

Your Guide to Survival

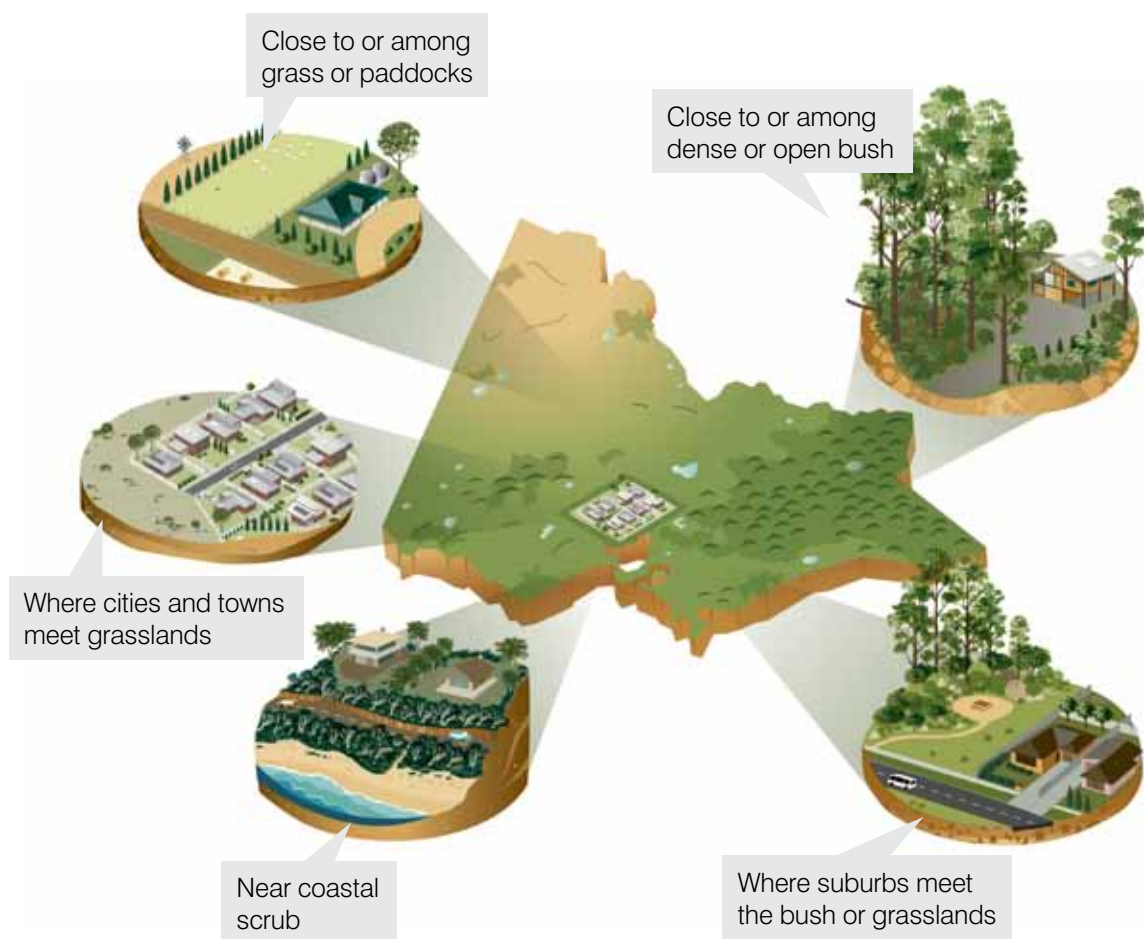


Am I at risk of fire?

You don't have to live in the country to be at risk.

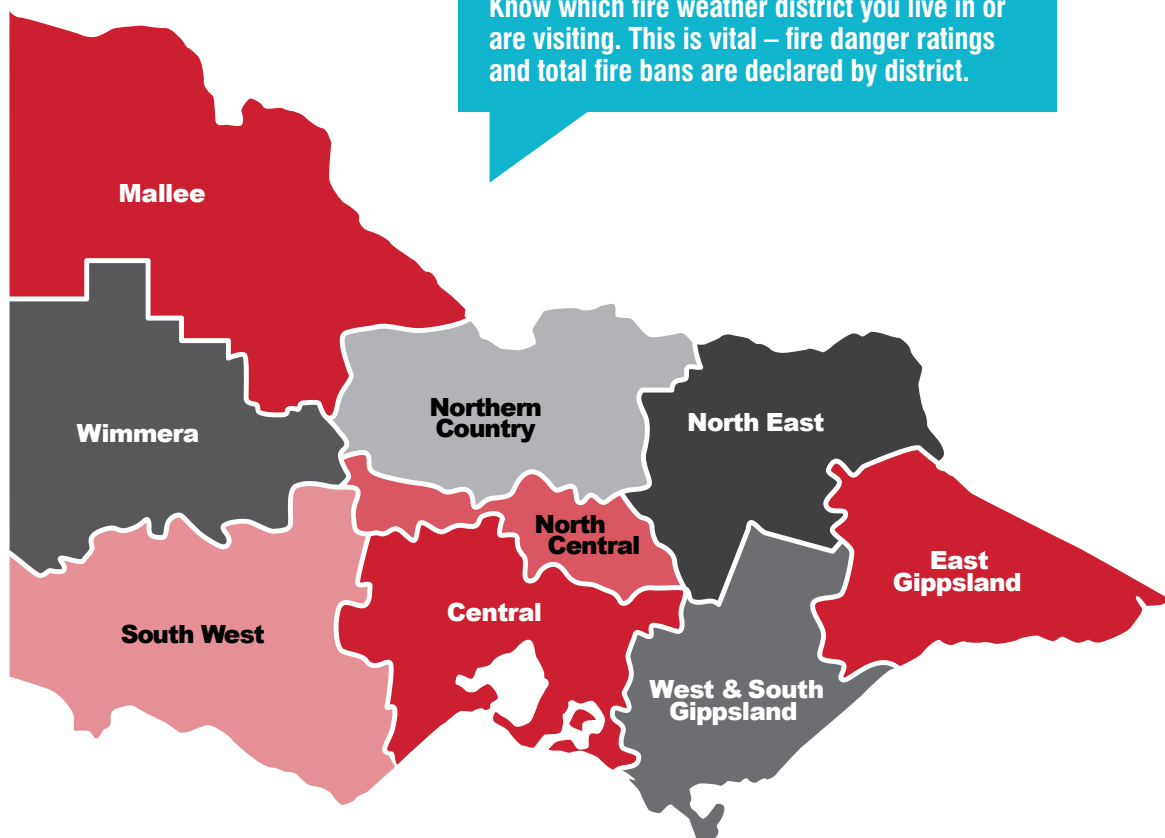
Fires can occur where the suburbs meet the bush or in urban areas where houses have grass, bushland or parkland around them.

