

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:

Close to or among grass or paddocks



Close to or among dense or open bush



Where cities and towns meet grasslands



Near coastal scrub

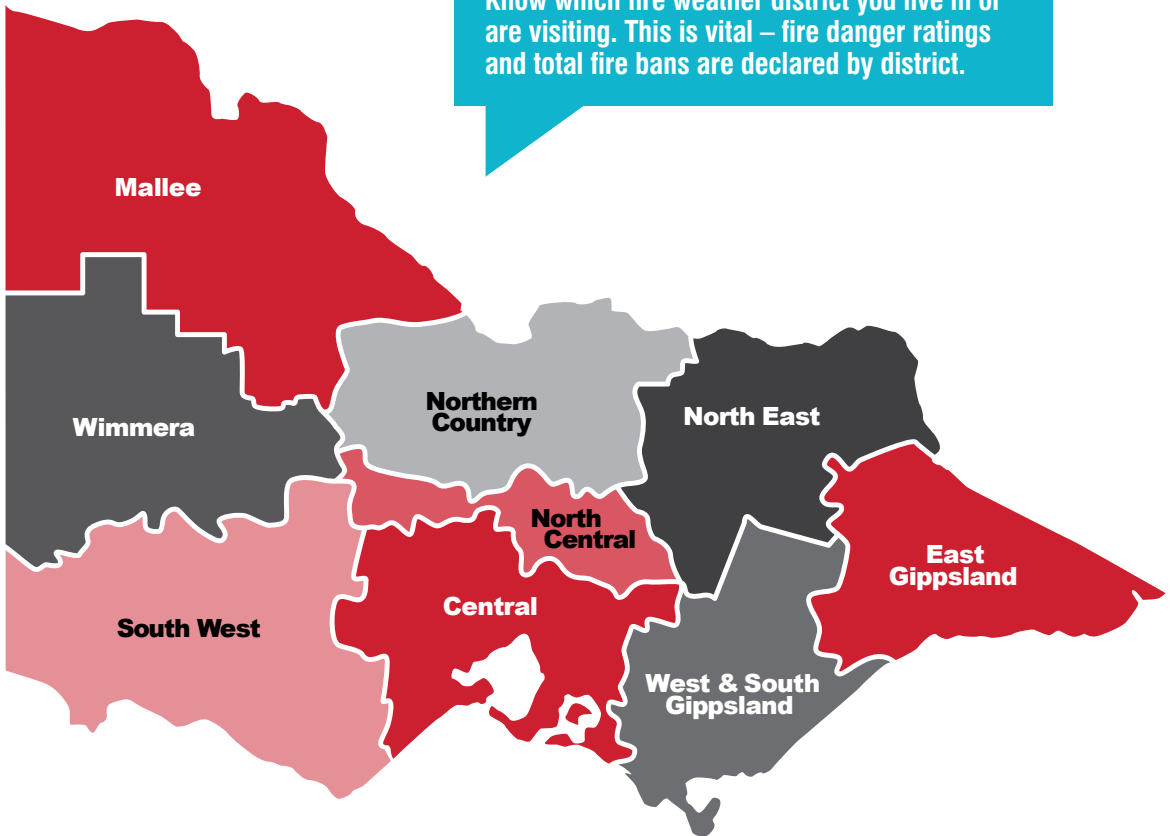


Where suburbs meet the bush or grasslands

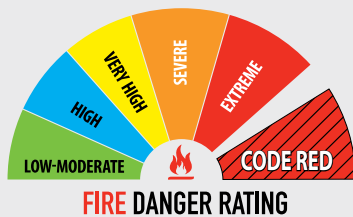


How bad is the risk today?

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. Refer to the FDR table on page 4.

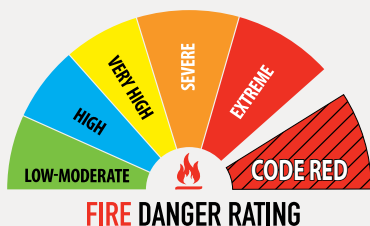
KNOW YOUR RESTRICTIONS



Total Fire Bans (TFB) tell you what you can and can't do and what activities are banned on certain days during high fire risk months. For more information visit cfa.vic.gov.au/can



KNOW YOUR DAILY FIRE DANGER RATING



The Fire Danger Rating predicts fire behaviour (should a fire start) and how dangerous it would be to put out. The higher the rating, the more dangerous the conditions. Fire Danger Ratings feature in weather forecasts during the fire season.

