



South Australian
**Country
Fire Service**

Bushfire Safety Guide for Business

Use this guide to prepare
your business for bushfires

cfs.sa.gov.au/business



Government
of South Australia

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Please check cfs.sa.gov.au for updates and revisions.

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We acknowledge that our work is undertaken upon the lands of First Nations people, and pay our respects to the traditional owners and custodians, past, present and emerging. We recognise their continued relationship and connection to these lands and waters.

Introduction

About this safety guide

Why is it important to be bushfire prepared?

Bushfires pose a very real danger in South Australia, particularly during summer months. Together with emergency services, it is everyone's responsibility to be aware of bushfire danger, and be prepared, especially for those living, working, or travelling in bushfire prone areas.

Learning from experience

When speaking with those who have lived through a major bushfire event, unfortunately it is not uncommon to hear they thought they were ready and prepared for the fire danger season and, they thought they would know how to handle the threat of fire should it happen.

However, when a bushfire arrived, many who thought they were prepared, were not, and have stated they could never have expected fire so big or destructive, nor could they have anticipated the emotional struggles they have lived with years after the event.

Learning from the experiences of others can help to ensure we are all aware of, and prepared for, the level of serious threat bushfire can pose to homes, businesses, or lives. Being prepared can be key to avoiding the long-term impacts of fire, that last well beyond the initial devastation.

The CFS has developed this Bushfire Safety Guide for Businesses, to help highlight the importance of bushfire preparedness, and advise on how to plan (ahead of time) for a bushfire event.



Bushfire and business

Aside from the emotional and physical damages left in the wake of bushfire, the hard truth is that businesses impacted by bushfire can experience:

- Extended cash flow interruptions
- Business continuity disruptions
- Service provision and duty of care legal obligations
- Unplanned or unexpected employee impacts.

This Bushfire Safety Guide for Business is a resource to:

Aid in preparations for fire danger season

Help mitigate bushfire risk

Highlight areas of consideration for coping, responding, and adapting should a bushfire or other emergency, threaten your business or workplace.

How to use this guide

This guide will help you to:

Increase your knowledge of bushfire danger and the risks to your business

Identify which actions you need to take to prepare for bushfire

Recognise gaps and weaknesses in your preparedness

Develop policies and procedures for bushfire safety as a part of your emergency business planning.

The different sections of this guide can be used to hone your thinking about the potential challenges and impacts to your business/workplace before, during, and after a bushfire or other emergency.

Links to additional resources such as web pages, tools and templates, relevant legislation, and codes of practice, are provided throughout this document.