Fires occur in all these areas:

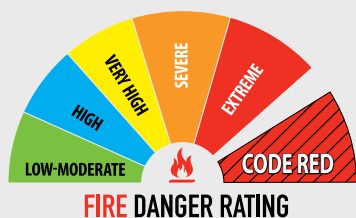


How bad is the risk today?

Know which fire weather district you live in or are visiting. This is vital – fire danger ratings and total fire bans are declared by district.



KNOW YOUR DAILY FIRE DANGER RATING



Fire Danger Ratings (FDR)

tell you how dangerous a fire would be if one started – the higher the rating, the more dangerous the conditions.

KNOW YOUR RESTRICTIONS



Total Fire Bans

tell you what you can and can't do and what activities are banned on certain days during high fire risk months.

Can I or can't I?

There are legal restrictions in place during the **Fire Danger Period** and on **Total Fire Ban Days**. The **Can I or Can't I?** brochure (pictured below) details what you can or can't do when fires in the open air are restricted. Go to cfa.vic.gov.au/can to view this important brochure.



Can I or can't I?
Updated August 2018

To report a fire DIAL 000

This guide gives you general information about what you can and can't do during declared Fire Danger Periods and on days of Total Fire Ban, when fires in the open air are legally restricted. CFA declares Fire Danger Periods by municipalities in the country area of Victoria during periods of increased fire risk. Refer to the CFA website cfa.vic.gov.au for further details about your location. In state forests, national parks and on protected public land, fire restrictions are in force all year round. See the back page for more information about the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning's DELWP role. Also, always check with your municipality as some have restrictions in place all year round.

Total Fire Bans are declared by CFA on days when there are likely to spread rapidly and be difficult to control. The penalties for lighting fires illegally during the Fire Danger Period and on Total Fire Ban Days include large fines and possible imprisonment.



Can I have a BBQ, light a camp fire or light a fire for warmth or comfort?

During Fire Danger Period
No, unless:

- The fire is in a trench or less than 10 metres from the outer perimeter of the fire and the appropriate point of the fire is at least 30 metres deep
- The fire does not occupy an area in excess of 1 square metre and the size and dimensions of such fuel used are the minimum necessary for the purpose
- A person is at all times within the fire to light, light and has the capacity and means to extinguish the fire
- The fire is completely extinguished before the permit expires

On Total Fire Ban Days
All camp fires, fires for warmth or comfort or fires for lighting are prohibited during Total Fire Ban Days. Fires and light fires are also prohibited during Total Fire Ban Days.

No, unless:

- The barbecue uses only gas or electricity and is a permanently fixed structure of stone, brick, concrete or another non-flammable material designed and constructed for the purpose, or is designed and constructed for the purpose of being used for the purpose (including portable barbecues), and when light is placed in a safe position
- The area within a distance of 3 metres from the outer perimeter of the barbecue is clear of flammable material
- You have either a hose connected to a water supply or a container with at least 10 litres of water for immediate use
- As well as there at all times when a fire is lighted when the fire is lighted and means to extinguish the fire
- The fire is completely extinguished before the permit expires



Can I use self-propelled farm machinery, tractors, slashers, earth-moving, excavating or road-making machines propelled by a heat engine?

During Fire Danger Period
No, unless:

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- The fire does not occupy an area in excess of 1 square metre and the size and dimensions of such fuel used are the minimum necessary for the purpose
- A person is at all times within the fire to light, light and has the capacity and means to extinguish the fire
- The fire is completely extinguished before the permit expires

On Total Fire Ban Days
No, unless you have a written permit issued by CFA, MFB or DELWP and you comply with the conditions of that permit.

As a community organisation, a charitable organisation or an organisation involved in fundraising for a purpose, a person or organisation may apply for a permit to light a fire for the purpose of fundraising or other purposes in the course of that business. These permits are issued by, and are the property of, the CFA district office, CFA headquarters, MFB district offices, or the Chief Fire Officer or CEO of the Fire Department.

Managing Fire Prevention Officers cannot issue these permits.