To check your district's daily Fire Danger Rating, visit cfa.vic.gov.au or call **1800 226 226**.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN?	WHAT SHOULD I DO?
<p>CODE RED</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > These are the worst conditions for a bush or grassfire. > Homes are not designed or constructed to withstand fires in these conditions. > The safest place to be is away from high-risk bushfire areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > 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 or long, dry grass. > Know your trigger – make a decision about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 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.
<p>EXTREME</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > 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 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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > 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. Seek information by listening to ABC local radio, commercial and designated community radio stations, or watch Sky News TV, visit emergency.vic.gov.au, call the VicEmergency Hotline on 1800 226 226 or via National Relay Service on 1800 555 677.
<p>SEVERE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > 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. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > 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. Seek information by listening to ABC local radio, commercial and designated community radio stations, or watch Sky News TV, visit emergency.vic.gov.au, call the VicEmergency Hotline on 1800 226 226 or via National Relay Service on 1800 555 677.
<p>VERY HIGH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > If a fire starts, it can most likely be controlled in these conditions and homes can provide safety. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Check your Bushfire Survival Plan. > Monitor conditions.
<p>HIGH</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Be aware of how fires can start and minimise the risk. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Action may be needed.
<p>LOW-MODERATE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Controlled burning off may occur in these conditions if it is safe – check to see if permits or conditions apply. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> > Leave if necessary.

Big decisions

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.

10 important decisions to make with your family before summer

- Which Fire Danger Rating is your trigger to leave?
- Will you leave early that morning or the night before?
- Where will you go? What will you take with you?
- What route will you take and what is your back up route if a fire is already in the area?
- What are you going to do with your pets or livestock?
- Who else do you need to talk to about where you are going?
- What will you do if all members of your household are not home?
- 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?
- What will you do if your household is not together when your trigger is reached?

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.

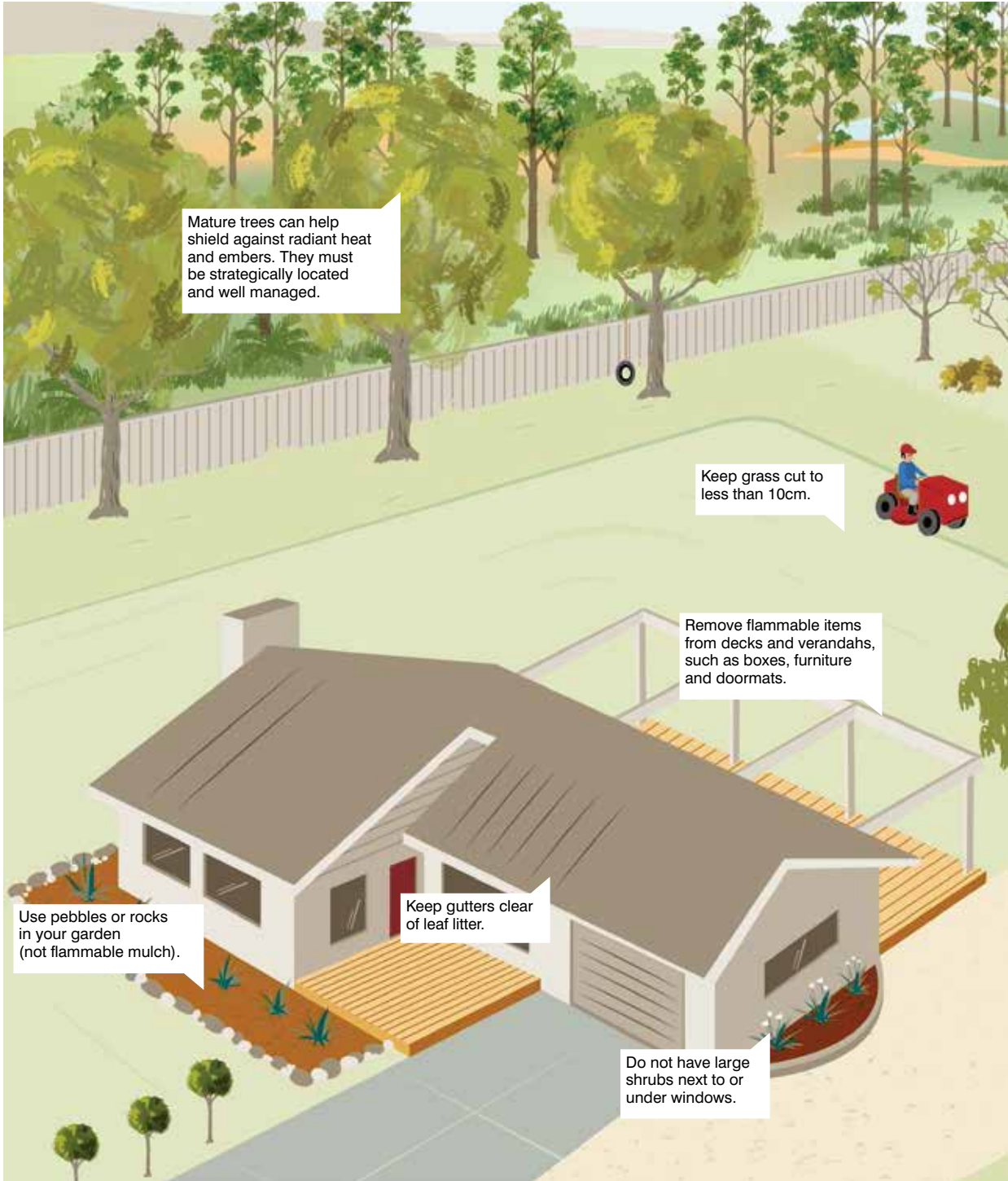
It's up to you to decide where you will go on a fire risk day. Don't wait and see.

