Bushfires in the SA outback

Bushfire is a part of the landscape in the SA outback and is often started by natural events such as lightning strikes. People have also used fire as a land management tool for many thousands of years and indigenous cultural burning and land management burns are common practice today.

How big and how hot a bushfire is depends on the type of vegetation and how much is available to burn. Fires may start in the mid year period (May to August), but cooler conditions limit their intensity and spread.

Bushfires tend to be hotter later in the year (September onwards) because the grass and plant litter is drier and burns more readily. Dry lightning storms are common later in the year (September to December) and the fires they cause can be very hot and fast moving.

In the arid regions of central and southern Australia, big fires occur approximately every 10 years. This often happens after years of unusually high rainfall and flooding like this year, when there is lots of plant growth, like this year.

Know your risk

Whether you live or work in outback Australia or are simply travelling through, you need to be aware that bushfires can be a very real and serious risk.

Your risk depends on how prepared you are, what sort of landscape you are in, what the weather is like and how late in the season it is.

Because of its sparse landscape, most fires in the outback happen in very remote and inaccessible areas making it difficult for firefighters and pastoralists to put the fires out. There are very limited fire-fighting resources in remote areas. Many outback fires are left to burn towards a fire break while they are monitored remotely.

This means that you may come across a fire which is burning over a very large area and is unattended. It may block your journey and you may have to turn around and travel a very long distance to safety.

When there is a major bushfire, emergency services may install roadblocks and you may be stranded by the roadside or at a township for extended periods of time in extremely hot and uncomfortable desert conditions.

Remember if you do come across an unattended bushfire on your travels, there is no radio or phone coverage in many areas. You may not be able to contact someone for advice and you will need to be alert, prepared, resourceful and self-sufficient.

To keep yourself and others safe, you need to think about bushfire safety, be prepared and know how to act if a bushfire occurs.

Fires in the outback can start suddenly, without warning and travel very fast given the right conditions.

Stay Alert and Informed

Travelling in the outback during the bushfire season needs to be done with caution and vigilance. Recognise the warning signs and learn what to do to keep yourself safe.

Fire Ban Districts

Fire restrictions apply throughout South Australia's Fire Ban Districts during the fire danger season. Knowing which Fire Ban District you are visiting is the first step in finding out which restrictions apply.

Do you know which Fire Ban District you're in or travelling to?

Total Fire Bans

The CFS may declare Total Fire Bans in some Fire Ban Districts or even across the whole state on days when severe weather - such as high temperatures, strong winds and low humidity - could cause fires to become uncontrollable. Certain activities like barbeques and camp fires are banned on these days.

Do you know what you can and can't do today?

Fire Danger Ratings

Every day during the fire danger season, weather and other factors are used to calculate Fire Danger Ratings for each Fire Ban District. These ratings are not a prediction of how likely a bushfire is to occur, but how dangerous it could be if it did occur.

Do you know today's rating?

You can find out all of these for your outback journey by visiting the CFS website, calling the Bushfire Information Hotline, or through the CFS Smartphone application.

FIRE DANGER RATING	WHAT SHOULD I DO?
CATASTROPHIC TOTAL FIRE BAN	You need to act now. These are the worst conditions for a bushfire - if a fire starts, it will be extremely difficult to control and will move very fast. Buildings are not built to withstand these fires. No fires may be lit.
EXTREME TOTAL FIRE BAN	You need to get ready to act. Very hot and windy conditions. The bush is very dry and fires that start under these conditions will be unpredictable, fast-moving and difficult to control. No fires may be lit.
SEVERE TOTAL FIRE BAN	You need to be aware. Hot and windy conditions. Fires that start under these conditions will be difficult to control. No fires may be lit.
VERY HIGH	You need to be prepared. Hot and windy conditions. Fires that start under these conditions are controllable, but can still be dangerous. Buildings can provide safety.
HIGH	Warm conditions, with some wind. The bush is very dry, but fires that start under these conditions are more easily controlled. Buildings can provide safety.
LOW-MODERATE	If a fire starts it is likely to be controlled in these conditions. Buildings can provide safety. Controlled burning may be undertaken in these conditions if it is safe.