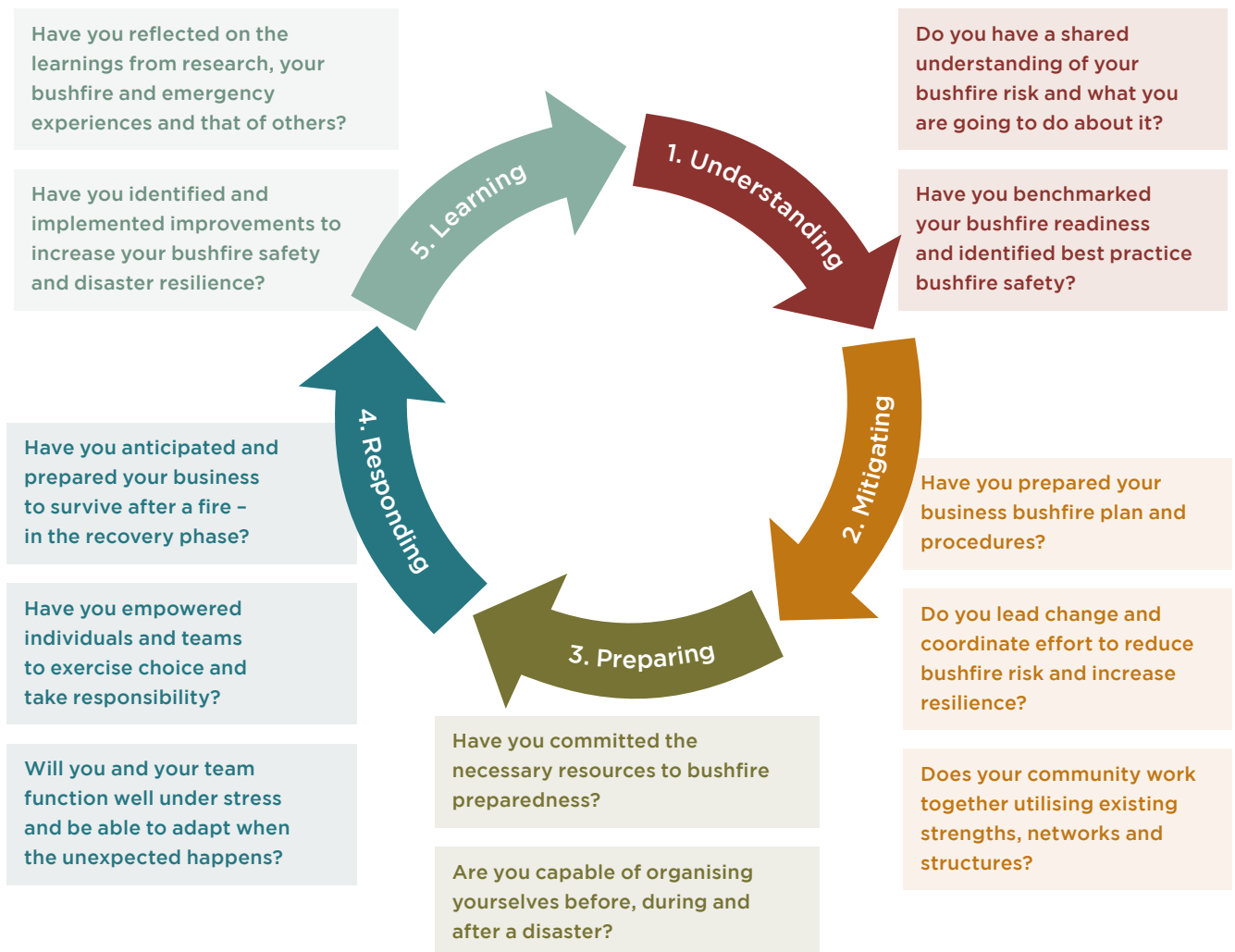
All information and resources referred to in this guide can be found on the Business Guide companion page at cfs.sa.gov.au/business

Bushfire ready cycle for business

Using research and community learnings from bushfire experiences, we have identified five stages to consider when building disaster resilience and preparing your business for an emergency.

Each stage focuses on critical knowledge, skills, and capacities needed to cope, respond, and adapt in the event of a fire or other emergency.

Important questions are asked throughout the cycle, to help you to assess how prepared your business is for bushfire. It will help you to evaluate where you are doing well, and perhaps where further work or planning is required.



An aerial photograph showing a paved road on the left, a grassy verge, and a large area of blackened, charred vegetation on the right, illustrating the impact of a bushfire.

Stage 1: Understanding

Understanding bushfires

Bushfires occur every year in South Australia, and often start without warning. They have in the past destroyed properties, businesses, and livelihoods.

Sadly, bushfires also take the lives of people, pets, livestock, fauna, and flora. They are devastating events, that can have long term impacts on a community's social, emotional, and economic wellbeing. However, being prepared and aware of what to do during a bushfire can help to reduce the severity of devastation and loss.

Business critical considerations

There are some critical things to consider when planning for an emergency. Some example questions to ask yourself include:

- Are you confident that you could keep yourselves and others safe?
- Would your business still be able to operate after major and ongoing impacts such as road closures, loss of power, or destruction of critical infrastructure?

Every business and circumstance is different, and your business bushfire planning will depend on how and where you operate, and the goods or services offered. Regardless, there are key things to consider when preparing for potential bushfire, and these can be broken down into the stages of planning for:

- **Before** a bushfire (including before fire danger season)
- **During** a bushfire
- **After** a bushfire.

Bushfire basics

What do you know? What don't you know?

Before identifying the risks to you and your business, it's important to understand the basics of bushfires and community safety. The CFS offers a range of resources and programs to help teach these basics.

Identifying gaps in your bushfire knowledge

The checklist below will help you to identify gaps in your bushfire knowledge.

Supporting materials to help you answer these questions can be found at cfs.sa.gov.au/business



	I know	I don't know
That the top reason buildings burn down is because of embers?		
That vehicles do not provide safety in a bushfire, and that there are a high number of deaths due to people being caught in cars?		
That radiant heat is the biggest threat to life?		
What a Bushfire Safer Place is? What a Bushfire Last Resort Refuge is and when to use one?		
Where to get the latest information about on-going bushfires?		
What the different Fire Danger Ratings mean, and what the recommended actions are for each?		