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.



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.

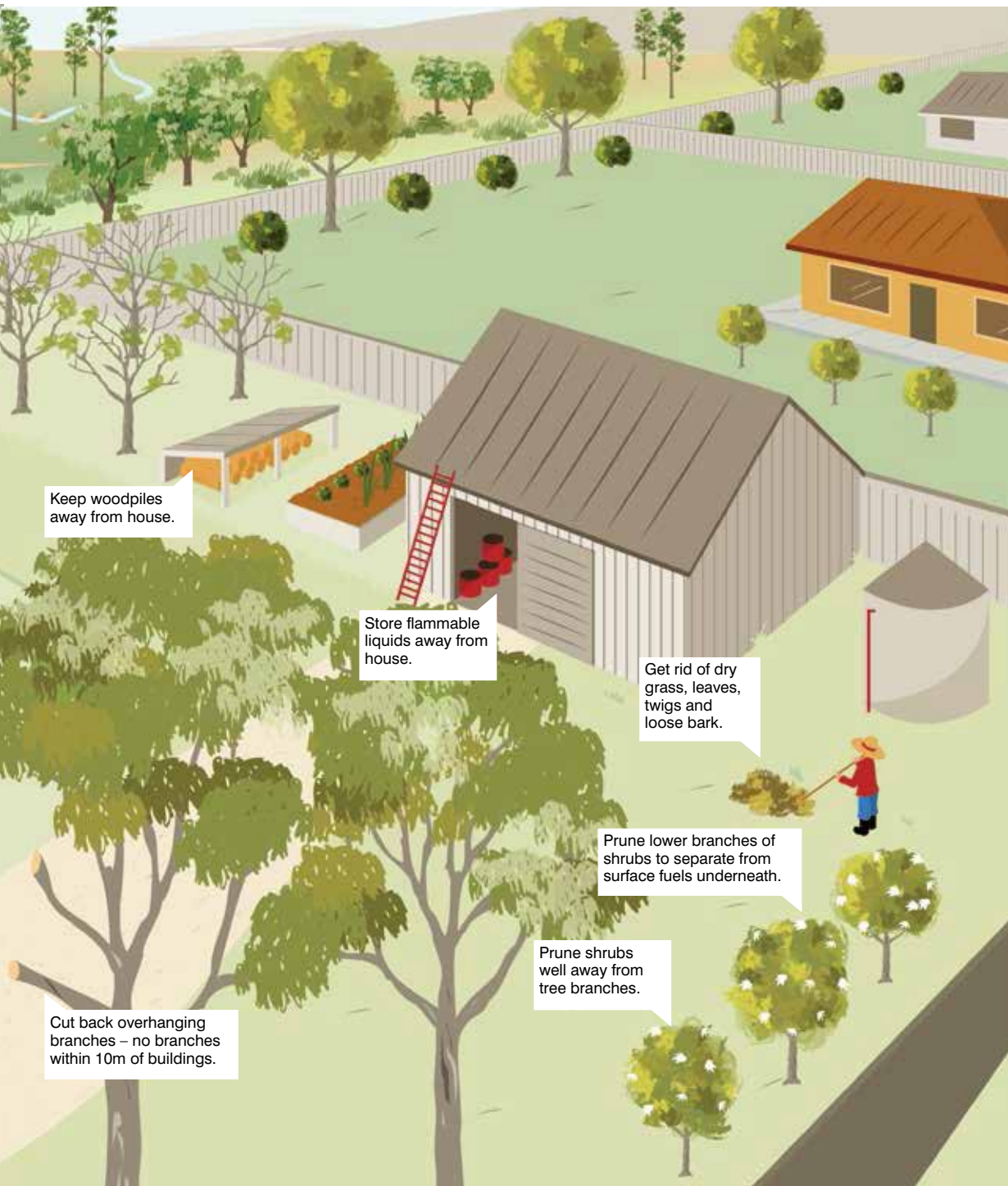
Remove flammable items from decks and verandahs, such as boxes, furniture and doormats.

