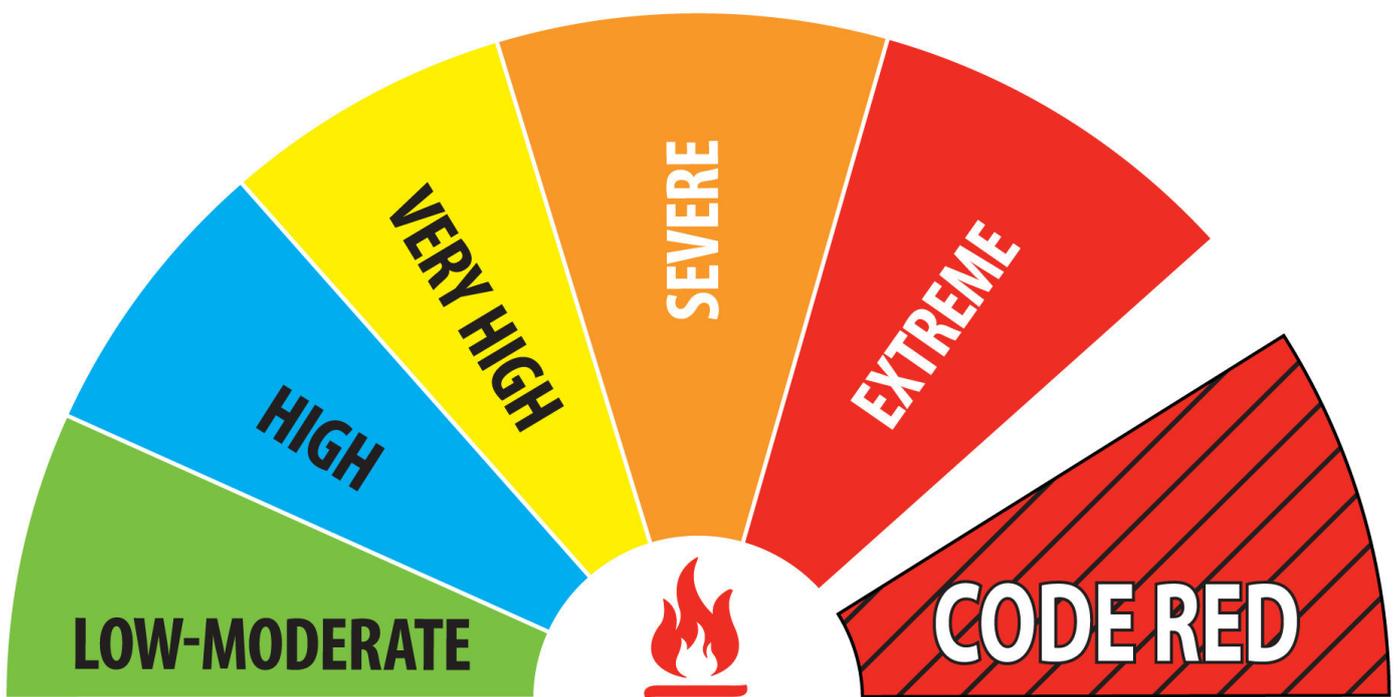


Summer Bushfire Information

cfa.vic.gov.au



FIRE DANGER RATING

In this issue

- Message from Deputy Chief Officer
- Don't get caught out
- 3 month climate outlook
- Know your Fire Danger Ratings
- Warnings and Emergency Information
- Tips to prepare for bad fire weather
- BBQ Safety
- What to do if you are caught in your car
- Emergency Information for the Deaf
- Stay Safe - Grassfires

Deputy Chief Officer – Trevor Owen

2020 has been an extremely challenging year for all Victorians as we have adapted to living with COVID-19. This has been particularly difficult for our East Gippsland communities, many of whom are still recovering from the devastating bushfires during late 2019 and early 2020.

The drought conditions we saw at this time last year have, to some extent, lessened across the region. However, the importance of being prepared for the grass and bushfire season must remain a priority. With warmer than average days and increased rainfall expected this summer, we expect the grass growth will be abundant. This type of weather pattern will lead to increased fuel loads and this will in turn increase the fire risk. With this grass fire risk, any property surrounded by grass land must be prepared.