In case of emergency

Police, fire, ambulance (for life threatening emergencies) **000** (TTY 106)
Note: If you are unable to speak English you can call Triple Zero (000), say "fire" and leave the phone off the hook. The call will be recorded and traced.

Where to find information

Bushfire Information Hotline	**1300 362 361** (TTY 133 677)
CFS (Country Fire Service)	www.cfs.sa.gov.au download the CFS Smartphone app visit us on or
Bureau of Meteorology	www.bom.gov.au
Parks SA	http://www.environment.sa.gov.au/parks/home
SES (State Emergency Service)	www.ses.sa.gov.au
South Australian Police	www.sapolice.sa.gov.au
For current outback roads information	http://www.transport.sa.gov.au/quicklinks/northern_roads/northern.asp

For emergency warnings and alerts

Tune into one of our Emergency Broadcast Partners

Emergency Broadcast Partners for North and West SA:
ABC Local Radio, Sky News Television, Commercial Radio Australia

Radio Frequencies in SA

Adelaide/Broken Hill	891 ABC Adelaide	891 AM
Andamooka	ABC North & West	105.9 FM
Ceduna	Flow FM	106.1 FM
Clare/Mid North	Flow FM	107.5 FM
Coober Pedy	ABC North & West	106.1 FM
Coober Pedy	Flow FM	99.7 FM
Cook	ABC North & West	107.7 FM
Glendambo	ABC North & West	106.1 FM
Leigh Creek Coalfield	ABC North & West	99.3 FM
Leigh Creek South	ABC North & West	1602 AM
Marree	ABC North & West	105.7 FM
Mintabie	ABC North & West	88.7 FM
Oodnadatta	ABC North & West	95.3 FM
Port Augusta	5AU	1242 AM
Port Lincoln	ABC Eyre Peninsula	1485 AM
Port Pirie	ABC North & West	639 AM
Prominent Hill	Flow FM	91.3 FM
Roxby Downs	Flow FM	97.9 FM
Roxby Downs	ABC North & West	102.7 FM
Streaky Bay	ABC Eyre Peninsula	693 AM
Streaky Bay	Flow FM	99.3 FM
Woomera	ABC North & West	1584 AM
Woomera	Flow FM	101.7 FM
Wudinna	Flow FM	106.9 FM
Yalata	ABC North & West	105.9 FM

2011-12

Bushfire safety in outback SA

Are you visiting or travelling through the outback this bushfire season?

This leaflet will help you know your risk, be prepared and know what to do if you encounter a bushfire.

Government of South Australia

Bushfire Information Hotline
1300 362 361 (TTY 133 677)
www.cfs.sa.gov.au

BUSHFIRE READY
PREPARE. ACT. SURVIVE.

PREPARE.

Before you leave on a trip to the outback

- Seek more information on outback travel and bushfire safety and follow the advice.
- Check the CFS website; download our Smartphone app; subscribe to the CFS RSS feed, email updates, twitter or facebook to see the latest incident information.
- Check the road conditions, Fire Danger ratings and long range weather forecast.
- Postpone your travel or modify your travel plans when dangerous fire weather is forecast.
- Make sure you and your vehicle are prepared for an emergency.
- Let someone know your destination and schedule if your plans change, let someone know.
- Carry woollen blankets, a good first aid kit, protective clothing (not synthetic) and boots.
- Always carry extra supplies – food, water and medical. Include foods that do not require cooking or heating.
- Carry some form of communication equipment – satellite phone, UHF and/or VHF radio - and a signal device. Consider carrying a personal locator beacon (PLB).
- If you are 4-wheel driving, make sure you know how to use a 4WD, have proper equipment, spares and tools and that you know how to use them.
- Plan your route and take hard copies of maps. Understand the big distances and remote desert conditions between roadhouses and townships.

Bushfires are unpredictable and you need to be prepared for the unexpected.

ACT.