Can I use a chainsaw, plant or grass trimmer or lawn mower?

During Fire Danger Period
No, unless:

- The fire is in a trench or less than 10 metres from the outer perimeter of the fire and the appropriate point of the fire is at least 30 metres deep
- The fire does not occupy an area in excess of 1 square metre and the size and dimensions of such fuel used are the minimum necessary for the purpose
- A person is at all times within the fire to light, light and has the capacity and means to extinguish the fire
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Burning off

Once fire restrictions come into force for your shire or council (known as the **Fire Danger Period***), you cannot light a fire in the open air unless you have a permit or comply with certain restrictions.

You can apply for a permit by contacting your local shire or council. You must also notify Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority – or ESTA – of your burn off by calling 1800 668 511.

You will need to tell them:

- › the location
- › the date
- › expected start and finish times
- › what you intend to burn
- › the estimated size of the burn off.

You need a permit to burn off during the Fire Danger Period.

* The Fire Danger Period begins in the lead up to summer and is declared by CFA for each shire or council. Go to cfa.vic.gov.au or your local shire or council for up-to-date information.

Big decisions

At the very least, here are ten things you should discuss and decide with your family before summer even starts.

10 important decisions to make with your family

- ☐ Which Fire Danger Rating is your trigger to leave?
- ☐ Will you leave early that morning or the night before?
- ☐ Where will you go?
- ☐ What route will you take and what is your back up route if a fire is already in the area?
- ☐ What will you take with you?
- ☐ What are you going to do with your pets or livestock?
- ☐ Who else do you need to talk to about where you are going?
- ☐ Is there anyone outside your neighbourhood that you need to help or check up on?
- ☐ How will you stay informed about warnings and updates?
- ☐ What will you do if there is a fire in the area and you cannot leave?

Leaving early – what does it mean?

‘Leaving early’ means being away from high risk areas before there are any signs of fire. It does not mean waiting for a warning or a siren. It does not mean waiting to see or smell smoke. And it certainly does not mean waiting for a knock on the door.

Fires can start and spread very quickly. Leaving early is the safest option for anyone in a high risk bushfire area. Many people have died trying to leave at the last minute.

If you care for children, older people or those with a disability you must leave early.

When you decide to leave is the most important decision you will make.

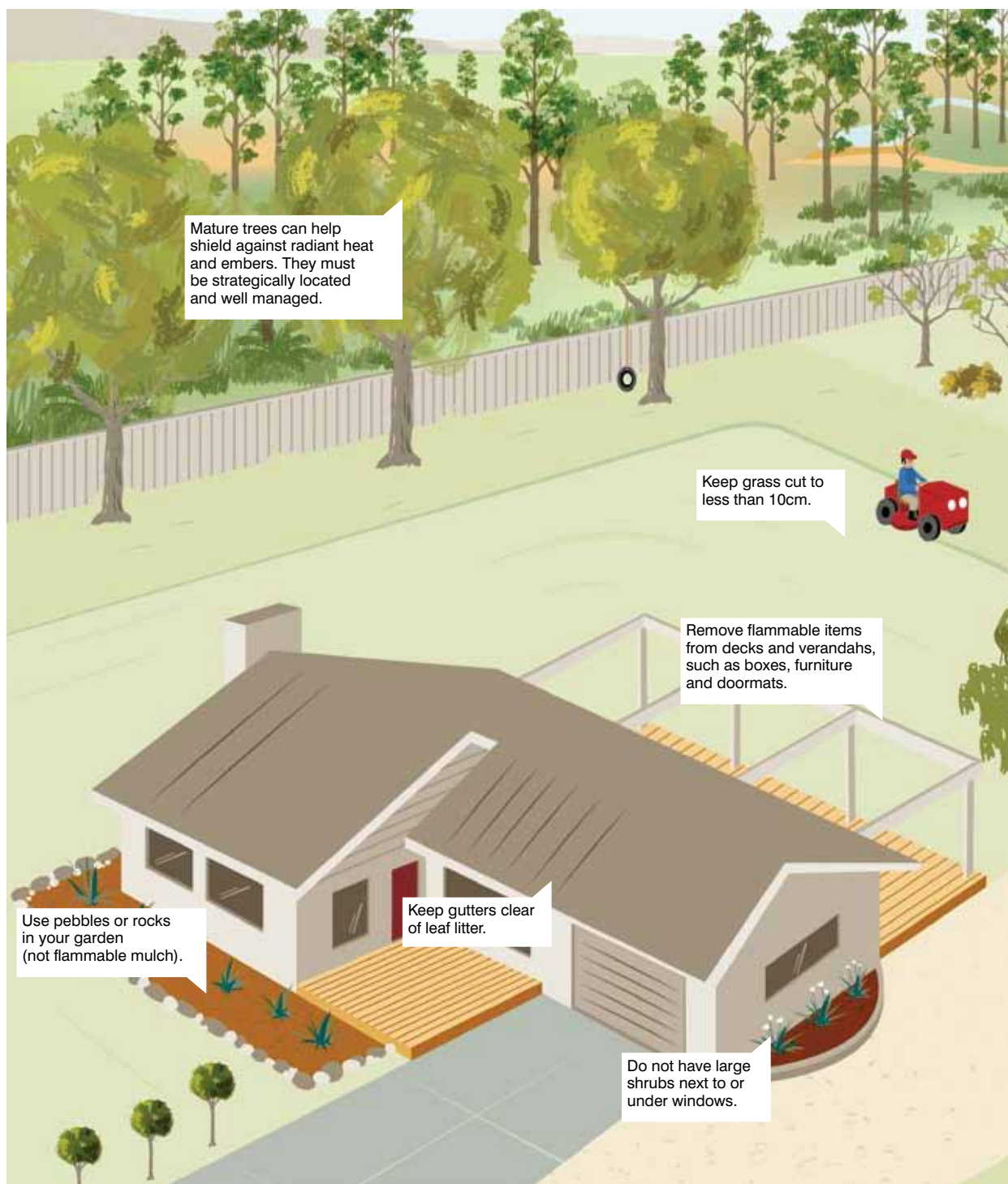
Driving in a bushfire is extremely dangerous and can be fatal. A drive that would normally take five minutes could take two hours with road closures, traffic jams, crashes, smoke, fallen trees and embers getting in the way.

