



Guide to Bushfire Emergency Management Planning

For bus operators

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How to develop a Bushfire Emergency Management Plan

Overview

This information will help you develop a Bushfire Emergency Management Plan. You can also use it to improve your existing Emergency Management Plan.

Emergency management planning is about preparing, mitigating risk, responding to, and recovering from an emergency. It should be an ongoing element of your approach to business continuity and provide clear direction for management, staff, procurers/customers (such as Department of Education), customers, and other stakeholders in case of an emergency.

Good practice emergency management plans:

- are tailored to meet the specific needs of communities and procurers/customers/customers
- reflect your location, physical environment, procurers/customers, customers and staff
- outline decision-making authority
- have clear triggers for activation and deactivation
- provide options for responding to different types of emergencies such as altering or ceasing services, sheltering and evacuation
- contain contingency plans for things like telecommunication failures, power loss or key staff unavailability
- include processes for sourcing accurate, up-to-date information during an emergency
- define communication arrangements
- are updated as required and reviewed annually.

Good practice emergency preparedness includes:

- communicating emergency management plans to all staff and key stakeholders
- completing all identified risk mitigation strategies
- undertaking emergency exercises annually.

The most successful plans are developed under consultation, so drafts should be shared with employees, procurers/customers, local government and Emergency Services for their ideas and input. This will make sure your planning is comprehensive and your plan can be actioned quickly in an emergency.

Bear in mind that your Bushfire Emergency Management Plan will differ depending on the type of services you provide. School bus services will necessarily differ from regular route or charter services. You will need to tailor your plan accordingly – you may need more than one plan to properly capture all the services you provide.

You should review your plan every year to ensure it is up to date. Elements of the plan that require staff training or that need to be practiced as an organisation should be actioned regularly.

Identifying decision makers – Nominated Officers

You must make decisions in advance about how your business will respond to an emergency based on the circumstances and your customers' needs. You are accountable for the consequences of those decisions.

Your emergency management plan must define who in your company has authority to make decisions during an emergency.

The authority should reside with a **Nominated Officer** (such as general or operations manager), or it can be formally delegated (i.e. to the business owner) so that appropriate decisions can always be made.

You should clearly outline the decision-making chain of command in your emergency management plan (i.e. if the Nominated Officer is unavailable).

Elements to include in a plan

1. Cancellation and rerouting policy

Your cancellation policy should be readily available on your website and on request. It should state your discretionary and pre-emptive policies, for example:

- who in your company has the authority to cancel a service
- when a procurer/customer has the authority to cancel or reroute a service
- when and in what conditions a service can be resumed
- when a discretionary cancellation or rerouting of a service could occur based on:
 - a certain fire emergency warning /fire danger rating
 - confirmation of a rapid onset fire emergency
 - consultation with the customer
- your pre-emptive policy for when a Catastrophic level day is declared; or for ongoing bushfires under an Emergency Warning.

The cancellation and rerouting policy should also explain that the CFS and SAPOL have the right to close roads at short notice, without warning. This could result in the mandatory cancellation of a service. Drivers must obey the directions of these authorities when on the road.

Note: bus services should not operate to or from a destination that has been closed because of a declared Catastrophic day. The CFS advises that people should not be in a high-risk area (e.g. somewhere outside of a Bushfire Safer Place) when the Fire Danger Rating is Extreme or Catastrophic.

2. Emergency Management Team – roles and responsibilities

This should be an easy to read table of information that details the role, a listing of responsibilities, the name of the person responsible, and their contact details.

3. Critical responsibilities

This section of the plan should go into full detail of all critical duties expected from each role in the Emergency Management Team (e.g. Nominated Officer, Operations Manager). Quick reference guides can be developed from the information to be used on the bus and in the depot.

Sources of fire danger information

The CFS is the primary source of bushfire information in South Australia for warnings, bans and ratings. However, it is important to list multiple ways to get information in case one source fails. Try to be comprehensive with your list of the sources for bushfire warnings and alerts. At the very least it should include:

- [CFS website](#)
- CFS [Facebook](#) or [Twitter](#)
- Bushfire Information Hotline **1800 362 361**
- 891 Adelaide ABC radio or your regional ABC station

4. Risk assessment and mitigation

List the potential risks to your business (in order of likelihood) and any mitigation/contingency strategies. When thinking through and documenting potential risk it is a good idea to be as broad ranging as possible – try to capture every scenario, such as:

Fire risk assessment considerations:

- Terrain and topography
- Vegetation/fuel type, amount, location
- Typical weather conditions for location

Other risk considerations:

- Location of stops
- Vehicle reliability and features e.g. aircon, is it likely to break down in high heat?
- Driver experience and ability
- Mobile black spots and chance of losing all communications in fire incident
- Availability of key personnel
- Likely response time and availability of local emergency services (particularly for more remote areas)
- Passenger profiles (such as young children or the elderly)

5. Identification of alternative routes and Bushfire Safer Places

For each route supply a map of the area that details the location of Bushfire Safer Places and Bushfire Last Resort Refuges. On the CFS website is a section called [Bushfire Safer Places](#). It provides maps and explains how to use these areas.

Based on the risk assessment done in Section 5 (above), you should also list any alternative bus routes or detours that could come into effect due to known risk areas on a given route.

6. Crisis communication plan

A concise communication plan can help you to respond proactively to fire emergencies.