While you're travelling in the outback

- Avoid travelling in areas where bushfires are burning.
- Stay alert and use your own senses: What's the weather like? Can you smell smoke? You are unlikely to have radio or phone coverage if you have left a township area.
- If you do have coverage, stay tuned into one of the emergency broadcasters listed in this brochure or call the Bushfire Information Hotline on 1300 362 361 (TTY 133 677) for possible information on bushfires in the area. But do not expect an official warning or assistance from Emergency Services in the outback.
- Know the Fire Ban District you are in and check the Fire Danger Ratings in weather forecasts every day if you can. Enjoy bushfire safe activities on dangerous days.
- Never rely solely on electronic mapping devices like GPS and mobile phones, as they may be out of range and may be affected by smoke and local conditions.
- Check the regulations and find out if there is a Total Fire Ban in place before starting a campfire or using your barbeque or cooking stove. A camping stove, gas or electric appliance is safer than an open fire because the flame is contained and there is little risk of sparks escaping. Note that strict regulations apply to all fires, including barbecues, in national parks and wildlife reserves.
- Never throw a cigarette butt from a car or drop or throw a cigarette butt where it will come into contact with flammable material. Do not smoke within 2 metres of flammable bush or grass outside of a township. You could start a bushfire and endanger yourselves and others as well as be liable for a $5000 fine.
- Only park your car in cleared areas. Never drive your car over long grass or vegetation. You could start a bushfire when your hot car exhaust comes into contact with flammable plant matter.

No fires can be lit on a day of Total Fire Ban

On a Total Fire Ban day, a gas or electric barbecue can only be used if:

- the BBQ is within 15 metres of a domestic premises, or on a coastal foreshore;
- it is clear of all flammable material to a distance of at least 4 metres around and above the BBQ and;
- it is attended by an adult at all times and an appropriate extinguisher is at hand.

On days where the Fire Danger Rating is low moderate or high, a campfire can only be lit for cooking purposes when:

- the fire is in a 30 cm deep trench and no more than one square metre in area;
- you have a four-metre cleared space around and above the fire; and
- an adult is in attendance at all times with water and/or an extinguisher
- it is extinguished completely with water before leaving

Fires can be started accidentally when people are not careful with cars, campfires and cigarette butts. Obey the rules, stay safe and avoid fines.

SURVIVE.

When threatened by smoke or bushfire

Cars are a very dangerous place to be during a bushfire, as they offer little protection from radiant heat, and driving conditions are often difficult and stressful.

If there is smoke

- Slow down and be aware that there could be people, vehicles and animals on the road.
- Pull over to the side of the road and stop your vehicle in a clear area.
- Turn your car headlights on and close windows and outside vents.
- Ensure you are not in the path of the fire.
- Keep your headlights and hazard lights on and wait until the smoke clears.

If you need to use your vehicle as a shelter from a bushfire:

Before the fire front reaches you

- Park behind a solid structure to block as much heat as you can. If this isn't possible, find a clearing away from dense bush and flammable material on the ground.
- Park the vehicle off the roadway to avoid collisions in poor visibility.
- Face the vehicle towards the oncoming fire front.
- Turn headlights and hazard warning lights on.
- Tightly close all windows and doors.
- Stay inside your vehicle – it offers better protection from the radiant heat than being in the open.
- Shut all the air vents and turn the air conditioning off.
- Turn the engine off.
- Put on your protective clothing, get down below the window level into the foot wells and shelter under woollen blankets.
- Drink water to minimise the risks of dehydration.

As the fire front passes

During a bushfire the critical time for personal safety is during the short time it takes for the fire front to pass.

- Stay in the vehicle until the fire front has passed.
- Fuel tanks are very unlikely to explode.
- Smoke gradually gets inside the vehicle and fumes will be released from the interior of the vehicle. Stay as close to the floor as possible to minimise inhalation and cover mouth with a moist cloth.
- Tyres and external plastic body parts may catch alight. In more extreme cases the vehicle interior may catch on fire.
- Once the front has passed and the temperature has dropped, cautiously exit the vehicle (be careful – internal parts will be extremely hot).
- Move to a safe area such as a strip of land that has already burnt
- Stay covered in woollen blankets, stay with your vehicle, conserve your food and water and park so you can be seen.

If you encounter a bushfire on foot or bike

- Do not panic.
- Move to clear or already burnt ground and put on protective clothing and footwear.
- Do not try to run uphill or try and outrun or outride a bushfire.
- Stay low and seek shelter from radiant heat behind a log, rocky outcrop or embankment to protect yourself from radiant heat.
- If your clothes catch fire, don't run - stop, drop, cover your face and roll over and over to extinguish the flames.