Plan ahead so you know how you will leave. Know different routes to get out of the area – some may be closed if a fire is already burning nearby.

It's up to you to decide where you will go on a fire risk day. Don't wait and see.



Well-prepared property



Mature trees can help shield against radiant heat and embers. They must be strategically located and well managed.

Keep grass cut to less than 10cm.

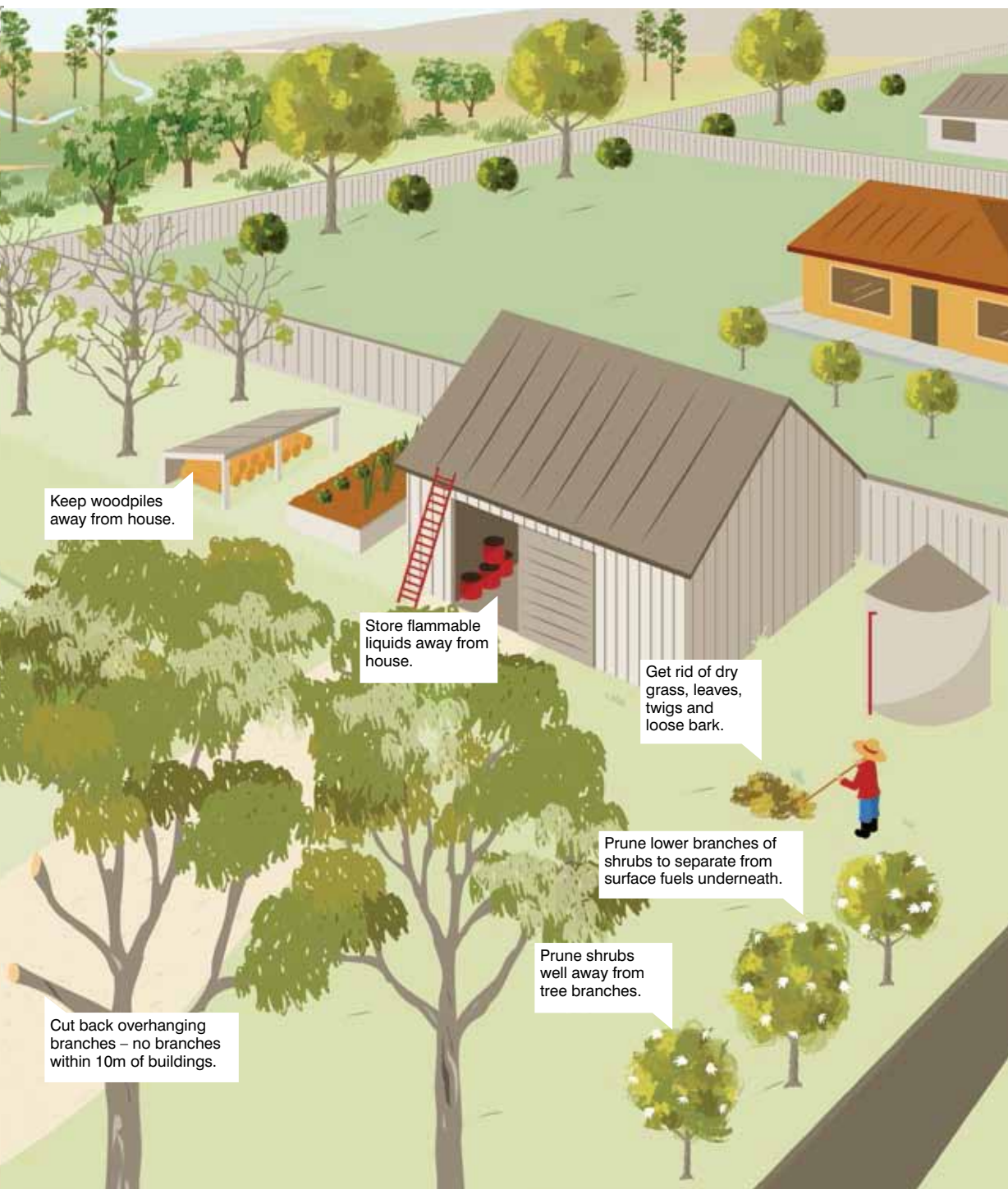
Remove flammable items from decks and verandahs, such as boxes, furniture and doormats.

Use pebbles or rocks in your garden (not flammable mulch).

Keep gutters clear of leaf litter.

