



South Australian
**Country
Fire Service**

Farm Fire Units Handbook

Use this guide to prepare your
Farm Fire Unit for bushfires



Government
of South Australia

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Acknowledgement

The CFS acknowledges the Traditional Custodians and Owners of the lands on which we work and live across Australia and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

① Introduction

Thank you for your interest in Farm Fire Units (FFUs) and how you may be able to help the South Australian Country Fire Service (CFS) protect your community.

The CFS is responsible under South Australian legislation for the protection of life, property and the environment, and has overall control during bushfires.

FFUs can often be the first vehicles on a fireground, particularly in remote areas, so this Handbook is designed to help you understand the dangers on a fireground, how to minimise them, and how to communicate with the CFS to ensure you are supported while attending a fire.

This Handbook supports local arrangements across the state and establishes a uniformed approach to how these arrangements are managed.

The Handbook also provides information on how to communicate with the CFS, equipment required to attend a fire, and protection offered by the CFS for yourself and your equipment.

By becoming a registered CFS FFU, you join a large team fighting a fire and will be included in the planning, response and support of crews on the ground.

You may also be covered if you are injured or your equipment is damaged while you are fighting a fire in support of CFS.

FFU operators should familiarise themselves with the contents of this Handbook prior to attending a fire to ensure the best outcomes are achieved for all parties involved.

② Minimum requirements for registration

To become a CFS registered FFU you must meet the minimum requirements to attend a fire managed by CFS. This is also a requirement for personal injury and equipment insurance coverage.

To register as an FFU with the CFS you must live and/or work as/for a farmer/primary producer. If you live and work within a township you cannot register an FFU with the CFS. Understanding the minimum requirements in the FFU Guidelines is important. CFS, on receipt of a claim, will investigate whether the minimum requirements were met. If you do not meet the identified standards your claim may be rejected.

As a CFS registered FFU you are required to:

- notify the CFS when you arrive at a fire (Log on) and when you leave the fireground (Log off)
- carry and use properly fitted personal protective clothing and equipment (described in Checklist on p.16)
- ensure your vehicle complies with relevant South Australian regulations
- ensure your vehicle is equipped to the minimum requirements (see Checklist, p.16)

- carry and use appropriate communication equipment for fireground communication and logging on and off
- work cooperatively with emergency services and follow directions.

The following activities are not considered FFU activities approved by the CFS:

- responding to fires more than 150km from your property or outside of your local brigade area (whichever is greater)
- the use of any vehicle which is not registered with CFS*
- the use of a vehicle classed greater than Medium Rigid (MR)*
- firefighting on your own property prior to calling Triple Zero to report the fire.

** If you have a HR classified vehicle that you wish to register as an FFU you will need to have endorsement by your local Group Officer and CFS Region. Once you have the endorsement your contact and vehicle details will then be forwarded for processing.*



③ How to register

Becoming a registered FFU is beneficial to the owner/operator and the CFS.

The CFS can provide coverage for injuries and vehicle damage, as well as information to assist you to work with your local CFS brigades before, during, and after fires.

When FFU operators register with the CFS, it is much easier for all operators in the area to be identified.

3.1 Registration

An online registration system is available at cfs.sa.gov.au/farms.

The registration process will provide you with a basic understanding of your role and responsibilities on a fireground.

Online registration may also be available at regional and local events hosted by CFS Groups and Brigades.

Once your online registration has been completed you will be sent a FFU sticker to be displayed on your vehicle.

If you are unable to access the CFS FFU online registration, approach your local CFS Brigade, Group or CFS Regional Office for assistance.

3.2 FFU Sticker

A FFU sticker will be provided once the owner/operator has completed the CFS FFU registration process and has agreed to comply with the expectations and requirements of the CFS when operating on CFS controlled firegrounds.

The FFU sticker is intended to provide a distinctive mark of recognition for emergency personnel to assist in identifying a FFU vehicle that is involved with assisting neighbours and the CFS in fighting a bushfire.

Such stickers may assist in providing access for FFUs through road closures or Traffic Management Points (TMPs), but this is not guaranteed. On occasions, emergency personnel or SA Police managing these points may prevent FFUs from proceeding as it may not be safe to do so.

