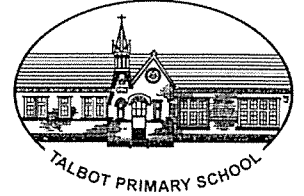


# TALBOT PRIMARY SCHOOL

## BUSHFIRE POLICY



### Purpose

This policy outlines actions schools and early childhood services must take in relation to bushfire and grassfire risk.

### Aims

- All registered schools, as a component of their registration, must comply with the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) Guidelines for Bushfire Preparedness.
- Schools and early childhood services must ensure they understand their bushfire and grassfire hazard exposure, their risk and the actions that they need to take for their emergency management planning, preparedness, ongoing situational awareness and response.
- All schools and early childhood services on the Department's Bushfire At-Risk Register (BARR), and schools and early childhood services listed at risk of grassfire (Category 4), must close on all days declared Code Red for their fire weather district.

**#Note** this change means that schools and early childhood services that have been notified that they are at risk of grassfire (Category 4) must now also close on a determined Code Red day.

- All bus routes which travel through fire districts declared Code Red will be cancelled.
- All BARR schools need to understand their risk categorisation and how this determines whether they are also required to relocate or close on a Severe or Extreme Fire Danger Rating day in their Local Government Area.
- In the event of exposure to an immediate bushfire or grassfire threat, all school principals and approved providers/facility managers (or their delegates) have the authority to enact their Emergency Management Plan.
- The Department and the Country Fire Authority have collaborated to provide guidance to schools and early childhood services on the Bushfire-at-Risk Register on preparing for the risk of bushfire and grassfire, refer to the Guidance tab.

### Implementation

#### Bushfire and grassfire risk management

The Department's Bushfire and Grassfire Preparedness policy is formed by expert advice from the emergency sector, including the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO).

Schools and early childhood services around Victoria are at varying risk from bushfire and grassfire:

- Every school and facility should consider if they are located near bushland or grassland, placing it at increased risk of bushfires or grassfires. Information and resources are available from the Country Fire Authority.
- All registered schools, as a component of their registration, must comply with the VRQA's Guidelines for Bushfire Preparedness (VRQA Guidelines).

- In addition, the Department maintains a register of the schools and early childhood services most at risk of bushfire — the Bushfire At-Risk Register (BARR). The Department also maintains a list of schools most at risk of grassfire.
- Schools on the BARR have additional preparedness requirements under the VRQA Guidelines.

In the event of exposure to an immediate bushfire or grassfire threat, all school principals or facility managers (or their delegates) have the authority to enact the school or facility's EMP.

### Schools and early childhood services at risk of grassfire

The Department maintains a list of schools and early childhood services most at risk of grassfire, refer to Schools and early childhood services at risk of grassfire (Category 4).

This list is reviewed annually.

Schools and early childhood services on this list must close on days that are determined to be Code Red for their fire weather district and cancel their bus routes

All schools and early childhood services located near grassland must record their grassfire response procedures in their EMP, and Government schools are to utilise the online EMP portal to do this. Refer to Emergency and Critical Incident Management Planning.

### Schools and early childhood services on the Bushfire at-Risk Register (BARR)

The Department maintains a register of the schools and early childhood services most at risk of bushfire — the BARR.

As a consequence of listing on the BARR, the school and early childhood service:

- is categorised based on its bushfire risk
- must meet requirements for bushfire preparedness in the VRQA Guidelines
- may be required, based on its BARR category, to relocate or close on Severe or Extreme Fire Danger Rating (FDR) days
- must close on Code Red days declared for their fire weather district and cancel their bus routes
- receives bushfire-specific compliance advice for their Shelter-in-Place building

### Risk assessment and categorisation of schools and early childhood services on the BARR

The Department has applied an evidence-based methodology for identifying which schools and early childhood services will be on the BARR and how BARR schools' risk will be categorised.

When determining which schools and early childhood services should be on the BARR, the Department, based on advice from the CSIRO, considers:

- the site's Bushfire Prone Area designation
- the Bushfire Management Overlay
- the Victorian Fire Risk Register
- the site's terrain, fuel and vegetation type.

Schools and early childhood services listed on the BARR are rated according to their level of bushfire risk, as either Category 1, 2 or 3, with Category 1 having the highest bushfire risk profile.

The BARR is reviewed annually with advice from CSIRO. Schools with queries about whether they should be listed on this register should email [emergency.management@education.vic.gov.au](mailto:emergency.management@education.vic.gov.au)

#### Bushfire preparedness for schools at bushfire risk

Schools and early childhood services located near bushland must record their bushfire response procedures in their EMP, and Government schools must use an online EMP portal to do this. Refer to Emergency and Critical Incident Management Planning.

The VRQA Guidelines include specific requirements in relation to infrastructure and site maintenance, emergency management planning, information sharing and training that BARR schools must comply with as a condition of their registration.

