

Bushfire Policy

Purpose

To prepare for and then ensure the safety of students, staff and school visitors on days of forecast elevated fire danger taking into consideration the importance of shared responsibility and continuance of education.

Prerequisite policy

- [Emergency Management Planning](#)

Policy

All registered schools, as a component of their registration, must comply with the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) [Guidelines for Bushfire Preparedness](#).

Bushfire at Risk Register (BARR)

Schools around Victoria are at varying risk from bushfire. The Department's [Bushfire at Risk Register](#) (BARR) records the schools and early childhood services most at risk from bushfire.

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/health/Pages/bushfirerisk.aspx>

Entry onto the BARR considers:

- [Bushfire Prone Area designation](#) - publically available map, built on a number of criteria that maps where fire can reach under Code Red conditions, and aligns to building controls
- [Bushfire Management Overlay](#) - triggers the need for a planning permit for certain developments and requires new developments to include appropriate bushfire protection measures
- [Victorian Fire Risk Register](#)- map assets at risk from bushfire and assess the level of risk to the asset
- terrain - influences the direction and speed at which a fire will travel
- fuel type exposure - vegetation type, i.e. forest, mixed, grass.

Schools on the BARR are further categorised based on their bushfire risk. The categorisation determines actions for individual schools on days of elevated fire danger and enables targeted treatments.

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 Emergency Management Plan.

The shelter-in-place building for BARR schools must be suitable to provide a temporary protective measure from a predicted ember and smoke attack from fire or other outdoor hazardous incident for the entire school population.

Eaglehawk Primary School shelter-in-place building is 'The Church' as it has running water, toilet facilities, multiple exits close to transport and is the most manageable size for authorities to access.

For further details see: [Shelter-in-Place Building\(s\)](#)

Code Red day

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

Schools on the BARR must close on a determined Code Red day in their weather district.

The Region wherever possible, will:

- provide schools with four to seven days notice of a planned Code Red day closure
- confirm the final decision to close a school no later than 1.00pm the day before the planned Code Red day closure.

Ahead of the fire danger period, schools on the BARR must:

- advise their school community and site users that the school will be closed on any determined Code Red day
- complete the activities outlined in the School Site 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 on the BARR must:

- notify staff, parents/carers and other site users e.g. contractors, of 'potential' and confirmed closures
- check proposed camp and excursion venues located in forecast Code Red districts and update the [Student Activity Locator](#) with any cancellations or changes
- notify bus travellers, parents, bus operators and client schools of potential and confirmed cancellation of bus routes.

No staff will remain on site and all out-of-school care programs (including vacation, before and after school programs) will not operate.

All school closures are published on the Department's website along with changed bus routes and/or bus service cancellations.

Note: Schools not on the BARR will remain open, unless directly threatened by fire or another Emergency.

Forecast elevated fire danger

Schools on the BARR categorised at highest or higher risk will have pre-planned approved relocation arrangements in place ahead of summer. These arrangements will be enacted under localised severe and/or extreme fire weather conditions.

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.

If all practicable relocation options are exhausted identified higher risk BARR schools will be approved by their Regional Director to close.

Before every relocation, the relocating schools must:

- notify the Regional Director
- notify staff, parents and carers and other site users e.g. contractors
- complete the School Relocation Principal Checklist and forward to the Regional Director
- make alternate arrangements for camps and excursions that are due to depart or arrive at the school on the day of the relocation.

This policy was last ratified by School Council – in December 2019.

This policy will be reviewed as part of 2 year review cycle.

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 forecast elevated fire danger. These schools, in the first instance, should discuss their plans with their regional Manager Operations and Emergency Management.

Fire in the landscape

In the event of exposure to an immediate bushfire threat or other emergency, the school principal has the authority to enact the school's emergency management plan.

Emergency closures and relocations link

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/health/pages/closures.aspx#link79>

For schools and early childhood services that are currently closed, see: [Emergency Closures](#)

Schools and early childhood services that have been identified as being at high fire risk and on the Department's [bushfire at-risk register](#) will close on days determined Code Red by the Emergency Management Commissioner.

Schools and early childhood services not on the Department's bushfire at-risk register will remain open, unless directly threatened by fire or another emergency.

Where possible, four to seven days notice of a planned closure will be provided. Parents and carers should expect that in some instances fewer than four days notice may be provided.

Once a Code Red day has been determined by the Emergency Management Commissioner this decision will not change – regardless of any changes in the weather forecast. This will help limit confusion and help your family plan for how your children will be cared for when their school or early childhood service is closed.

Advice will be provided to you directly by your school or early childhood service.

When a school or early childhood service is closed due to a Code Red day determination, no staff will remain on site and all out-of-school care programs (including vacation, before and after school programs) will not operate.

If your school or early childhood service is listed as potentially closed on the school and service closure list, you should start planning for alternative care arrangements for your child in the event that the planned closure proceeds. The final decision to close a school or early childhood service will be confirmed no later than 1.00pm the day before the planned closure. This decision will not change, irrespective of an improvement in the weather forecast. No child should be left at home alone or in the care of siblings on high-fire danger days.

School bus transport

If a bus route is threatened by unexpected fire, the school will enact its local emergency management plan. Information on changes to bus routes or cancellation of services will be provided by your school and via this website.

This policy was last ratified by School Council – in December 2019.

This policy will be reviewed as part of 2 year review cycle.

Off-site activities

The safety of students and staff is paramount and off-site activities may be cancelled, postponed or relocated if faced with the threat of bushfire.

Off-site activities include any activity undertaken by staff and children away from their normal school facility. This can include:

- Camps
- Field trips
- Sporting activities
- Training or conferences for staff

Appendix 1

Dear parents,

The Department of Education and Training in association with Emergency Management Victoria have worked closely to develop new policy to provide further options for schools on Extreme Fire Danger Rating (FDR) days.

As Eaglehawk Primary School is listed on the Bushfire At-Risk Register (BARR), this new policy may impact our school community and it is important that you are aware of it.

Currently, all government schools and early childhood services listed on the BARR are required to pre-emptively close where a Code Red FDR day has been determined.

This new policy provides us an option to relocate or close our school if an Extreme FDR day places our school at too great a risk.

A decision to close or relocate the school will not be taken lightly and will be done so following close consultation with our regional office and Emergency Management Victoria.

Schools are some of the safest places in our community during extreme weather. Approval for closure or relocation will only be granted in circumstances where students and staff would be at greater risk remaining at our school.

If our school was to enact a relocation or closure, notification will be given to the entire school community with as much notice as possible..

Kind regards,

Principal