FFU operators are required to comply with lawful instructions from emergency services personnel or SAPOL and cooperate with their directions.

For more information

cfs.sa.gov.au/warnings-and-incidents/managing-road-closures-during-emergencies/

④ Entering and leaving a fireground

The CFS is accountable for the safety and wellbeing of all personnel who are on a CFS-controlled fireground.

Under the Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005 (Section 59) the CFS must “provide efficient and responsive services in the country for the purpose of fighting fires”.

Section 97.2 of the Act details how the CFS is legally able to assume control over any land where there is a need to protect life, property or the environment from a fire.

With Section 59 and 97 in mind, it is essential for FFU operators to make their presence known as soon as possible to CFS when they arrive at or depart from a fireground.

FFUs operators should also record the details of who/how you logged on/off with, and the time it occurred, as you may need this information at a later date if making an injury or damage claim.

The first option is to use pre-determined local arrangements to ensure that a record of FFU logging on has occurred.

Contact your local CFS brigade or Regional Headquarters and familiarise yourself with current local arrangements for your area.

Logging on to an incident will allow for:

- operations to be managed in a coordinated and safe manner
- inclusion in welfare and catering arrangements
- access to water re-supply for firefighting
- notification of arrangements for any first aid/medica reporting and treatments
- coverage for personal injury protection under Return-to-Work legislation
- vehicle and ancillary equipment damage and repair expenses reimbursement.

⑤ PPC and safety equipment

Wearing the correct types of personal protective clothing (PPC) and safety equipment (PPE) when firefighting is essential.

The correct PPC and PPE:

- provides protection from radiant heat
- provides protection when working in a hazardous fire ground environment
- enables the wearer to remain as comfortable and safe as possible during firefighting activity.

5.1 Minimum PPC and PPE Requirements

All clothing must be worn correctly and properly secured (buttoned/zipped) with sleeves rolled down.

The following is the minimum PPC required on the fireground:

- long sleeve heavy duty cotton or natural fibre shirt
- long pants, heavy duty cotton or natural fibre
- sturdy, closed leather footwear (workboots or similar).

Working from the rear of a moving vehicle during a bushfire presents additional hazards that must be considered by the operator. For example, if working from the rear of a vehicle, an FFU operator is more exposed to radiant heat and dust. In this instance, additional PPE is required.

This should include:

- leather work gloves
- head protection
- eye protection
- breathing protection.

5.2 Recommended PPC and PPE

Clothing

Long sleeve and long leg, cotton or natural fibre clothing, high visibility, or fire rated. Rural Firefighting ensemble is recommended.

Footwear

Leather boot, hardened toe with ankle protection. Pull on or lace up.

Gloves

Leather, with cuff that provides wrist protection (gauntlet style).

Head protection

Hard shell helmet that provides some radiant heat protection with a chin strap to secure helmet. A visor to provide facial shielding from radiant heat.

Eye protection

Industrial googles with strap that fits securely and seals to the face.

Breathing protection

A P2 or above rated dust mask.

■ A PPE checklist is provided on page 16.

⑥ FFU vehicle and equipment

FFU vehicle and equipment may comprise of:

- FFU vehicles and equipment used for firefighting
- ancillary equipment including heavy plant, farm machinery and implements

6.1 Minimum FFU vehicle requirements

The minimum requirement for a CFS registered FFU vehicle are:

- registered, roadworthy and compliant with relevant vehicle regulations
- equipped with a UHF CB Radio
- under its gross vehicle mass (GVM)
- a secure load including the tank, pump and fittings
- pump and tank must be in good working order
- personal drinking water is carried to maintain hydration.

6.2 Recommended FFU vehicle standards and equipment

- a fitted UHF CB Radio
- appropriately insured, including private firefighting use
- heat shields, handrails and safety equipment fitted to tray if being used by personnel for firefighting.
- First Aid Kit – with a specific burns kit included
- woollen blanket for fire protection
- rotating amber light fitted for use on fireground
- a means of personal communication with the driver and people working on the rear of the vehicle
- personal drinking water and snacks.