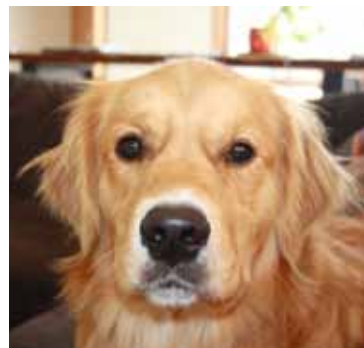
Do not have large shrubs next to or under windows.

You can reduce the impact of fire on your home by preparing your property before summer.



Before summer

- ☐ Pack an Emergency Kit with essential items and keep it in a handy place.
- ☐ Scan important documents and photos onto a memory stick.
- ☐ Buy a battery-operated radio, powerful torch and extra batteries.
- ☐ Save important contact numbers in your mobile phone. Include family, friends and the VicEmergency Hotline. Have a spare mobile phone that you keep fully charged for emergencies. Download the VicEmergency app if you have a smartphone.
- ☐ Set aside protective clothing (long-sleeved, made from natural material such as cotton, and sturdy footwear such as leather boots) for each member of the family.
- ☐ Put woollen blankets in your car for protection in case you get caught on the road.
- ☐ Practise packing your car so you know how long it will take.
- ☐ Mark your main routes, including back up routes and petrol stations on hard copy maps. Check **cfa.vic.gov.au** to see if your town or suburb has a Community Information Guide map.
- ☐ Make arrangements with anyone you plan to visit or stay with when you leave early.
- ☐ Talk to neighbours or nearby friends about ways you can help each other.
- ☐ Don't forget pets. Make sure pet containers are in your Emergency Kit or packed in the car. If you have horses, make sure you can move them somewhere else if they won't be safe on your property.



Remember to prepare for your pets as well. Make sure your pet is wearing an identification tag and add the following items to your Emergency Kit:

- › suitable transport carriers or leash
- › any medications
- › dietary supplements
- › food and drinking water
- › a familiar item (toy, bed, treats) to help reduce stress.

Your Emergency Kit

Important items

- › photo ID
- › passport
- › photos
- › will
- › jewellery
- › insurance papers
- › medical prescriptions
- › USB stick containing important files

Medicines and first-aid kit

Mobile phone and charger

Battery-powered radio, torch and spare batteries

Overnight bag with change of clothes, toiletries and sanitary supplies

Adequate amount of water and food

Woollen blankets

Contact information

- › doctor
- › council
- › power company



On fire risk days

- ☐ Stay updated by using more than one source of information so you will know if a fire has started near you.
- ☐ Move livestock to a safe area and put your pets in a safe place ready for loading in the car.
- ☐ Pack personal items such as a change of clothing for each person and toys for children and pets and put them in the car.
- ☐ If your car is behind an electric garage door or gate, take it out and position it in the driveway facing out or on the side of the road.
- ☐ Remove any materials that could burn easily from around your house, on decks, verandahs and pergola areas. This includes mats, outdoor furniture and wood piles.

Last things to do before you leave:

- ☐ Add final items to your Emergency Kit such as medications, prescriptions, mobile phone chargers, pet food and water for everyone.
- ☐ Pack the car, remembering your most important items such as wallet, cards, keys, banking, medical and insurance documents (these should be easily accessible on a USB stick or in an expanding file).
- ☐ Turn off the gas supply.
- ☐ Block the downpipes and partially fill the gutters with water, only if you have time.
- ☐ Make sure everyone is wearing or has access to protective clothing – long pants, long-sleeved shirts and sturdy shoes such as leather boots (not sandals or runners). Clothes should be loose fitting and made from natural fibres like pure wool, heavy cotton drill or denim. Do not wear synthetics.
- ☐ Tell people you are leaving.
- ☐ Close all doors and windows and lock doors.
- ☐ Leave the front or access gate open.

Don't wait and see.

You should never wait and see what happens during a bushfire.

Leaving late means you will be on the road when conditions are at their most dangerous or you may not be able to get out at all.

The longer you wait to leave, the greater the risk to your life.

Staying informed

During summer, it's up to you to stay informed.

Make it your habit to:

- › check your FDR every day during summer
- › know if it is a TFB day
- › check for warnings, especially on hot, dry windy days.

WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

FIRE DANGER RATINGS tell you how dangerous a fire would be if one started.



TOTAL FIRE BANS tell you what you can or can't do on days where fire will spread rapidly and be out of control.



WARNINGS tell you that a fire has already started.



Check the VicEmergency app for up-to-date Fire Danger Rating and Total Fire Ban information, as well as information, warnings and the locations of current fires. Download the app free for Apple and Android devices.

WARNINGS AND UPDATES

Levels of warnings

There are three different levels of warnings – Advice, Watch and Act and Emergency Warning. Don't expect warnings to be issued in any particular order. The first warning you hear about could even be an Emergency Warning.

ADVICE General information to keep you up to date with developments.



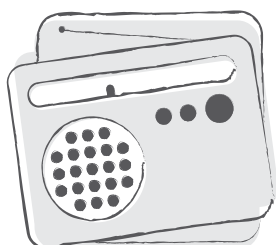
WATCH AND ACT An emergency threatens you. Conditions are changing and you need to start taking action now to protect your health, life and your family.



EMERGENCY WARNING You are in imminent danger and need to take action immediately. You will be impacted by the emergency.