As COVID-19 restrictions ease, our CFA members are returning to some face to face engagement and will be more visible to you. Additionally, you could contact the Fire Safety Outreach Program for advice on bushfire preparation. This online service is free and can be reached by telephone on 0419 874 484 (during business hours) or via email to firesafetyoutreach@cfa.vic.gov.au.

Leaving early on days of Severe, Extreme and Code Red Fire Danger is always the safest option. This year it is important to review your fire plan to ensure compliance with any current COVID Safe restrictions. This information can be found on the Department of Health and Human Services website - dhhs.vic.gov.au/coronavirus

Please have a safe summer and bushfire season. Remember to always check the local Fire Danger Rating when travelling around Victoria and download the Vic Emergency App to keep up-to-date with current warnings.

"At CFA we put the community at the centre of everything we do; we are the community, serving the community."



Make a plan - stick to it

What we know is if people are well prepared and have planned for fires they have better outcomes. However, there are always exceptions.

Investigations into tragedies during bushfires have taught us that the real danger is where people planned to leave early, but for whatever reason, ended up in a situation where leaving safely wasn't possible.



Investigators have some well-informed theories about why some people don't leave when they planned to do so. One theory is that, as the fire front approached, people who had planned to stay and defend their properties panicked and tried to leave either on foot or by car. Those on foot succumbed to radiant heat as they had no protection in the open. Those in vehicles were often involved in collisions. They simply couldn't see where they were going and crashed into trees or other vehicles. It's hard to imagine road conditions like that, but they are a reality during bad fires.

In other cases, people didn't leave because although they were aware there was a fire in their area, it was headed away from their properties, and they hadn't anticipated a wind change, or the speed at which the fire travelled. The fire front isn't always the danger. Often, embers and spotting ahead of the main fire trap people before they realise the seriousness of the situation.

We often talk about making sure the whole family agrees on your plan. This is because we know there have been instances where partners have disagreed when the pressure to act was on. People who were planning to leave ended up staying because a partner changed their mind, with tragic consequences. Others were planning to leave as a family, when one stayed behind believing they could save their property, despite not being prepared. These last minute decisions, made under high levels of stress, ended up having tragic consequences.

The reality is, none of us knows how we will react when we face different pressures, and when a situation is life and death many of us would be surprised by our behaviour. Stress can be debilitating, and people who can handle a high level of stress in certain circumstances can react differently when stressors change. The point is, you need to consider what might happen before you're in a pressure situation. A common reaction when facing emergencies is for people to do nothing, which is how they are caught in dangerous situations. The problem solving part of our brain does not respond the same way as it does in our day-to-day lives. So don't leave a life-or-death decision to chance. Plan, and put something in place to make sure you enact your plan the way you intended when it's time to take action.

What is this summer forecast?

During summer we now see many more very hot days compared to earlier decades. Statistics provided by the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) confirm last year there were 43 days classified as extremely warm, more than triple the number in any of the years prior to 2000.

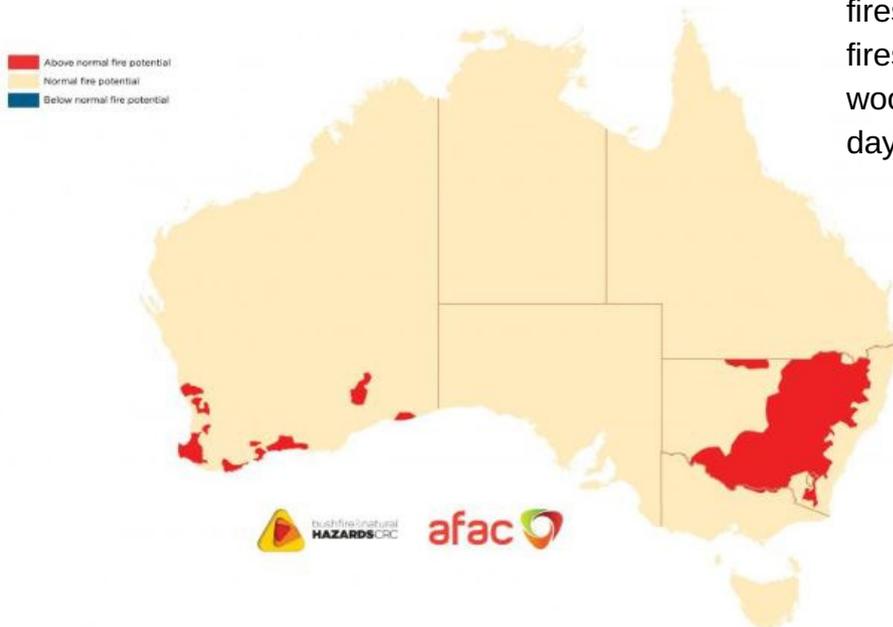
This winter Victoria experienced below average rainfall for most of the state except for East Gippsland, which received above average rain. Spring has resulted in average rainfall for most of the state, with areas of above average rainfall in the west and south west. As a result, the entire state is currently experiencing average to above average soil moisture conditions..