	I know	I don't know
Which Fire Ban District I am in, or travel through regularly?		
What I can and can't do during Fire Danger Season and on Total Fire Ban days?		
What to do if I have to shelter from fire in a building?		
What to expect when if I experience a bushfire?		
What I can do to prepare my land and livestock for a bushfire?		
How to prepare a property before the fire season, and when a fire happens?		
Why we need to be skilled in decision making under stress?		
Why some people need our support before, during, and after a bushfire?		
How to prepare and practise a bushfire survival plan for home?		



It is recommended that you read the CFS resource: **Your Guide to Bushfire Safety** available for download and as an audio file on the CFS website. This guide provides a good foundation for bushfire safety knowledge.





Operating a business

Businesses and organisations face additional challenges when it comes to bushfire risk, compared to people in their homes.

Key considerations for bushfire preparedness

As a business owner, operator, or employee, you may need to consider the following.

Does your business have:

- **Multiple or complex worksites** that present challenges for communication and coordination of emergency actions?
- **Staff travelling that may expose them** to bushfire risk on the road?
- **Large numbers of people** including visitors, clients, and customers to manage in an emergency?
- **Special risks onsite** such as chemicals, machinery, and high value or uninsurable assets?
- **Staff training** in emergency drills or any firefighting activities they may need to undertake (e.g., with farm fire units)?
- **Client/customer communications and relationships** that must be managed when operations change due to emergency impacts?
- **Legislative responsibilities** that require you to ensure workplace health and safety is maintained, restrict critical activities, or require specific standards of building design and site management?

Assessing your level of bushfire danger

Business location and surrounds

Bushfires will burn in grassland, forest, paddocks, scrub, and heathlands. As a rule of thumb, the more fuel there is to burn, the hotter and bigger the fire will burn, and therefore, the more danger there is to you and your business.

The level of immediate danger to your business from bushfire depends upon the local conditions (such as natural fuel sources) that influence bushfire behaviour.

Does your organisation/business operate in or near grassland, scrub, forest, paddocks, or heathland? Do staff, clients, contractors drive through bushfire risk areas?

Weather conditions

Weather and topography are also major factors in determining a bushfire's level of danger. The hotter, drier, and windier the weather is, the faster and hotter a fire will burn through the landscape. If your business operates in more than one area, you will need to consider the different conditions in each area.

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Bushfires can burn extremely fast and leave no time for escape. In 2015, the Pinery Fire killed two people, destroyed homes, and had \$124M in commercial insurance claims. In 4 hours the fire travelled over 40km. After a wind change, a 40km fire front was pushed in an easterly direction and burned an estimated 82,500 hectares in about 9 hours.



Smoke and ember damage

Smoke and embers can travel many kilometres ahead of a main fire causing low visibility, new fire starts, and structure fires. Smoke can also be present for weeks after a main fire, and can impact telecommunications, infrastructure, and people's health.

Smoke can trigger respiratory problems for people who have existing illnesses. Long term exposure, even at low levels can cause respiratory disease, and certain levels of protection may be required.

Different businesses can be affected by smoke in specific ways e.g., businesses that care for vulnerable people may have to consider the health conditions of their clients. Smoke can damage food crops and stored goods causing expensive losses of produce.

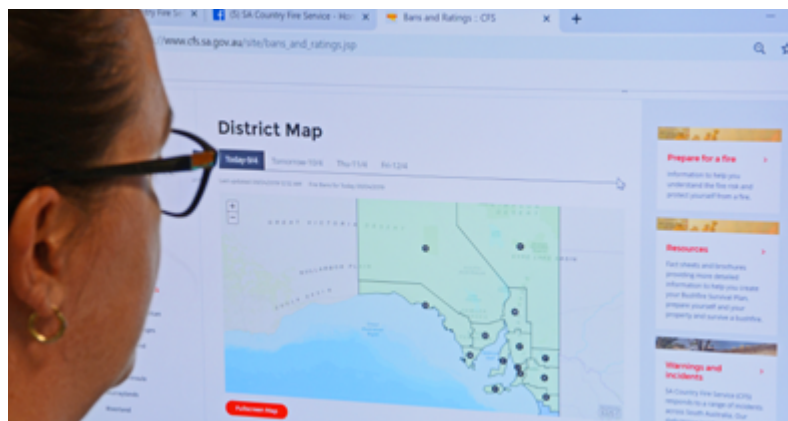
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The ongoing exposure to smoke during the Black Summer event (2019–20) was linked to over 2,000 people presenting to hospital for respiratory problems.