6.3 Trailer Firefighting Units

Trailer units are discouraged from being used for firefighting as they present significant challenges in terms of manoeuvrability, mobility and stability, as well as to the safety of personnel on the fireground.

Do not ride on trailer units while firefighting as this is considered an unreasonable safety risk.

6.4 Ancillary Equipment – Heavy plant, farm machinery and implements

Farm machinery and implements refers to a category of equipment for use in tasks such as slashing, ripping, harrowing or grading, and are usually drawn by another vehicle such as a tractor.

The use of heavy plant, farm machinery and implements on a fireground should be supported by a vehicle with wet firefighting capability and communications, and only used to perform tasks acknowledged and approved by the CFS.

Heavy plant refers to equipment such as bulldozers, graders, scrapers and front-end loaders that are not directly involved in firefighting and/or are being operated independently and not commercially contracted by the CFS.

The operator of ancillary equipment must ensure:

- the safety of the operator and that of other personnel is maintained
- the apparatus is suitable and capable of performing the task
- the apparatus is reliable to operate in the hazardous environment of a fire ground.
- the apparatus are only used by suitably trained, experienced and licenced operators.

A vehicle and equipment checklist is provided on page 16.

6.5 What is not considered a CFS registered FFU

The following vehicles are not considered as CFS registered FFUs for firefighting purposes:

- vehicles and ancillary equipment used for the defence of domestic dwellings on their own property in a bushfire
- vehicles and ancillary equipment commercially contracted by emergency services
- vehicles or equipment on a fireground that are not registered with CFS
- vehicles or equipment that are classed greater than Medium Rigid (MR) unless an exemption has been endorsed by the local CFS Group Officer and Region.
- Industry Brigade Firefighting Units.

⑦ Communication on the fireground

The CFS considers the use of UHF CB as the primary method of communication on the fireground with Farm Fire Units.

Prior to the fire season the local FFU Coordination officer (usually attached to a CFS brigade) should be consulted to determine the communications arrangements and protocols applying to various areas around the state.

It is likely that there will be a combination of various technologies used including UHF CB radios, mobile phones and other services.

The primary UHF channel for many areas is 9, with secondary options of 19, 29 & 39 (also known as ‘the 9s’), but this should be checked with the local CFS.

Use of UHF CB channels 9, 19, 29 & 39 are compatible and consistent with both 40 and 80 channel UHF CB sets.

When allocated a UHF Channel to use on the fireground ensure that you remain on that channel for the duration of your attendance. The channel will be used to convey tasks, instructions, and important safety information.

Communications with FFU operators is essential in providing information such as:

- operational instructions and tasking
- location of water points
- safety messages
- warning messages – fire changes/weather and wind changes
- welfare, catering and first aid arrangements.

Depending on the size of the incident a communications plan, including UHF CB channels for FFU, may be implemented by the CFS. Large incidents may allocate different channels for different areas of a fireground.

Communications may not be confined to use of technology, and verbal face-to-face contact between FFU operators and CFS crews may also be necessary, depending upon the circumstances of the incident. It should be remembered that smoke from a bushfire may interfere with radio and mobile phone communications.



⑧ Working cooperatively with emergency services

It is essential during an active fire that FFU operators work with emergency services to achieve the overall goal of protecting the community.

8.1 Before the Fire Danger Season

Prior to the start of the Fire Danger Season, FFU operators should contact their local CFS Brigade, Group HQ or Regional HQ to make themselves aware of any changes to procedures. Many CFS Groups and Brigades will arrange pre-season activities to engage with FFU owner/operators. These events are a valuable relationship building opportunity. You are encouraged to attend these and share your knowledge.

8.2 The role of FFUs during a fire

FFU roles and tasks when carrying out firefighting may include:

- initial attack of the fire, only if safe to do so
- coordinated support and pairing with CFS fire trucks
- blackout operations (wetting down hot areas that exist after the main front of the fire has passed)
- patrolling and observing the fire for reignitions
- providing local knowledge.

Remember that each task will vary in terms of:

- the current and perceived hazards and risks involved
- the degree of physical and mental exertion required
- the extreme conditions that equipment may need to operate in.

