush fire in the local district including onsite (shelter-in-place) and offsite evacuation procedures
  - response measures the OSHC Service will take if confronted with a bush fire hazard or emergency
  - identified evacuation assembly areas and evacuation routes (it is recommended that the plan contains two external (off-site) evacuation assembly areas if practical to do so)
  - what assistance will be required to evacuate children at the service (including non-ambulant children and consideration for multi-story buildings)

- emergency communication arrangements in case of power outages- designated landline, Emergency Positioning Indicator Radio Beacon (EPIRB), satellite phone, designated mobile phone
  - the use of a battery-operated radio in its shelter-in-place location or emergency kit
  - when evacuating children, if the weather is hot, do the children need footwear?
  - what mechanisms are in place to ensure the transfer of real-time information, such as weather forecasts, bush fire activity, site closures and emergency operations
  - how parents will know where to locate their child, if evacuated
  - procedures to ensure children are only released to persons authorised to collect them
  - procedures to ensure correspondence is made to feeder schools
  - 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 or on the at risk of grassfire register (category 4) <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/health/Pages/bushfirerisk.aspx>
  - ensure a current emergency and evacuation floor plan of the OSHC Service and instructions for what to do in an emergency are clearly displayed in a prominent position near each exit of the service (Reg: 97(4))
  - ensure exit signs are displayed above emergency exits, emergency exits are free from debris and obstructions and are easy to open
  - ensure emergency drills, including a bush fire drill and shelter-in-place on site are practiced with educators and children every 3 months [see *Bush Fire Response Procedure*]
  - ensure a record is kept of each emergency evacuation drill practiced
  - ensure the OSHC Service and educators are prepared for bush fire conditions and prepared to respond quickly and appropriately during high fire danger periods
  - 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 are clear of vegetation or debris
  - ensure all outdoor taps are in working order
  - communicate with staff, educators, and families about bush fire preparation information and provisions
  - discuss the *Bush Fire Response Procedure* at team meetings and make any amendments as required

- ensure local emergency services have current contact details, including 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 Australian Fire Danger Rating (AFDRS) is checked daily through Australian Government Bureau of Meteorology <http://www.bom.gov.au/?ref=hdr> or Country Fire Authority <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/warnings-restrictions/total-fire-bans-and-ratings>
- provide 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 OSHC Service building (recommended best practice)
- 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 property/landowners or local council if neighboring properties pose a fire risk
- ensure driveways are accessible for fire emergency vehicles, clear of overhanging branches and archway structures
- ensure rubbish and recycle bins are secure, emptied on a regular basis and located away from the services shelter-in-place location
- consider the Service's 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 flammable items are removed from the OSHC Service
- ensure all emergency exits are clear and accessible at all times
- conduct an emergency evacuation kit checklist to ensure emergency contact information and supplies are
- ensure all records of attendance of children, staff, visitors and volunteers is accurate for each session of care
- ensure current emergency phone numbers are near the phone, including emergency services and the regulatory authority *and* in the contacts of designated mobile phones
- monitor the bush fire situation when the rating is above through internet or radio
- ensure the [VicEmergency app](#) is installed on designated Service mobile devices
- upon advice from relevant authorities (Department of Education or Fire Authority) not accept children for care on days when there is a catastrophic danger rating

- cancel any outdoor activities on days where air quality due to bushfire smoke may cause harm to children [see *Bush Fire Response Procedure*]
- be prepared for fire ratings and consequent closure of the service if listed on the BARR or at risk of grassfire (Category 4) in **Victoria**
- 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 email if there is no access to phones
- 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 OSHC 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 (AFDRS)
- ensure the emergency evacuation kit is organised and stored in an area that is easily accessible
- become familiar, confident with and implement the OSHC Service's emergency evacuation policies and procedures
- participate in emergency drills, including *Bush Fire Response* procedures at least every 3 months
- become familiar with the Service's emergency exits
- be aware of the designated assembly area/s
- eliminate all papers around the OSHC Service, including artwork, posters, displays and emptying garbage and recycle bins if advised that bush fires are in the local district
- keep up to date with professional development and training about bush fires, emergency equipment and emergency evacuation
- be familiar with their role and responsibilities in the event of a bush fire.

### CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT/REFLECTION

Our *Bush Fire Policy* will be reviewed on an annual basis in consultation with children, families, staff, educators and management.

## CHILDCARE CENTRE DESKTOP- RELATED RESOURCES

Bush Fire Response Procedure	Fire and Safety Equipment Checklist
Emergency Evacuation Kit Checklist	Potential Emergencies Risk Assessment

## RESOURCES

ACECQA [Managing Emergency Situations in Early Education and Care Services](#)

Australian Government Department of Education – [Help in emergency](#)

[Be You](#) resources- Bushfires and mental health

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

Country Fire Authority Fire Danger Rating updates <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/warnings-restrictions/total-fire-bans-and-ratings>

Department of Education Victoria [Emergency Management Plan 2023-2024 Template](#)

Department of Education Victoria. [Managing bushfire and grass fire risks in early childhood services.](#)

[Emerging Minds](#) Bushfire preparedness for your family

Victorian Government. Early Childhood Services at the highest risk of fire danger are placed on the Department’s [Bushfire At-Risk Register \(BARR\)](#). Inclusion on this register is a trigger for Early Childhood Services to pre-emptively close on days declared **Code Red** in their Bureau of Meteorology district

## SOURCES

Australian Children’s Education & Care Quality Authority. (2014).

Australian Children’s Education & Care Quality Authority. (2023). [Guide to the National Quality Framework.](#)

Australian Government: Geoscience Australia. Community safety: Bushfire:

<http://www.ga.gov.au/scientific-topics/hazards/bushfire>

Community Early Learning Australia. [Bushfire advice for children’s services](#)

Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010. (Amended 2023).

[Education and Care Services National Regulations.](#) (Amended 2023).

National Council for Fire and Emergency Services (afac). 2022. <https://www.afac.com.au>

Revised National Quality Standard. (2018).

Victoria State Government Education and Training. Emergency management requirements:

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/regulation/Pages/emergencymanagementrequirements.aspx>



## REVIEW

POLICY REVIEWED BY	JOSHUA PEACHEY	EDUCATIONAL LEADER	31/7/24
POLICY REVIEWED	AUGUST 2024	NEXT REVIEW DATE	AUGUST 2025
VERSION NUMBER	V5.06.24		
MODIFICATIONS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• annual policy maintenance</li> <li>• additional reference to preparing a personal emergency evacuation plan (PEEP) for staff members or children with additional needs</li> <li>• specific territory information included in resource section</li> <li>• minor editing</li> <li>• sources checked and updated as required</li> <li>• removed Appendix (these are available as separate documents in the CCD library)</li> <li>• added Childcare Centre Desktop Library Resources</li> </ul>		
POLICY REVIEWED	PREVIOUS MODIFICATIONS	NEXT REVIEW DATE	
JUNE 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• annual policy maintenance</li> <li>• hyperlinks checked and repaired as required</li> <li>• minor formatting edits within text</li> <li>• Continuous improvement section added</li> <li>• Appendix 1 additional points</li> </ul>	JUNE 2024	
OCTOBER 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review of policy against recommendations for bushfire/grassfire readiness checklist (Victoria)</li> <li>• Updated Australian Fire Danger Rating System information</li> <li>• Removal of requirement for services to submit their EMP to the regulatory authority</li> </ul>	JUNE 2023	
JUNE 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New Policy Developed for Out of School Hours Services located in Victoria</li> </ul>	JUNE 2023	