1,305 went to emergency departments for asthma-related conditions, with 1,100 admitted to hospital for cardiovascular problems caused by the fires.

The bushfire smoke was even linked to 417 deaths. Consider how people can be protected from smoke exposure in the workplace.





Fire Danger Season

Fire Danger Season refers to the time of year where there is the greatest risk of bushfires occurring. These dates also signal the time of year for when there are restrictions on what activities you can and cannot do during Fire Danger Season.

Fire Danger Season can start and end at different times across the state, depending on location and on local conditions. In South Australia, these different areas are called Fire Ban Districts.



Did you know: Fire Danger Season dates are nominal and can commence and finish at different times as determined by the CFS, depending on the environmental conditions at the time. Check the CFS website for current dates.

Fire Ban Districts and Fire Danger Ratings

During the Fire Danger Season, each Fire Ban District will be given a daily Fire Danger Rating. This rating represents a prediction of how dangerous a fire would be, if started in that Fire Ban District, on that day.

Districts with an elevated Fire Danger Rating, will be under a Total Fire Ban for 24 hours. A Total Fire Ban brings additional restrictions with it.

It is important that you know in which Fire Ban District your business operates, so that you are aware of the days of elevated fire danger, and when there are Total Fire Bans.



In order to undertake activities that are restricted in Fire Danger Season or by Total Fire Bans, a permit must be issued by the local council or CFS.

Visit the [CFS website](#) for more information.



Did you know: A new Australian Fire Danger Rating System is currently under development and due for release in the 2022-2023 Fire Danger Season. Check the CFS website to ensure you are looking at the most up-to-date Fire Danger Rating.

Beaches do not offer protection from radiant heat.



Safety

Where to seek shelter and refuge

Bushfire Safer Places are pre-identified places in South Australia that can provide a relative level of safety from bushfires. It is recommended that during times of elevated fire danger, and when a fire is going nearby, that people go to a Bushfire Safer Place, if it is safe to do so.

Bushfire Last Resort Refuges are pre-identified places that can provide a relative level of protection from radiant heat but cannot guarantee safety. Bushfire Last Resort Refuges are found outside of Bushfire Safer Places and really are a last resort for when other options and plans have failed.

Bushfire Safer Places and Bushfire Last Resort Refuges can still be subject to embers and smoke.

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Visit the CFS website to find the Bushfire Safer Place nearest to your workplace, and those along the routes that your staff travel.

Staying informed during a bushfire

The CFS will endeavour to provide the community with information such as warnings and updates as soon as possible. Fires can move fast, and even with modern systems and technologies, lines of communication can fail, so you may not receive an official warning.

It is important to stay up to date on the latest information from official sources, to help you make informed decisions. There's a range of ways to stay updated including via the CFS website, radio, and social media. The most suitable for you will depend on how your business operates.

Consider how to use the information from the CFS and other official sources in your workplace, and plan for what you will do if information isn't available.

Sometimes, due to the speed or complexity of an emergency event, there is very little information available. Furthermore, misinformation can also be spread through a community. It is important to verify emergency information using official channels when possible.



How will you ensure the right information is communicated and understood across your workplace for employees, clients, customers, and visitors? How can your people be ready for failures in mobile communications and loss of internet services?



Information sources/channels

Consider how each of the following channels could be used in your workplace for business planning, and to help keep people safe.

CFS website cfs.sa.gov.au

- **Current incidents** Lists all current incidents.
- **Current warnings** Lists all current warning messages in place.
- **Map** Provides visual representation of all current incidents and warnings.
- **Total Fire Ban information** Informs of when there is a fire ban in place and the restrictions associated with it.
- **Fire Danger Rating information** Advises on the day's Fire Danger Rating and what it means.
- **4-day Fire Danger Rating forecast** Provides a 4-day forecast of fire danger to allow for forward planning.
- **Bushfire Safer Places** Explains Bushfire Safer Places, how to use them, and offers printable maps of where they are located.