The use of ancillary equipment, which does not involve direct firefighting, may include:

- graders, bulldozers, scrapers and front-end loaders to create mineral earth breaks
- tractors for slashing, ploughing or grading to remove fuel from the fire line.

As the fireground is a hostile environment, there will be a number of hazards encountered when operating a FFU. It is your responsibility while on the fireground to monitor your health and safety.

Some of the hazards you may be exposed to include:

- smoke, radiant heat, dehydration, heat stress and heat stroke
- high levels of noise for prolonged periods
- poor visibility
- exposure to mental stress and/or trauma
- falling objects (trees and tree limbs)
- rough terrain or dense vegetation
- close proximity to firefighting vehicles, heavy machinery or other emergency vehicle traffic
- downed, live powerlines.

Where a FFU operator encounters a safety risk they should withdraw to a safer location and notify others on the fireground of the hazard immediately.

8.3 Safety at fires

The highest priority for the CFS when attending fires is the protection of life. This includes you as a FFU operator. When preparing for firefighting and on the fireground, FFU operators must take responsibility for their own safety. It is essential that well before the fire danger season begins you are adequately prepared. This includes checking you are prepared:

- mentally and physically
- with the minimum Personal Protective Clothing and Equipment (see section 5)
- with a vehicle that meets the minimum requirements (see section 6)
- and capable of fighting a fire.

Do not work alone – team up with others to enhance the safety of yourself and others on the fire ground. Working as a team will contribute to:

- being able to look out for each other
- being aware of the situation around you and changing fire behaviour or, weather conditions
- communicating with others on the fireground
- identifying escape routes
- identifying safety zones.

Alcohol and drugs

FFU operators are expected to ensure that while operating on the fireground they:

- are not affected by drugs or alcohol to the extent where it may impair their judgement or capacity to act safely
- do not consume alcohol or drugs

8.4 Know your risks

FFU operators must be aware of what is happening around them on a fireground. You must be constantly alert to the changing conditions that may impact the personal safety of yourself and others. The CFS encourages the use of risk assessments prior to entering and whilst on a fireground. Risks can range from, but are not limited to, topography, changing vegetation and fuel loads, variable weather conditions, aerial fire bombers, falling trees and unpredictable fire behaviour.

The CFS utilises the LACES dynamic risk assessment process. LACES is an acronym for Lookout, Awareness, Communication, Escape Routes, and Safety Zones.

As conditions change, on-ground responders rely on the use of safety zones and the timely use of escape routes for safety. In these situations, LACES provides a system to maintain safety. During bushfires, LACES is particularly useful where there is a risk of burnover, entrapment, or a weather change. LACES should be considered as part of the dynamic risk assessment process.

- **Lookout:** A fixed, aerial or mobile lookout shall be deployed to maintain a clear overview of risks and to provide timely advice of the need to use escape routes and safety zones.
- **Awareness:** Firefighters and FFU operators shall be aware of the impact of changes in fire behaviour, including those resulting from variations to fuel, weather and topography and of other fireground hazards.
- **Communications:** All fire crews (FFU operators included) shall follow the Communications Plan, communicate with surrounding crews to discuss and address safety issues.

- **Escape routes:** At least two escape routes should be agreed and made known to all relevant personnel. The suitability of an escape route should be continually reviewed to ensure it remains effective.
- **Safety zones:** Safety zones should be identified and made known to all relevant firefighters and FFU operators. Firefighters need to consider escape time and safety zone size requirements that will change as fire behaviour changes.

The CFS recognises that some aspects of the LACES process may not be fully utilised by FFU operators, but it is crucial that FFU operators are aware of the risks when entering a fireground and, where possible, undertake a risk assessment to assist in mitigating injuries, damage to vehicles and equipment and potentially loss of life. At a minimum FFU operators must be constantly aware, utilise effective and approved communications, and know your escape routes and safety zones.

Remember – everyone at a fire has a responsibility for safety. Make safety your priority.

8.5 Accept responsibility

When a FFU operator elects to engage in firefighting as a private individual they accept responsibility for their own decisions and actions. The FFU operator:

- will be expected to take responsibility for their decisions
- will not be exempt or above the law when firefighting
- will be expected to comply with all legal obligations.