What does this mean for fires?

With the outlook for summer indicating above average rainfall across Victoria due to the influence of La Niña, it is likely this soil moisture will persist in many areas and will lead to normal fire potential across the state, with the exception of the far north east.

With significant grass growth, 2020/21 has potential to be more of a grass fire dominated season. There is some potential for above normal grass fire potential in north east border areas, due to the heavy grass and crop fuels prior to harvest.

Bushfire risk in the eastern parts of the state – particularly in areas that burnt last season – has reduced, thereby reducing the risk of prolonged fires. Elsewhere in the state, shorter-duration fires are still likely to occur in drier forests and woodland/heath fuels on hotter and windier days.



Although drought conditions in Gippsland have eased the underlying dryness remains

Increased rainfall together with warm days will lead to fuel growth in grass and bush land



Stay aware of the Fire Danger Rating and know what to do.

The Fire Danger Rating predicts how a fire would behave if one started, including how difficult it would be to put out. The higher the rating, the more dangerous the conditions. The rating is your trigger to act, so to stay safe you need to stay aware of the Fire Danger Rating in your district. During the Fire season, the Fire Danger Rating will feature in weather forecasts, be broadcast on radio and TV and appear in some newspapers. It can also be found on the of CFA and VicEmergency websites or by calling the VicEmergency Hotline **1800 226 226**

CODE RED

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

These are the worst conditions for a bush or grass fire. Homes are not designed or constructed to withstand fires in these conditions. The safest place to be is away from high risk bushfire areas.

WHAT SHOULD I DO?

Leaving high risk bushfire areas the night before or early in the day is your safest option – do not wait and see. Avoid forested areas, thick bush and long, dry grass. Know your trigger – make a decision about:

- when you will leave
- where you will go
- how you will get there
- when you will return
- what you will do if you cannot leave

EXTREME

Expect extremely hot, dry and windy conditions. If a fire starts and takes hold, it will be uncontrollable, unpredictable and fast moving. Spot fires will start, move quickly and will come from many directions. Homes that are situated and constructed or modified to withstand a bushfire, that are well prepared and actively defended, may provide safety. You must be physically and mentally prepared to defend in these conditions

Consider staying with your property only if you are prepared to the highest level. This means your home needs to be situated and constructed or modified to withstand a bushfire, you are well prepared and you can actively defend your home if a fire starts.

- If you are not prepared to the highest level, leaving high risk bushfire areas early in the day is your safest option.
- Be aware of local conditions and get information by listening to ABC Local Radio, commercial and designated community radio stations or Sky News TV, going to cfa.vic.gov.au, emergency.vic.gov.au or call the VicEmergency Hotline on **1800 226 226**

SEVERE

Expect hot, dry and possibly windy conditions. If a fire starts and takes hold, it may be uncontrollable. Well prepared homes that are actively defended can provide safety. You must be physically and mentally prepared to defend in these conditions.

- Well prepared homes that are actively defended can provide safety – check your bushfire survival plan.
- If you are not prepared, leaving bushfire prone areas early in the day is your safest option.
- Be aware of local conditions and get information by listening to ABC Local Radio, commercial and designated community radio stations or Sky News TV, going to cfa.vic.gov.au, emergency.vic.gov.au or call the VicEmergency Hotline on **1800 226 226**

VERY HIGH

If a fire starts, it can most likely be controlled in these conditions and homes can provide safety.