Radio and Social Media

- **Current incidents and warnings** Broadcast partners and official CFS Social Media provide current, and up to the minute warning messages.
- **Fire bans and elevated fire danger** Forecast fire danger and Total Fire Bans.

Email

- **Mailing list** Email alerts for new warning messages, incident updates, and Total Fire Bans.

Phone

- **Alert SA mobile app** Phone app with push notifications that alert the user to fire bans, incidents, and warnings in a specified area.
- **Information hotline 1800 362 361** Service offered so you can talk to someone directly about: current incidents and warnings, Bushfire Safer Places, Bushfire Last Resort Refuges, fire ban and Fire Danger Ratings.
- **Emergency Alert** A system where emergency information is broadcast to mobile and landline phones in an area impacted by an emergency where there is an immediate threat to life.

Other useful sources of information

- traffic.sa.gov.au Shows information on current road closures.



Consider how you can source information locally. Local chat groups on social media may be a valuable source of information on what is happening locally. You should consider the validity of the information you are receiving and be aware of how to verify it as accurate.

Emergency management in your community

How people, other businesses, and agencies respond before, during, and after emergency, can impact the survival and continuity of your business.

A community's ability to cope with an emergency, depends on many factors. This includes the makeup and function of a community, infrastructure quality in a region, the individual and collective action, and the robustness of emergency management arrangements.

It is important that you understand how this might influence what you do in an emergency, and how you can plan accordingly. To find out more about local emergency management arrangements, check your local:

- Government emergency management plan
- Zone emergency plan
- Chamber of commerce
- Industry sector representative
- Neighbouring businesses and communities.



Legislation, codes of practice, and guidelines

Your responsibilities

Your business operations may be affected by restrictions that are in place due to Total Fire Ban rules and codes of practice.

Legislation that may affect your business operations in an emergency include the:

- Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005
- Fire and Emergency Services Regulations 2021
- Native Vegetation Act 1991
- Work Health and Safety Act 2012
- Work Health and Safety Regulations 2012
- Work Health and Safety codes of practice safework.sa.gov.au
- CFS Codes of Practice
- Sector specific guidelines (refer to your industry representative body).

There are several codes of practice that cover a range of personal, commercial, and industrial activities that present a risk of fire ignition or smoke damage. These codes can be viewed on the CFS website.

Current Codes of Practice relate to:

- Broad acre burning and pile burns
- Pizza ovens
- Mowing and slashing
- Cutting and grinding tools
- Bee keeping
- Grain harvesting.



A photograph of three people in a meeting. On the left, a man in a blue shirt is seen in profile. In the center, a man in a light-colored shirt is looking towards the right. On the right, a woman with glasses is partially visible. The background is slightly blurred, showing what appears to be a modern office or meeting space.

Stage 2: Mitigating

Identifying and analysing risk

What could happen?

When thinking of bushfire risk to business, physical risks may first come to mind, such as personal injury, damage to structures, property, and critical infrastructure. However, it is important to think beyond the physical, as risks can be more far-reaching.

Risks can include challenges caused by:

- Supply chain or cash flow interruption
- Confusion due to lack of training
- Poor decision making due to insufficient clarity in roles and responsibilities
- Lack of emotional preparedness.

Without proper consideration of all types of risk, businesses may not be able to maintain service delivery or cash flow, and ultimately may cease operations.

When identifying risks to your business, it may be helpful to consider the following: site, people, operations, community, in addition to risk posed before, during, and after Fire Danger Season, on days of elevated fire danger, and after a fire impact.

- **Site** The physical aspects of your business such as buildings, access, location, and vegetation. Critical assets and infrastructure can be considered here too including machinery, equipment, and livestock. Site security can also be an issue if you cannot re-enter the area to check on your premises.
- **People** These are human risks associated with the safety and wellbeing of staff, customers/clients, and visitors. This can include factors such as effective training for fire/emergency event, and decision making.
- **Operations** This covers how your business runs such as services delivery, freight and supply chains.
- **Community** How does your community rely on your business and vice-versa?

It is useful to consider the different risks before, during, and after an emergency. For a bushfire emergency, this can be segmented into the following.

- **Before** Fire Danger Season, before days of elevated fire danger (Total Fire Ban days) before a fire impacts.
- **During** Fire Danger Season, on days of elevated fire danger, during a bushfire impact and immediately afterwards.
- **After** Post fire danger season, after an activation of plans/procedures, after a fire impact, during long term recovery.