8.6 Personal limits and capabilities

FFU operators should know their physical and mental boundaries and work within those limits. This is because working on a fireground is an environment that:

- requires arduous physical exertion
- has continuous mental pressures to make decisions
- is variable and can be hazardous.

⑨ Injury protection and reporting

9.1 Personal injury protection

Claims for compensation for personal injury by an operator of a FFU are to be interpreted under the following South Australian legislation - Return to Work Regulations 2015 (under the Return-to-Work Act 2014).

To be covered by the provisions of this legislation, and therefore covered from a personal injury protection perspective, there must be:

- local arrangements for an operator of a FFU to make contact with the CFS present at the emergency operation
- information that captures the logged on/off to an incident.

Through this, the CFS will be aware of the presence of FFU operators and will effectively cover the requirements of the above legislation.

9.2 Reporting an injury

All FFU operators who sustain an injury while logged on to the fireground, no matter how minor at the time, must:

- while on the fireground report it to a CFS crew leader, FFU liaison officer, or Incident Management Team member so that the occurrence can be logged.
- the FFU operator must also record the name of the person who the injury was reported to and the time that the report was made.
- report the occurrence to the CFS Regional Office within 24 hours of the injury occurring, providing the details of who and when you logged on, and who and when you reported the injury to.

If the injury has caused medical expenses to be incurred and/or time has been lost from a main source of employment, the injured party is to consult promptly with a doctor of their choice and obtain a Workcover Capacity Certificate which will provide a detailed diagnosis and advice on current capacity for main employment duties.

To provide coverage for return-to-work personal insurance claims, the injured party is required to complete a Volunteer Accident Notification Investigation to Region Form with the assistance of the CFS Regional Office.



⑩ FFU vehicle or equipment loss or damage

It is the intention of CFS to reimburse expenses due to damage to FFU vehicles and ancillary equipment assisting in operational duties.

Expenses are covered by CFS provided the following criteria has been met:

- the vehicle or equipment must have been approved (logged on) for use by the CFS officer in charge at the incident
- the operator holds the appropriate licences to operate the vehicle or equipment
- the vehicle and operator was specifically tasked and operating under the direction of a CFS officer or representative
- the vehicle or equipment were not commercially hired for the incident.

When damage has occurred to FFU vehicles or ancillary equipment, the operator is to:

- record the incident scenario and resulting damage and take photographs of the damage if possible
- obtain witness statements if possible
- notify a member of the CFS at the incident attended (i.e. Crew Leader, Sector Commander or Incident Management Team member) as soon as reasonably possible so that the circumstances can be logged.

10.1 Insured vehicles

For insured FFU vehicles and ancillary equipment, the CFS liability for reimbursement of damage or repair expenses is limited to the cost of the owner's insurance policy excess.

10.2 Uninsured vehicles

For uninsured FFU vehicles and ancillary equipment (vehicles with no current insurance coverage), the CFS will meet the lesser of the repair costs or the market value of the vehicle.

Where the market value of the vehicle is paid, the vehicle becomes the property of the agency for salvage purposes.

10.3 No CFS Liability

No liability will be accepted by the CFS for damage to vehicles and ancillary equipment where the damage is caused by a negligent or reckless act or omission on the part of the owner or operator, or where they are operating on their own behalf and without the appropriate CFS approval.

10.4 Making a Claim for Reimbursement

In the event of damage to insured FFU vehicles or ancillary equipment, the owner is to:

- contact their own insurance provider to arrange for repair
- pay for the excess of insurance and retain a copy of the payment details
- complete a Private Farm Fire Unit and Ancillary Equipment Damage Claim Form, available through the CFS Regional Office, and submit the form to the CFS Regional Office together with supporting documentation (evidence of excess payment, photos etc.).

In the event of damage to uninsured FFU vehicles or ancillary equipment, the owner is to:

- have the repairs undertaken
- pay for the repairs undertaken and retain the tax invoice
- complete a Private Farm Fire Unit and Ancillary Equipment Damage Claim Form available through the CFS Regional Office and submit the form to the CFS Regional Office together with supporting documentation (evidence of excess payment, photos etc.).