Note: Early childhood services are separately regulated by the Department's Quality Assessment and Regulation Division (QARD). Emergency management requirements for early childhood services are available at Emergency Management Requirements — Early Childhood Professionals.

#### Arrangements for schools at highest bushfire risk

Schools on the BARR categorised at highest risk (Category 1 and Category 2) will have pre-planned approved relocation arrangements in place ahead of summer. These arrangements will be enacted under severe and/or extreme fire weather forecast conditions for their Local Government Area (LGA) — refer to Fire Danger Information for High Risk Schools, a fact sheet on accessing localised forecast fire danger information.

Ahead of the fire danger period, these schools must:

- engage/involve their school community in bushfire preparedness planning
- identify a host location
- develop a Bushfire Preparedness Relocation Plan for approval from their Regional Director – refer to Appendix A of the Bushfire Preparedness Relocation and Closure Procedures for a template plan

If relocation is not a feasible option, identified highest risk BARR schools will be approved by their Regional Director to close.

Arrangements for highest risk schools will be as follows:

- **Category 1** schools — will relocate or close in accordance with their pre-approved plan on a day of forecast **Severe** and **Extreme** FDR for their LGA.
- **Category 2** schools — will relocate or close in accordance with their pre-approved plan on a day of forecast **Extreme** FDR for their LGA.

Before every relocation, the relocating schools must:

- notify the Regional Director
- notify staff, parents and carers, outside school hours care and other site users, e.g. contractors
- complete the School Relocation Principal Checklist and forward to the Regional Director — refer to Appendix D Bushfire Preparedness Relocation and Closure Procedures for the checklist

- make alternate arrangements for camps and excursions that are due to depart or arrive at the school on the day of the relocation

Schools on the BARR, regardless of categorisation, may still apply to their Regional Director, on a case-by-case basis to have alternate arrangements for their school due to elevated fire danger forecast. These schools, in the first instance, should discuss their plans with their regional Manager, Operations and Emergency Management.

### Code Red days

Schools and early childhood services on the BARR and at risk of grassfire (Category 4), regardless of risk category, must close on a determined Code Red day in their weather district, and their buses cancelled. All other buses which travel through the Code Red area will also be closed.

Determined by the Emergency Management Commissioner, a Code Red day is the highest level of Fire Danger Rating and signifies the worst conditions for bushfire and grassfires. Once a Code Red day has been determined this decision will not change, regardless of any changes in the weather forecast.

In some circumstances the Department may be advised of the potential for Code Red conditions to be present.

The Region, wherever possible, will:

- provide schools and early childhood services with four to seven days' notice of a possible or planned Code Red day closure to enable to schools to forewarn their school and parent/carer community
- confirm the final decision to close a school by 1 pm the day before the planned Code Red day closure

Ahead of the fire danger period, schools and early childhood services on the BARR and at risk of grassfire must:

- advise their school and parent/carer community and all site users of the arrangements for the summer that the school or early childhood facility will be closed on any determined Code Red day and nobody is to be on site that day
- complete the activities outlined in the Bushfire/Grassfire Readiness Review Checklist
- notify bus travellers and parents/carers that no school bus services will operate to or from a school closed on a determined Code Red day

Before every Code Red day closure, schools and early childhood services on the BARR and at risk of grassfire must:

- notify staff, parents/carers and all other site users e.g. contractors, outside school hours care, extracurricular activities and programs that the school or early childhood facility will close and nobody is to be on site that day. Schools may consider using the template letters and newsletter content, for this purpose, see the Resources tab
- check proposed camp and excursion venues located in forecast Code Red districts and update the Student Activity Locator with cancellations or changes
- notify bus travellers, parents, bus operators and client schools of potential and confirmed cancellation of bus routes

Schools are advised to download the VicEmergency app to maintain situational awareness, including any determination of Code Red conditions.

All school and early childhood facility closures and bus service cancellations are published on the Department website — refer to Closures and Bus Service Cancellations.

Note: Schools and early childhood services not on the BARR or the list of schools and services that are at risk of grassfire will remain open, unless directly threatened by fire or another emergency.

### Shelter-In-Place building

All schools (regardless of their BARR status) must nominate a building or buildings on the school site that can provide temporary accommodation until emergency services arrive and/or as a building of last resort if there is insufficient time to evacuate. The school must identify the Shelter-In-Place in their EMP.

For further details refer to Shelter-in-Place Buildings.

### Planned burning

Planned burning is conducted throughout the state to reduce the risk to communities from future bushfires. For more information about the location and timing of planned burns for the next ten days, you may contact the Victorian Bushfire Information Line on 1800 240 667 or visit the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning.

### Related policies

- Buildings and Grounds Maintenance
- Emergency and Critical Incident Management Planning
- Excursions
- Leave — Bushfire, Flood or Other Severe Weather Event
- Shelter-in-Place Buildings

*This policy was last ratified by School Council in....*

2021

*Principal's signature:* *Hrista Barnes*

*School Council President's signature:* *b*

*Date:* *18<sup>th</sup> March, 2021*