Bushfire risk planning

Who should be involved?

As part of your risk identification process it is recommended that you involve your staff, clients, customers, and other key stakeholders, to ensure you gain broad coverage of issues and a range of perspectives on what is, and isn't, important. This will also help to identify challenges that you may not have thought of before.

Important questions to ask

What are the major challenges we could face?

What are the critical resources and services we depend on to operate?

In what ways can staff and customers be exposed to dangerous fire conditions?

What fires and emergencies have happened here in the past?

Can my staff safely deal with an emergency without support?

Do I understand the long term impacts a bushfire can have on my business and community?



Identifying site risk

Physical site risks can include:

- Nearby vegetation
- Poor building construction
- Suitable sheltering and refuge areas
- Flammable objects and dangerous goods
- Smoke ingress
- Poor access for emergency services.



Identifying people risk

People associated risks can include:

- Not knowing roles and responsibilities
- Inadequate communication methods
- Limited staff training
- Not having personal bushfire plans for staff
- Staff travel requirements
- Ineffective decision making
- Customer and visitor exposure
- Lack of availability of personal protective equipment for staff.



Identifying operational risk

Risks to business operations can include:

- Supply chain interruptions
- Inadequate insurance
- Staff unable to attend the workplace due to road closures
- Customer access inhibited due to roadblocks
- Critical service and infrastructure losses.

Insurance

Do you have sufficient coverage?

Consider for a moment if your current insurance cover will enable you to continue operating after a major impact?

Do you regularly review your business insurance arrangements to confirm they are adequate? When budgets are tight, how do you prioritise what to insure? You may need to be strategic and consider which assets and income streams are the most important to keep your business going after a disruption.

After you have identified possible challenges and risks to your business, you will need to analyse and evaluate your options for addressing the risks and work out actions to be prioritised.

business.gov.au has some helpful resources regarding emergency management for businesses.

Managing and treating the risks you have identified can take various forms, and it's important to prioritise the practical options that will have the most immediate impact for people's safety.

Clear procedures, staff training and information sharing and site maintenance can reduce risks significantly. In comparison, other risks may need longer term investment e.g. retrofitting a structure to make it more resistant to ember attack.



**If a fire burned through your business tomorrow would your most critical assets be protected?
How soon could you resume operations?**



How do you chose which assets are insured?



Stage 3: Preparing

Planning and preparing

How planning can help to reduce risk

Having a written, practised, and communicated emergency plan is important, and will increase the chances of survival and recovery for your business, staff, and customers.

Well written and communicated policies will give your staff and clients reassurance about what they can expect in an emergency. Policies can outline core principles that can be used to assist in decision making during uncertain times.

Business specific bushfire plan

Plans will differ from business-to-business and will largely depend on things such as location, business type, number of personnel, and specific risks. There are a range of planning resources such as templates and examples available online, but when using these, you must ensure that the specific needs and risks related to your organisation are covered.

Reach out to your sector's industry advocate or representative body. They may have specific resources for risk management and emergency planning that have been developed with the needs of your specific industry in mind.

Examples of sector specific resources include:



The Australian Council of Social Services

Resilience toolkit for community service organisations

The South Australian Council of Social Services

Emergency preparedness and disaster resilience

The SA Wine Industry Association

Wine industry resource

Business SA

Business Continuity Planning Booklet

Policies, procedures, work instructions

When developing policies for your organisation you need to address the following key areas: preparedness, response, recovery.

Preparedness: How do you guide actions before an event to be emergency ready?

- Staff induction, training, and practice
- Site preparedness e.g., vegetation management and building maintenance
- Preparing to adjust operations on Total Fire Ban days
- Customer communications and cancellation of bookings
- Information, monitoring, and keeping everyone up to date.

Response: How do you guide actions when an emergency is happening?

- Communications
- Shelter in place versus evacuation and triggers for action
- Site closures
- Staff absences due to emergencies.

Recovery: How do you guide actions after an emergency?

- After action reviews
- Health checks
- Business adaptations.

How will you communicate with your clients and customers?



How can planning for days of elevated fire risk reduce the potential impacts that a fire could have on your site, people and operations?



General planning

Roles and responsibilities

Defining clear roles and responsibilities is a must. It is essential that people know what they should be doing in an emergency event.