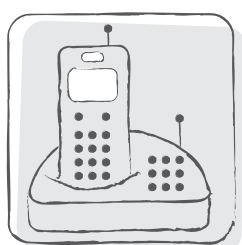


Where to find warnings and updates



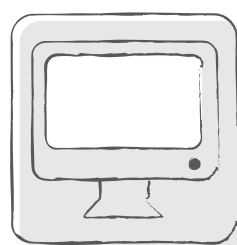
Local News

Listen to ABC Local Radio, commercial and designated community radio stations and watch Sky News TV.



1800 226 226

The VicEmergency Hotline is a freecall.



Online

VicEmergency website:
emergency.vic.gov.au



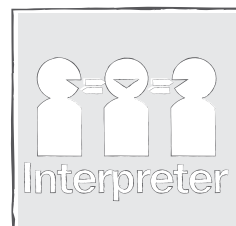
Social Media

Twitter **@CFA_Updates** and
[facebook.com/cfavic](https://www.facebook.com/cfavic)



1800 555 677

Callers who are deaf, hard of hearing, or have a speech/communication impairment can contact VicEmergency Hotline via the National Relay Service.



131 450

If you do not speak English, call the Translating and Interpreting Service for translated information.

IN SOME CIRCUMSTANCES



You may receive an SMS to your mobile phone.



You may receive a call to your landline phone.

Know your local emergency broadcaster

These include:

- › ABC local radio
- › SKY NEWS TV
- › UGFM – Radio Murrindindi
- › Stereo 974
- › Plenty Valley FM
- › Radio Eastern FM 98.1
- › Radio KLFM
- › Various commercial stations across Victoria.

You can find a complete list at emv.vic.gov.au

Emergency Alert is a system used by emergency services to send voice messages to landlines and text messages to mobile phones about emergencies. For more information, go to emergencyalert.gov.au

When to look for warnings

There are different situations when you might need to monitor and check for fire warnings and updates.

WHEN	WHAT TO DO
It's a hot, dry, windy day	During summer, check regularly for updates. Fires can start suddenly at any time.
It's a fire risk day. You have left early, or are preparing to do so.	Ensure the route you have planned is safe. Stay up to date about fires in your area. Know when it is safe to return.
I can see or smell smoke in the air and I want to check what is going on.	Check the VicEmergency website or the VicEmergency app to see if there are signs of a fire in your area.
I'm staying to defend on a fire risk day.	It is important that you know at the earliest possible stage if a fire is in your area so that you can implement your plan. Once you are aware of a fire, continue to monitor updates.

Do not rely on an official warning to leave. Bushfires can start quickly and threaten homes and lives within minutes. If you receive a warning, you must take it seriously. Failure to act can be fatal.

Keep an eye on conditions outside – you may be aware of a fire before the emergency services.

If you see flames or a column of smoke, always call 000 immediately.

During a fire

Bushfires are scary and stressful. Understanding what to expect and having a plan about what you will do can help you cope.

What to expect

- › Embers and spot fires moving ahead of the main fire
- › Smoke, heat, noise and darkness
- › Lack of visibility, making it hard to know where the fire is. Travel will be dangerous
- › Fires approaching from any direction (or two directions at once)
- › Burning embers landing around your property for many hours before or after the main fire front has passed
- › Roads blocked by fallen branches, powerlines and emergency vehicles.

How you might feel

- › Confused
- › Disorientated (don't know where you are)
- › Unable to breathe properly
- › Scared
- › Thirsty and hungry
- › Tired.

Expect disruptions to services

Disruptions to telephone service, internet and mains power and water are common during a fire or on a fire risk day.

Don't rely on having mains power and water. If the power goes out, you will not be able to use:

- › Cordless phones
- › Remote control garage doors, electric gates or similar devices
- › Computer and the internet
- › Air conditioners and coolers
- › Electric pumps.

The best way to prepare yourself mentally is to have a written and practised plan that everyone in your household understands and has agreed to. This helps reduce confusion and time wasting. Your plan must include contingencies in the event your plan fails.

Radiant heat

Radiant heat is the intense heat that radiates from a bushfire. It is like the heat you feel from a campfire, but can be up to 50,000 times stronger. Radiant heat can cause surfaces to catch alight, crack or break windows.

