

TOP TIPS FOR REDUCING RISK

If you live in a bushfire zone, the risk of a bushfire can never be completely removed. However, the risks can be reduced if you prepare properly for when a bushfire threatens.

DISASTER WORDS

Embers burning particles that 'shower' down from a fire

Evacuate leave a dangerous area

Reducing risk around the home

When preparing your home for the bushfire season, follow the guidelines on page 25 to reduce the threat from the fire and **embers**. Make your house 'fire ready' even if you are planning to **evacuate**, in case you are unable to evacuate.

Preparing an emergency plan

Your bushfire plan outlines what each person in your family will do if a bushfire threatens your community. You need to know:

- where everyone will meet up if a fire threatens
- who to contact (and how) if the family gets separated
- the location of your family's bushfire emergency kit
- what job everyone will do if a bushfire draws near your home and you cannot evacuate.

Bushfire emergency kit

Keep a bushfire emergency kit somewhere easily accessible. It should contain the things you will need if a bushfire strikes, including:

- wind-up radio and wind-up torch
- fresh water and canned food to last several days
 - cutlery, plates and can-opener
 - protective clothing
- essential documents and valuables
 - first-aid kit.

Bushfire myths

Believing some of these myths about bushfires could cost you your life.

- 1 *The most dangerous part of a bushfire is the flames.*

False! The most dangerous part of a bushfire is actually the heat that travels in front of the fire. If you are unprotected, it can kill you instantly.

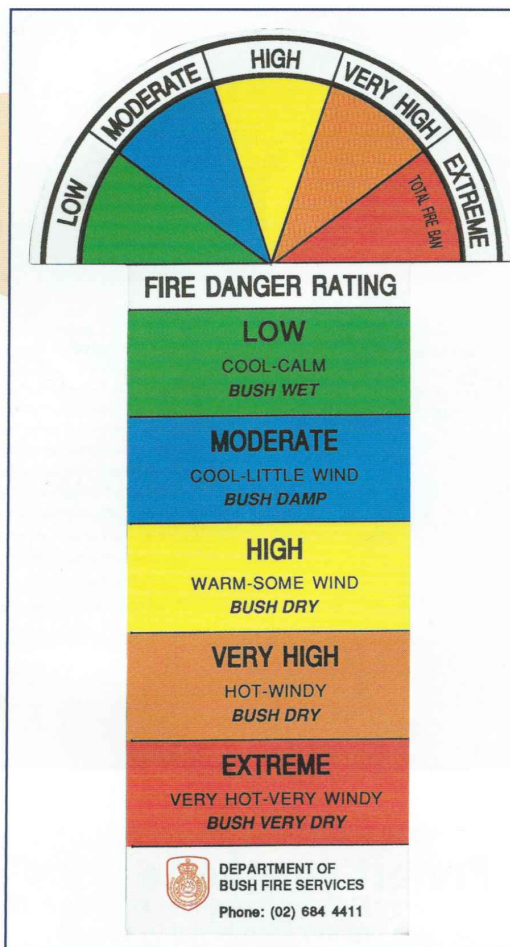
- 2 *If you are in a car, you can outrun a bushfire.*

False! Bushfires move incredibly quickly. Getting away in a car can be difficult because fallen trees can block roads and smoke can make it difficult to see.

- 3 *Only people who live in the bush are at risk during bushfires.*

False! People who live in towns, on the coast, close to grass or paddocks, and on the outskirts of cities can also be affected by bushfires. Everyone needs to be aware of fire danger and have a fire action plan.





The plants that evolved in Australia became **fire resistant**. Plants such as the eucalypt and the banksia (which relies on fire to open its seed pods) thrived, while other species died out.

When European settlers came to Australia 200 years ago, the Aboriginal practice of burning died out. This had a dramatic impact on the ferocity of fires when they did occur. Fire needs fuel. As well as the living trees, fires thrive on

Weather conditions and the amount of **moisture** in the bush are taken into account in rating the fire danger.

dead leaves, branches and logs that gather on the ground.

When the Aborigines were regularly burning the bush, this supply of fuel was kept in check. Once the practice of regular burning stopped, the fuel built up over much longer periods. As a result, when fires eventually came, they were far more severe than in the past.

The explosive gum tree

Australia's most common type of tree, the gum tree, is very **flammable**. Oddly, this makes it more fire resistant. The leaves have a high oil content, which means that when a fire passes, they quickly burst into flame. In addition, the leaves are thin and hang straight down, encouraging flames to travel quickly upwards. Gum trees seem to explode, often with a huge fireball billowing out of the top.

How does this help protect the tree? Gum trees are so flammable that as soon as one catches alight, the neighbouring trees also burst into flame. Before any great damage is done,



Controlling bushfires

To control a fire, one of the three ingredients (oxygen, fuel or heat) must be removed. Oxygen can be removed by **smothering** the flames. Small fires can be smothered with sand or blankets. Water can smother larger fires, although it is often difficult to get enough water to the site of a large bushfire. Water is also used to remove heat and to make the fuel less flammable.

Dry firefighting

The most common firefighting method in Australia is known as dry firefighting, and involves the removal of fuel from the path of the fire. This is done either by making firebreaks with bulldozers or by back burning. Back burning is the lighting of a controlled fire ahead of a **fire front**, which removes the fuel needed by the bushfire.

A constant danger in controlling a bushfire is '**spotting**', which occurs when burning twigs and cinders are carried ahead of the fire front by strong winds, starting new fires as far as five kilometres away.

Surviving a bushfire

If a bushfire is approaching:

- stay calm and go inside the house
- wear clothes that cover your body, arms and legs
- fill buckets and basins with water; wet towels and blankets
- close all windows and doors; block up any gaps
- stay in the room farthest from the approaching fire; the air near the floor will be the coolest and least smoky; cover yourself with wet blankets if necessary.

Safety

Fighting fires is extremely dangerous. Firefighters use protective equipment to help minimise the danger of death or injury. They wear heavy leather boots, hard hats, goggles and thick cotton overalls treated with a special fire resistant chemical called **probane**. A radio network allows the controller at the main base to warn fire trucks of approaching fire fronts, while a smaller radio at the fire scene allows the senior firefighter to keep in contact with the pump operator at the truck.

WHAT YOU CAN DO IF A BUSHFIRE HAPPENS

When a bushfire starts near your area, the first decision to make is whether or not to evacuate. If your family decides (or is forced) to stay, there are plenty of things you can do together to fight the fire and defend your home.

DISASTER WORDS

evacuate leave a dangerous area

Evacuation

Sometimes, the authorities advise people to evacuate to a safer place. People may also make their own decision to leave, without being told. It is important to:

- Make the decision early. Many people who die in bushfires are caught during last-minute evacuations.
- Remember that official advice is based on expert opinions of how the fire will behave.
- Try always to use evacuation routes that you have been told will be safe.
- Listen to updates before and during evacuation.

These cars are evacuating from a bushfire area. With the fire so close and smoke all around, it would have been safer to evacuate sooner.