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.



Keep woodpiles away from house.

Store flammable liquids away from house.

Get rid of dry grass, leaves, twigs and loose bark.

Prune lower branches of shrubs to separate from surface fuels underneath.

Prune shrubs well away from tree branches.

Cut back overhanging branches – no branches within 10m of buildings.

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.
- Save important contact numbers in your mobile phone. Include family, friends and the VicEmergency Hotline. Keep a fully charged portable charger handy 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.
- Buy a battery-operated radio, powerful torch and extra batteries.
- Put pure wool 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 and store in your glove box.
- 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.
- Follow the tips on pages 6 and 7 to prepare 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 with standard and portable charger

Battery-powered radio, torch and spare batteries

Overnight bag with change of clothes, toiletries and sanitary supplies

Adequate amount of water and food

Pure wool 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 and items such as outdoor furniture.
- Re-check your trigger to leave and stick to it.

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 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 or elasticised fabrics.
- 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 Fire Danger Rating 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.



WARNINGS tell you that a fire has already started.

TOTAL FIRE BANS restrict the use of fire and activities that produce heat on days when fire will spread rapidly and be out of control.



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 and set up your watch zone. 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 – plus a recommendation to evacuate. Don't expect warnings to be issued in any particular order. The first warning you hear about could even be an Emergency Warning if a fire starts close to you.

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.



Emergency Alert is a system used to send messages to landline phones and mobiles.
emergencyalert.gov.au

You may also see an **EVACUATION** symbol. This means that an evacuation is recommended or procedures are in place to evacuate.



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.

Create your Watch Zone

Creating a watch zone on your VicEmergency app allows you to be notified of incidents and warnings in a particular area of your choice. You can create up to 20 watch zones.



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.

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 trees, 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, 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.