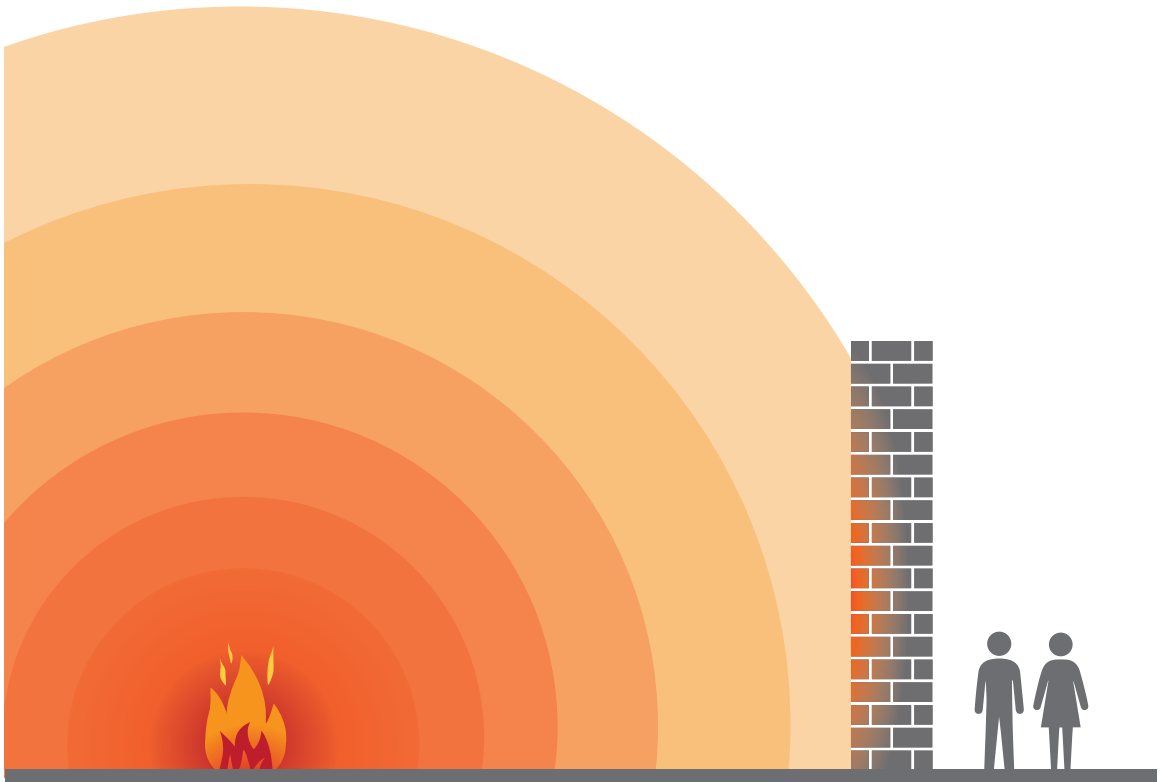
Radiant heat is the biggest killer in a fire. The human body simply cannot absorb large amounts of radiant heat.

Radiant heat can be blocked by a solid object such as a concrete wall or building.

If you are caught outside in a fire try to protect yourself by:

- › Covering up exposed skin
- › Being as far away as you can – distance is the best protection from radiant heat.
- › Getting behind a solid object
- › Staying away from windows as radiant heat can pass through glass.

The only sure way to survive a bushfire and avoid radiant heat is to leave early and be away from the threat.



Embers

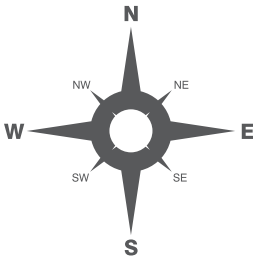
- › Embers are burning twigs, leaves and pieces of debris.
- › Embers are carried by the wind and land ahead or away from the main fire in unburnt areas and can start new fires – these are called spot fires.
- › Ember attack occurs when twigs and leaves are carried by the wind and land on or around a building.
- › Embers can land on top of debris in your gutters and set fire to your house.
- › Ember attack is the most common way houses catch fire during bushfires.
- › Ember attack can happen before, during and after the bushfire.



Wind

Wind has a significant influence on the:

- › Speed that a fire spreads
- › Direction that a fire travels and the size of the fire front
- › Intensity of a fire, by providing more oxygen
- › Likelihood of spotting. Burning pieces of leaves, twigs and bark (embers) are carried ahead of the fire by winds, causing new fires to start. These are known as spot fires.



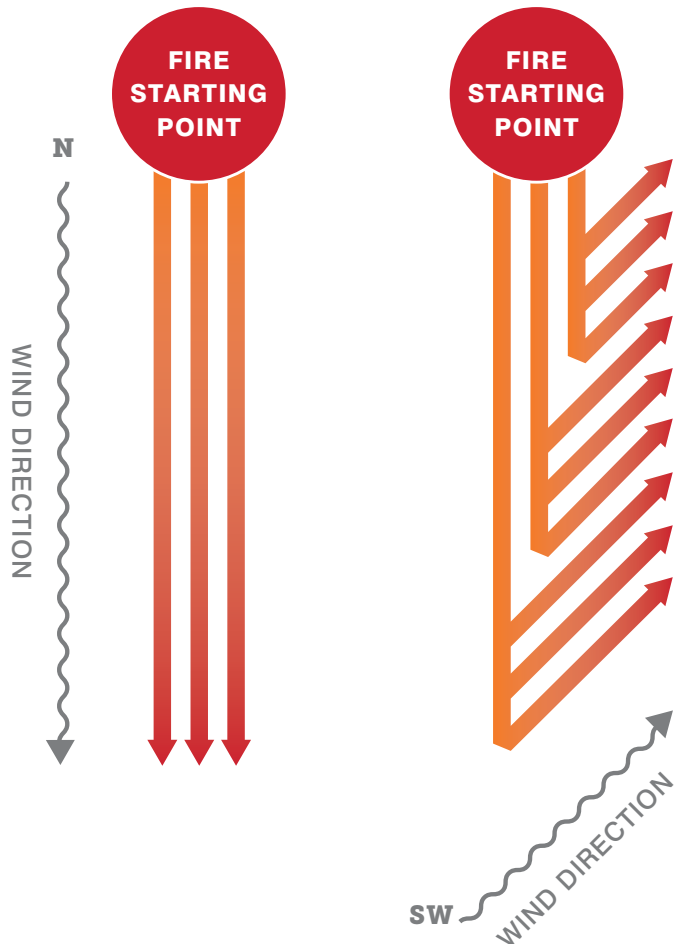
Wind change

A change in wind direction is one of the most dangerous influences on how a fire behaves.

Many people who die in bushfires get caught during or after the wind change.

In Victoria, hot, dry winds typically come from the north and north-west and are often followed by a south-west wind change.