HIGH

Be aware of how fires can start and minimise the risk.

LOW-MODERATE

Controlled burning off may occur in these conditions if it is safe – check to see if permits apply.

- Check your bushfire survival plan.
- Monitor conditions.
- Action may be needed
- Leave if necessary

What are warnings?

A warning will be issued when any type of emergency could impact you or your property.

Warnings aim to provide you with the best advice and information on what is happening to help you make good decisions to protect yourself and others.

Remember: Do not rely on an official warning to leave. Emergencies can start quickly and threaten you within minutes.

Always use more than one source for your emergency information.

What do warnings mean?



Emergency Warning

You are in imminent danger and need to take action



Warning (Watch and Act)

An emergency is developing nearby. You need to take action now to protect yourself and others



Advice

An incident is occurring or has occurred in the area. Access information and monitor conditions.

How do I find warnings and stay informed?



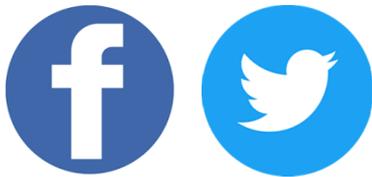
VicEmergency website
emergency.vic.gov.au



VicEmergency app
Apple and Android
mobiles and tablets



VicEmergency Hotline
1800 226 226



Social media
fb.com/vicemergency
@vicemergency

Remember:
Never rely on
one source of
information



Television
Sky News



Radio
ABC Gippsland 100.7FM
Commercial and agreed
Community stations



Emergency Alert
SMS to mobiles
Calls to landlines



Sirens
Continuous tone
for 5 minutes

Leading up to bad days

Staying and defending is not the only way you can prevent your home being impacted by fire. Taking time during the lead-up to hot, dry, windy days can make a big difference even if your plan is to leave early. If you know a bad day is coming, here are some easy things you can do to reduce fuel around your home and increase the chances of it surviving.

- ✓ Remove doormats from around the house
 - ✓ Ensure gas bottles are anchored securely with relief valves pointing away from any flammable materials
 - ✓ Mow lawns fortnightly, for larger properties, a clearing of about 10 metres of well mown grass around your home is advisable
 - ✓ Check your gutters, make sure leaves haven't built up
 - ✓ Make sure you remove any fuels from your windows and doors fortnightly, these are the most vulnerable parts of your home
 - ✓ Make sure trees on your property are healthy with no dead limbs and no vegetation underneath them
 - ✓ Move combustible outdoor furniture and other items from decks, up against, or under the home
 - ✓ Make sure you've cleared away anything flammable and sealed under the house to stop embers
 - ✓ Remove piles of fine fuels such as leaves to prevent embers igniting
 - ✓ Move pot plants a few metres from the home
- Some extra tips to ensure you're ready to go when you planned
- ✓ Recharge your rechargeables
 - ✓ Make sure you have plenty fuel in the vehicles you intend to use
 - ✓ Check your emergency kit, batteries, etc.
 - ✓ Ensure your insurance is sufficient and current
- Did you know that homes have been lost from things as simple as embers landing on the doormat, which created enough fuel to burn down the front door

Summer safety and your barbecue

Wind down and enjoy a barbecue this summer knowing you've taken a few simple safety precautions. Before starting your barbecue check whether fire restrictions apply or if a Total Fire Ban has been declared for the area you are in.

Restrictions in place for the Fire Danger Period and Total Fire Ban days help keep you and your loved ones safe.

Which BBQs are banned on a Total Fire Ban day?

- Solid fuel BBQs (e.g. wood, charcoal and briquettes).
- Liquid fuel BBQs.
- Camp Ovens, pizza ovens or any kettle-type appliances



Campfires, bonfires or any kind of outdoor fires are strictly banned on a day of Total Fire Ban.

Which BBQs are OK?

- Fixed gas or electric BBQs built into a permanent structure of brick, stone or concrete.
- Portable gas or electric BBQs, if they are designed exclusively for meal preparation.