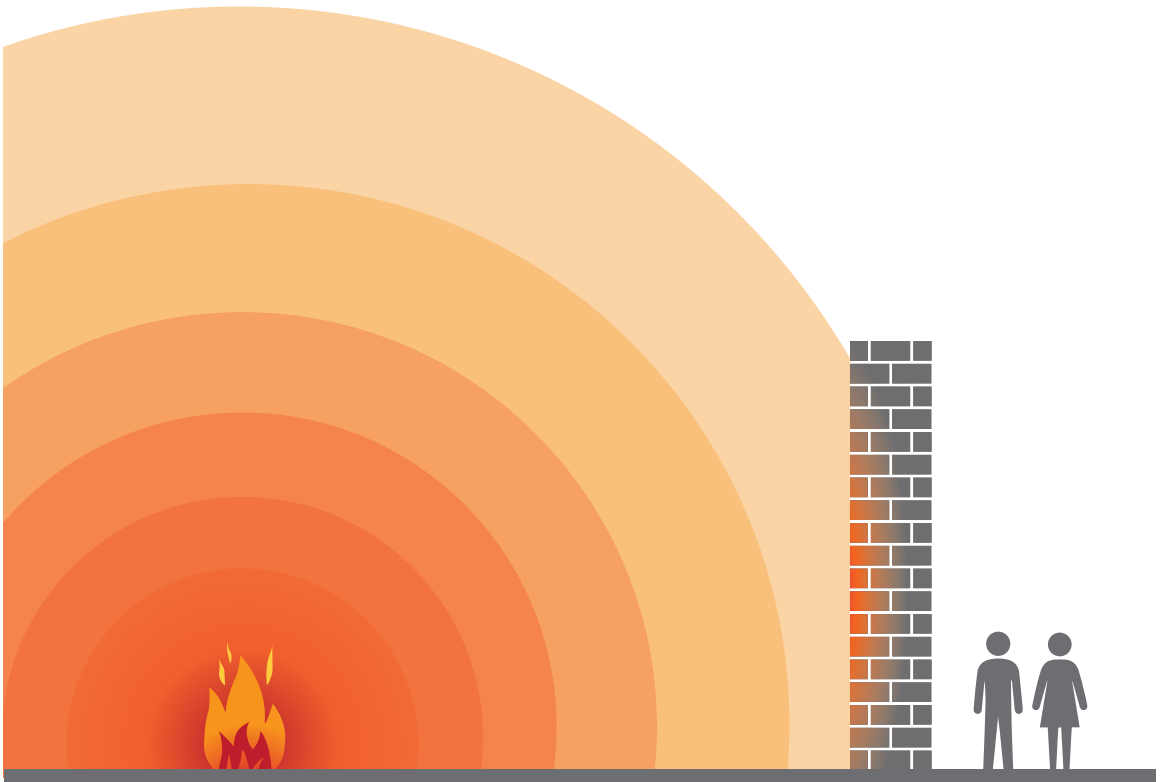
Radiant heat is the biggest killer in a fire. The human body simply cannot survive large amounts of radiant heat.

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 passes 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.