Further information

Resources and information included in this Handbook are available from the CFS website.
cfs.sa.gov.au/farms

References

SA Motor Vehicles Act 1959

www.legislation.sa.gov.au/lz/c/a/motor%20vehicles%20act%201959.aspx

SA Return to Work Regulations 2014

www.legislation.sa.gov.au/lz/c/a/return%20to%20work%20act%202014.aspx

Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005

www.legislation.sa.gov.au/lz/c/a/fire%20and%20emergency%20services%20act%202005/current/2005.40.auth.pdf

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Glossary

CFS Brigade

A group of CFS volunteers from a specific area with roles including Brigade Captain, Lieutenant(s), Senior Firefighter(s) and Brigade Members.

CFS Group

A collection of Brigades with roles of Group Officer, Deputy Group Officer(s) and other administrative roles.

CFS Regional Office

The Headquarters of each Region (an area designated by the CFS in relation to risk and capabilities of the volunteers within).

Deadman zone

An area above the fire (usually atop a hill or rise) where a fire will travel quickly to.

Divisional Commander

A position on the fireground used to coordinate firefighter response through Sector Commanders, Strike Team Leaders and Crew Leaders.

Escape routes

Identified pathways that firefighters can safely use to retreat from a fire.

FFU

Farm Fire Units.

FFU Coordinator

A person assigned, at a CFS regional or Group level, to co-ordinate and administer the FFU program by developing and improving relationships between CFS and local FFU owner/operators.

FFU Liaison

A person assigned during a fire to provide operational support and a connection between FFU owner/operators and the CFS Incident Controller.

Flanks

The sides of a fire where fire activity is less aggressive than its direction of travel.

Flank attack

A directive for firefighters to extinguish flames along the side of a fire.

Head of fire

The large flames at the front of a fire where the extremity of the flames and heat are greatest and where the most dangerous part of a fire is.

Heel of fire

The rear of the fire where ground has been burned and where flame activity is lesser than the area where it is travelling.

Heavy plant

Large machinery such as bulldozers, graders or front-end loaders.

Incident Controller (IC)

A person who is legally in control of the response to, and outcome of, an emergency and responsible for all personnel on the fireground.

Incident Management Team (IMT)

A team formed to support the IC on large incidents.

Red Flag Warning

A phrase used to describe information about hazards, perceived risks or actual risks on a fireground.

CFS Crew Leader

A CFS volunteer in-charge of a crew within a fire truck.

Safety Zones

Areas where firefighters can retreat to if required.

Sector Commander

A CFS volunteer who coordinates the response activity of a large area of a fireground via Strike Team Leaders and Crew Leaders.

Strike Team

A collection of firefighting crews (usually four fire trucks, a bulk water carrier and a command vehicle) used to attack specific areas of a fireground.

Strike Team Leader

A CFS volunteer who directs a Strike Team's activities or tasks.

Water points

Designated points where CFS is authorised to access water replenishments – can be dams, water tanks, stand pipes or Bulk Water Carriers.

Checklists

Personal Protective Equipment requirements

Do you have the correct Personal Protective Clothing and Equipment		Yes	No
1	Cotton or natural fibre overalls with long sleeves?		
	or		
	Natural fibre work shirt and trouser ensemble?		
2	Sturdy leather boots?		
3	Leather work gloves?		
4	Industrial type helmet with chin-strap?		
5	Industrial type goggles?		
6	Respirator or dust mask?		
7	Hearing protection (if required)?		
8	High visibility vest (if required)?		
9	Drinking water and food/snacks?		

Vehicles and firefighting equipment requirements

Is your vehicle ready?		Yes	No
1	When loaded is your vehicle less than the Gross Vehicle Mass?		
2	Is the load including tank, pump and fittings properly secured?		
3	Is your vehicle roadworthy?		
4	Are the vehicle and pump mechanically sound?		
5	Have the vehicle and pump been serviced regularly?		
6	Is your vehicle fitted with a UHF radio transceiver?		
7	Is there a first aid kit with burns pack in the vehicle?		
8	Is there a woollen blanket for fire protection in the vehicle?		
9	Is your vehicle fitted with an amber rotating beacon?		
10	Is your vehicle fitted with heatshields (if required)?		