A clear chain of command is also important so that people know who is responsible for making decisions when an everyday manager or decision maker is away.

Triggers for action

Outline clear triggers for action in your plan. This will assist with decision making during times of high stress and uncertainty. With pre-determined triggers for action, plans should flow more smoothly, and critical actions are taken with less delay.

Examples of trigger points:

A business that operates in a high-risk area checks the forecast Fire Danger. Catastrophic fire conditions are forecast for the next day. This triggers the business to adjust their operations so that staff who are not comfortable coming into work can work from home. Delivery work and staff travel is re-scheduled for early in the morning before the weather conditions are forecast to worsen. Customers are sent a notification that operating hours will be changed for the next day.

A Bushfire Warning Message for a fire nearby has been issued, and the warning impacts that business' service area, so they change operations and notify their staff who are travelling in the area.

Covering all times and seasons

Bushfire planning needs to include the tasks that your organisation will undertake before, during and after a fire. It can be easy to only focus on what will happen when there is a fire.

Monitoring and reviewing

It is important to create a timeline for monitoring and reviewing your workplace policies and procedures so that you know they are not out of date.

Contingency planning

Consider all possibilities and be ready. Emergencies can be unpredictable, and things may not go to plan. It is important to have back up options with multiple paths of action.

For example:



Your policy and planning may indicate that when fire danger is elevated or a fire is nearby, your site will close and staff will relocate to a Bushfire Safer Place.

However, you may find that your site is impacted at short notice and leaving to a Bushfire Safer Place is not an option.

In this case you would need to have a shelter-in-place option available to you and your staff.

Consider 'what-if' scenarios that could challenge your plans and people's abilities to cope.

Communications planning

Effective communication is a crucial aspect of all emergency planning. Consider how important information is communicated to employees, clients, customers, contractors, and visitors.

Important information to be communicated for emergencies includes:

- Changes in operations or service delivery based on Fire Danger Ratings or incidents
- Current and ongoing emergency responses
- Current and emerging threats
- Cancellation of services or site closures.

Multiple worksites

If you have multiple worksites that are geographically separated, then you will need to determine if one plan is suitable for all sites, or if each site needs its own plan. Multiple worksites may add complexity for communication, tracking staff whereabouts, and decision making. You will need consider this in your planning.

Other and unknown factors

Consideration should be given to the personal bushfire survival plans of your staff and how these will interact with your site plans. Do you have staff who will need time off to volunteer for emergency services?

What if a staff member's child's school closes on a catastrophic day and they need to stay home with their child? Consider the gaps in your knowledge, and what you may not know.

Alarm activations

Smoke from a bushfire can enter a building and trigger smoke detectors and automatic fire alarms. These alarms can add to the anxiety of everyone involved and may cause people to evacuate a building when it is actually safer to shelter indoors from the approaching bushfire. Managing and communicating a scenario such as this should be considered well in advance of a possible bushfire event.

Involving everyone

It is crucial that the details of your policies, plans, and procedures, are designed to work with everyone they affect. Ideally, when developing these guidelines, you would include key stakeholders (internal and external) so that issues and unknowns can be identified early.

“

When planning is undertaken without communicating with key stakeholders, plans can ultimately fail.

A real-life example of this is when a high school planned to evacuate to the local primary school should a bushfire event occur.

It was discovered later that the local primary school had their own plans of relocating to the high school.

Had there been a bushfire, both schools would have met each other halfway whilst relocating, resulting in confusion, stress, and a need to quickly come up with an alternative plan.





Examples of preparedness actions in a community care organisation

A community care organisation that coordinates visits to elderly clients and people with disability who live in bushfire risk areas, has much to consider in terms of business continuity and service delivery should a bushfire occur. The organisation provides clients with in-home care, support, and medical services. The organisation's office is also located in a bushfire risk area.

Below is a list of activities that a community care organisation could undertake to mitigate risk. Consider the type of risk (in terms of bushfire emergency preparedness) they are addressing through each activity.

Before fire danger season

- Undertakes building and grounds maintenance throughout the year.
- Checks site for vulnerability to embers.
- Removes dead vegetation from gardens.
- Identifies and maintains a shelter in place refuge.
- Maintains training for staff throughout the year.
- Reviews previous season's actions and their effectiveness.
- Backs up computer data regularly.
- Tests and maintains equipment.
- Has preparedness conversations with clients.
- Communicates plans to new staff and clients.
- Staff are trained to do backup roles.
- Staff are made clear on their roles and responsibilities.
- Emergency kits are checked.