A change in wind direction can change the size of the fire front. This makes wind a very dangerous factor in a bushfire.



Survival options

If caught in a building

If sheltering in a building during a bushfire, make sure you have two points of exit – including one direct exit to the outside of the house – in every room used as a shelter. Most bathrooms are unsuitable to shelter in. They typically have only one door which can make escape impossible if that exit is blocked by flames and heat.

Most bathrooms also have frosted windows that do not let you see outside – during a bushfire it is important that you can look outside and know what is happening. You and others with you in the building must be wearing protective clothing, long pants, long-sleeved shirts and sturdy shoes such as leather boots (not sandals or runners). Clothes should be loose fitting and made from natural fibres like pure wool, heavy cotton drill or denim.

If your house catches fire while you are inside, you will need to act quickly. Breaking glass, flames inside or trouble breathing are signs you need to act quickly.

- › Close the door to the room that is on fire.
- › Keep down low to minimise breathing in toxic smoke from the house fire.

- › Move away from the areas of house on fire, closing all the doors behind you.
- › Do not get trapped in a room with only one exit.
- › Move outside to burnt ground where the fire has already passed as soon as you can. Staying inside a burning house will almost certainly end in death
- › Wherever possible, try to put a solid object between you and the radiant heat from the fire.
- › Drink water to prevent dehydration.

If you are caught in a car

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

1) Position the car to minimise exposure to radiant heat:

- › Park away from dense bush and long grass – try to 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. Car crashes are common in bushfires due to not being able to see the road clearly.

Only shelter in a room that has a direct exit to the outside of the house. If your house is on fire, you will need to leave the house and move outside to burnt ground if possible.

2) 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 – you need to protect yourself from radiant heat which will pass through glass.
- › Drink water to prevent dehydration.

3) As soon as you become aware that the fire front is close by:

- › Shut all vents and turn off the air conditioning.
- › Turn off the engine.

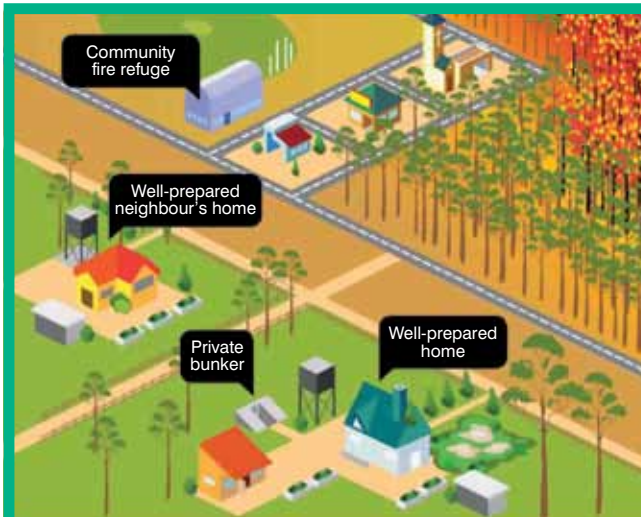
Sheltering in a car is extremely dangerous and can result in serious injury or death. Always plan to leave early to avoid this situation.



Leave Early

- › When the Fire Danger Rating is **Code Red**, leaving early is always the safest option.
- › Leave early destinations could include homes of family and friends who live outside the risk area, a nearby town or other built-up area.

Always the safest option



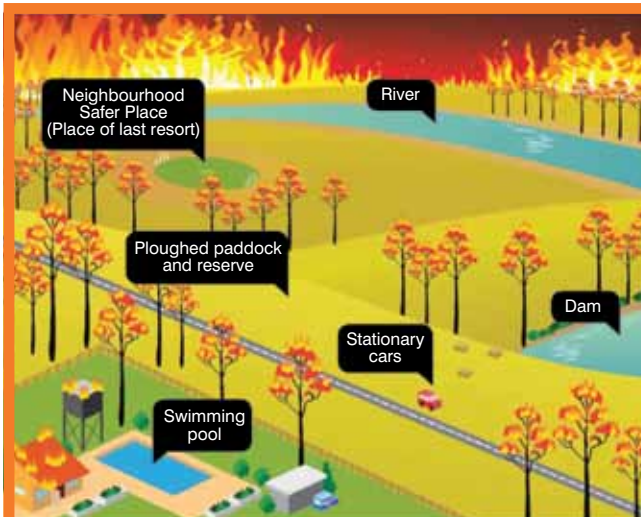
Well Prepared

If leaving the high risk area is no longer an option, there may be options close to where you are that could protect you.

These include:

- › a well-prepared home (yours or your neighbour's) that you can actively defend on **Severe** and **Extreme** Fire Danger Rating days only
- › private bushfire shelter (bunker) that meets current regulations
- › designated community fire refuge.

Your safety is not guaranteed



Last Resort

In situations where no other options are available, taking shelter in one of the below may protect you from radiant heat:

- › Neighbourhood Safer Place (Place of Last Resort)
- › stationary car in a clear area
- › ploughed paddock or reserve
- › body of water (i.e. beach, swimming pool, dam, river etc).

High risk of trauma, injury or death.

Dial: 000 If you see smoke, flame or embers

VicEmergency Hotline

for fire warnings and updates: 1800 226 226

Translating and Interpreting Service: 131 450

National Relay Service: 1800 555 677

cfa.vic.gov.au

delwp.vic.gov.au

emergency.vic.gov.au