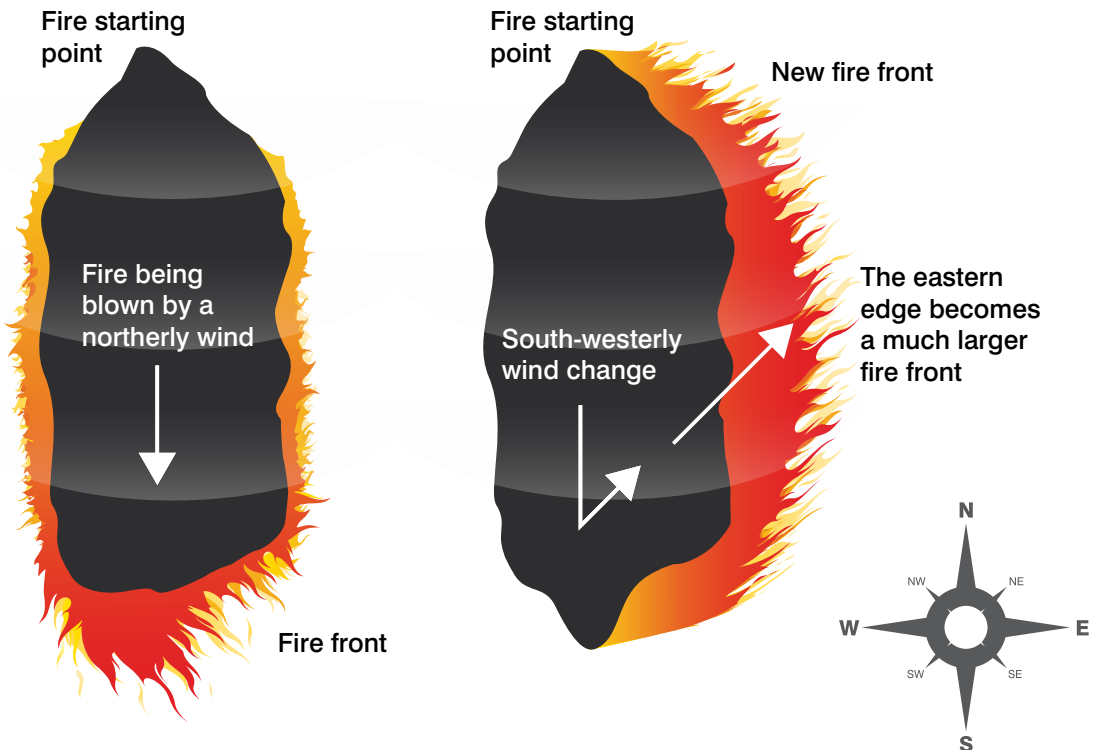
Wind change

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). Wear loose-fitting clothes made from natural fibres like pure wool, heavy cotton drill or denim (not synthetics or elasticised fabrics).

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.
- › It may not be immediately safe to go outside.

- › 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 as soon as the fire has passed the house. 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.

2) To increase your chances of survival:

- › Stay in the car and tightly close windows and doors.
- › Cover up with pure wool 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.

4) As soon as the fire has passed:

- › Get out of the car as soon as you can.
- › Move to an area that has already been burnt.
- › Protect yourself from radiant heat.

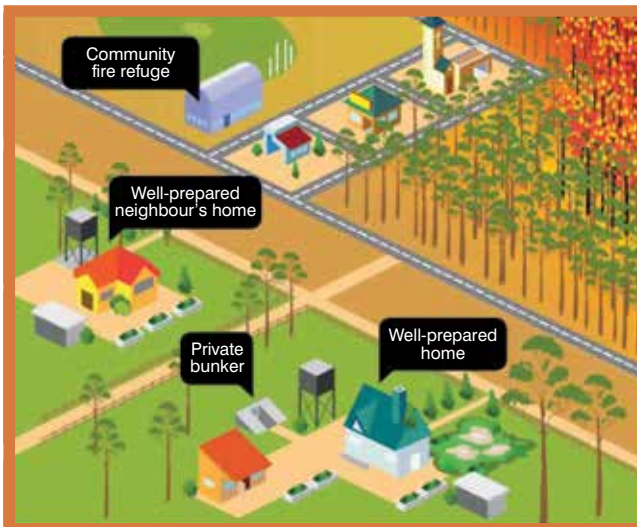
Sheltering in a car is extremely dangerous and can result in serious injury or death. Always plan to leave early to avoid this situation.



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

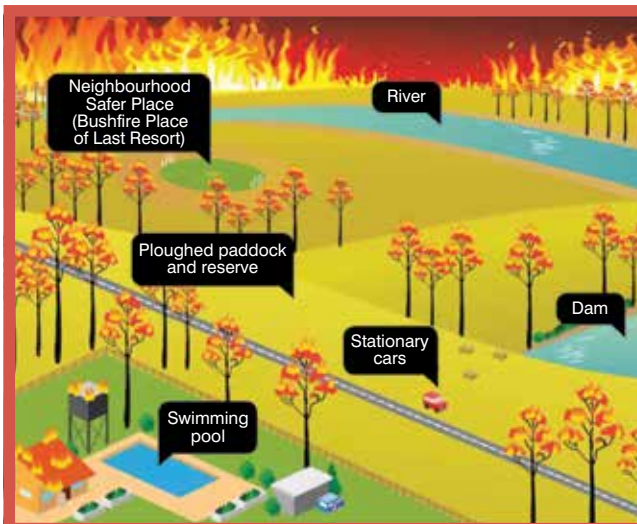
If leaving the high risk area is no longer an option, there may be options close to where you are that could protect you.

These include:

- › a well-prepared home (yours or your neighbour's) that you can actively defend.
- › private bushfire shelter (bunker) that meets current regulations
- › designated community fire refuge

Think about how you will get there.

Your safety is not guaranteed



Last Resort

If you're caught in the open and no other options are available, taking shelter in one of the below may protect you from radiant heat:

- › Neighbourhood Safer Place (Bushfire 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

ffm.vic.gov.au

emergency.vic.gov.au