It should include:

- an explanation of what has happened and the impact on your organisation and its operations
- an outline of contingency arrangements and how long the situation is expected to last
- an offer of reassurance
- a list of the actions your business is taking, and actions procurers/stakeholders need to take (if any)
- detail on where to go for more information
- the name, role and contact details of person who is communicating

Remember to:

- ensure the person responsible for communications has the appropriate authority and training
- have the contact details of the driver, the operator, the procurer/customer and Emergency Services recorded and easily accessible by all relevant groups/persons
- be prepared and have your crisis communications plan ready to go
- provide regular, accurate, concise and relevant communications in a bushfire situation
- ensure your message is timely and relates to the crisis
- be responsive – do not allow an information vacuum to develop
- make sure you're using methods of communication that are up to date, available in emergency circumstances and tested regularly
- have back up plans for how communications occur should your driver or business lose phone service, or access to the internet

7. Driver responsibilities

Drivers must know what is expected of them in a range of emergency scenarios. This section should explain their responsibilities in the case of a rapid onset bushfire, if caught in a fire front or storm, in the case of an on-board vehicle fire, etc. Quick reference guides can be developed from the information to be used on the bus and in the depot

8. School emergency contact lists

Please note this information in yellow has not yet been confirmed by the Dept of Education

The Department for Education is responsible for providing and maintaining an Emergency contact list for all public schools. This list will be updated at the commencement of each school year and a copy provided to your business. The Department for Education is also responsible for ensuring any subsequent changes to the list are communicated to you.

It is your responsibility to maintain an Emergency contact list for all private schools serviced by your business. This list must be updated at the commencement of each school year. The school is responsible for notifying you of any changes during the year to ensure currency.

These lists should be inserted into your Bushfire Emergency Management Plan.

Things to remember when developing a Bushfire Emergency Management Plan

1. The plan should be written in a clear and concise manner.
2. The plan should provide guidance for fire season preparation, and what to do in the lead up to high risk fire days.
3. When developing a plan driver and passenger safety are obviously the priority.
4. The most successful plans are developed under consultation, so once you have a draft of your plan you should share it with employees, procurers/customers/customers and local Emergency Services for their ideas and input.
5. Once completed, the plan should be communicated to all employees, procurers/customers, and local Emergency Services.
6. Your plan should match each bushfire emergency warning level*:
 - Emergency Warning
 - Watch and Act

- Advice
7. It should also match the following fire danger ratings* (at minimum):
 - Catastrophic
 - Extreme
 - Severe
 8. During and after each bushfire event you should hold regular review and debrief sessions.
 9. You should review your plan after each fire season to ensure it's up to date. Elements of the plan that require staff training or that need to be practiced as an organisation should be actioned regularly.

*[Visit the CFS website](#) for more information about these warning and rating levels.

School bus bushfire emergency management

The Department for Education website provides a list of high-risk schools and preschools that will close if their fire ban district has a catastrophic fire danger warning. [The list can be found here.](#)

Department for Education processes for school closures

The fire danger rating is forecast by the Bureau of Meteorology each day. Every day at about 4pm the CFS declares the fire ban for the next day. The CFS website also has a 3 day 'heads up' of [expected fire danger ratings](#). There are 3 fire danger classifications: 'severe', 'extreme' and 'catastrophic'.

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On days advised in advance as 'catastrophic':

- all high risk government schools listed on the Department for Education website within the fire ban district are **closed**
- all school bus services (including school taxi services) travelling through the affected fire ban district are **cancelled**
- non-high risk schools and preschools within the fire ban district remain open (however their bus or taxi service may have been cancelled, as above).

If the CFS elevates a fire danger rating to 'catastrophic' on the day in question, all schools, preschools and transport services will remain **open** and **operate as normal** unless otherwise advised by CFS/Emergency Services/school.

If a bushfire is reported in the area during the day, the school will be advised by CFS/Emergency Services about the accessibility of roads travelled by school buses.

Affected bus runs are not to leave a school until the roads are declared safe by Emergency Services.

On days advised in advance as 'extreme', the Department for Education will work on the advice of fire authorities regarding school closures.

In all cases, your company should liaise with CFS/Emergency Services/school regarding the cancellation of services, route changes, road closures, etc.

Notifying others of service cancellations and route changes

Your website, social media, emails, and other regular means of communication should state how you notify people of route changes and cancellations, etc, so they know in advance. When services are cancelled you should proactively use these means to inform them.

While it is the responsibility of schools and preschools to notify families of service cancellations, you should be prepared for enquiries. Have a response and relevant telephone numbers ready (such as the Department for Education's emergency information hotline on 1800 000 279).

How this occurs should be factored into your Crisis communication plan.

Useful links

Department for Education

- [List of high bushfire risk schools and preschools](#)
- [Bushfires and emergency closures](#)

CFS

- [Bushfire safer places](#)
- [Expected fire danger ratings](#)
- [Your guide to bushfire safety \(pdf document\)](#)
- [Bushfire traveller safety \(pdf document\)](#)

Other

- [Road closures, traffic alerts, etc](#)
(please be aware that things can change quickly in a bushfire situation, and this may not be the most up-to-date information available during a fire)

Resources

Several resources were used to develop this Guide, they can be further referenced by operators when developing their Emergency Management (Fire) Plan:

- Incident Management Guide for Bus Operators - Bus Industry Confederation. This Guide was developed and revised by Bus Industry Confederation in June 2012. It is available for members at <http://bic.asn.au/>
- CFS website <https://www.cfs.sa.gov.au/>
- [School Bus Program Emergency Management Operational Guidelines](#), State of Victoria, Education and Training, Public Transport Victoria.
- [Preparing for emergencies: A reference guide for organisations in the Health and Community Services Sectors](#), State of Victoria, Department of Health and Human Services. August, 2019.
- [How to prepare an emergency management plan](#), Australian Government.
- [List of high bushfire risk schools and preschools](#), SA Department for Education.
- [Bushfires and your Child's School or Preschool](#), SA Department for Education.

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https://www.education.sa.gov.au/sites/default/files/bushfire-and-your-childs-school-or-preschool-brochure.pdf?acsf_files_redirect