For any kind of gas or electric BBQ, you must have:

- A three-metre area around the BBQ cleared of material.
- A hose connected to a water supply or vessel with at least 10 litres of water.
- An adult present at all times who has the means and capacity to extinguish the fire.

The fire is completely extinguished before you leave.

Can I have a BBQ or light a campfire during the Fire Danger Period?

- YES, but only if:
- The wind is not more than 10 kph.
- The fire is lit in a properly constructed fireplace or in a trench at least 30 centimetres deep.
- A three-metre area around and above the BBQ is clear of flammable material.
- The fire does not occupy an area in excess of one square metre and the size and dimensions of solid fuel used are the minimum necessary for the purpose.
- You are in attendance at all times while the fire is alight and have the capacity and means to extinguish it.
- The fire is completely extinguished before you leave

Gas cylinder safety

Check the LP gas cylinder, hose and connections carefully. Spray the hose and regulator connections with soapy water - if bubbles start forming, you'll know that gas is escaping and it's time to repair or replace your gas bottle or hoses

Staying safe in the car

Driving during a bushfire is extremely dangerous and can result in serious injury or death; always plan to leave early to avoid this situation.

How to protect yourself

Take the following actions if you encounter smoke or flames and are not able to turn around and drive to safety.

- **Position the car to minimise exposure to radiant heat:**
 - Park away from dense bush - try find a clearing.
 - If possible, park behind a barrier such as a wall or rocky outcrop.
 - The car should ideally face towards the oncoming fire front.
 - Park off the roadway and turn hazard lights on.
- **To increase your chances of survival**
 - Stay in the car, and tightly close windows and doors.
 - Cover up with woollen blankets and get down below window level - this is your highest priority
 - Drink water to prevent dehydration.
- **As soon as you become aware that the fire front is close by:**
 - Shut all vents and turn off the air conditioning.
 - Turn the engine off



If you drive in bushfire prone areas, keep woollen blankets in your car

Car crashes are common in bushfires due to poor visibility



WHAT TO DO IN AN
EMERGENCY

CLICK HERE



Every year, bushfires, floods and other extreme weather events affect thousands of Victorians. Emergency services work hard to educate the community about different natural hazard risks, how to decide when to leave safely, and how to understand warning and evacuation systems.

However, most of this information is in written or spoken English. This means that deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing Victorians who cannot rely on spoken English or whose first language is Auslan are often the last to know. The Deaf Emergency Information resource brings important information together in one place, in Auslan and in written English. If you are deaf, deafblind or hard of hearing, this website will help you to:

- Understand the different natural hazards experienced by Victorians every year;
- Learn from the experiences of other people in the community;
- Understand how to watch and act so you can take responsibility for your own safety;
- Learn how to prepare, respond and recover from natural hazard events in your area;
- Understand how emergency services work together.

To find out more about your bushfire risk and what you can do to plan and prepare go to:

<http://deafemergencyinfo.com.au/about-us/>

Grassfire Safety



Grassfires can start anywhere and spread quickly.

On the urban fringe...

If you live next to grassland and a grassfire starts, walk at least two streets back from the fire.

If you live two or three streets away from grassland and a grassfire starts, stay where you are – grassfires are unlikely to spread into built up areas.

Never drive if you can see smoke or fire. Thick smoke will make it hard to see and traffic jams and accidents are likely.

Keep the roads clear for the emergency services.



It's difficult to get us all together right now so the Fire Safety Outreach Program is coming to you! If you want to be Fire Safe all year-round check this out.

The Fire Safety Outreach program is a free service for community members and professionals to access information and fire safety education from trained CFA community education officers.

Our community education officers will get in touch at a time that suits, via whatever communication method works for you.

Find out about:

- Bushfire planning for your household
- Property preparation for bushfire
- Understanding the fire danger ratings
- Where to gain trusted information during emergencies
- Fire restrictions, what you can and cannot do
- Home fire safety information
- Support education sessions for your community groups and clubs



**To register your interest for the program please contact
E: firesafetyoutreach@cfa.vic.gov.au or M: 0419 874 484 (BH)
We will then make contact with you and refer you to one of our
CFA Community Education Officers**

For further fire safety information head to: www.cfa.vic.gov.au/plan-prepare