During fire danger season

- Designated staff member monitors current bushfires and conditions.
- Designated staff member monitors upcoming Fire Danger Ratings.
- Designated staff member communicates latest information to other staff.
- Keeps garden watered.
- Ensures clients have multi day supply of medication in case services are disrupted.
- Adjusts daily visit times for clients in highest risks areas to early morning when it is cooler.
- Moves some clients to independent accommodation located in low-risk areas the night before high-risk days.
- Informs clients of upcoming high-risk days.
- Staff checks current CFS bushfire warnings before taking to the road.
- Staff who travel check where the nearest Bushfire Safer Places are on their routes and have printed hard-copy maps.
- Each staff member has an emergency kit in their vehicle.
- Changes in operations are communicated to clients and the community e.g. notification of closures.

After fire danger season

- Undertakes reviews with staff and clients.

Before a fire planning

Key considerations

At-risk clients and customers

Your specific actions may be influenced by people you have in your care. You will need to consider how your plans may impact them, and how they can be involved in the process.

If you have at-risk people in your care, and your plan is to leave early, you will need to consider the challenges and risks of moving them, especially if you have many people to move.

The time needed to safely relocate may be dramatically increased, and depending on the circumstance, may make relocation during an event impossible. In some cases, moving at-risk people is a greater risk to their health and wellbeing, than sheltering in a safe place.

The Australian Red Cross has developed a framework providing guidance on how governments, businesses, non-government organisations, and communities, can work together to help increase the preparedness, safety, and resilience of people at risk in emergencies. Search online for the Australian Red Cross [*People-at-Risk-in-Emergencies-Framework*](#)



What specific arrangements need to be made for clients, customers, or staff who have special risks?





Site preparedness

Your bushfire plan should identify when pre-season site maintenance will occur to reduce the risk of fire at your site. This can be integrated into existing work schedules.

Ensuring your site is adequately prepared may include addressing vegetation management, preparing, maintaining, and testing buildings and equipment. You should aim to have the greatest level of site preparedness, even if your plan is to leave early, because during fire, there may not always be time to leave.

Depending on where you operate and your business type, you may need to be aware of rules and regulations around the management of native vegetation.



| More information can be found on the CFS website

Data storage and back up

Have you considered how critical information and documents are stored or backed up? This could include external hard drives, cloud storage, or paid services. Do you have sensitive information that needs to be protected in an emergency?



Pre-season checks

Are you ready for a bushfire emergency?

Before the fire danger season, you should review and update your plans, checking your level of preparedness.

Important questions to ask



Are current plans and levels of preparedness still relevant? For example, has your business changed its size or areas of operation?

Is your information up to date, including contacts, phone numbers and websites?

Are your Bushfire Safer Places knowledge and maps up-to-date and ready (there could be boundary changes in Bushfire Safer Places or new Bushfire Last Resort Refuges)?

Are your emergency kits stocked and operational?



Planning with your community

Understanding what will happen locally is important to help your plans run as smoothly as possible.

Important questions to ask



What are my local emergency management arrangements? How does my business or property fit in to these?

What are the neighbouring businesses' plans? How can we help each other?

Have I approached like businesses, to strike a potential agreement for sharing equipment and resources should my business be impacted by an emergency?

For example, if you must close for an extended period, can you send your customers to a like business and vice-versa? Or if you lose critical equipment, is there an equipment sharing or loan agreement in place?

Who in your community relies on your business, and would be severely affected if you had to stop operating for some time?



Fire danger season

Days of elevated fire risk planning

Your business should plan for days of elevated fire risk.

Consider the following



How will you identify, monitor, and communicate upcoming days of high risk?

Who will need to be notified of changes to service? How will you notify those people?

How will a change in business operations be communicated to staff, clients, and other visitors, including altered business hours, or changes to service delivery?

Stage 4: Responding

Monitoring conditions



Serious fires can happen any day of the Fire Danger Season, with a greater risk of threat on days of Total Fire Ban. One of the most important aspects of emergency preparedness is staying informed about what is happening.

Consider how you will monitor fire danger and going fires in your workplace. How will this information be communicated to all staff and clients? Information monitoring and communication can become difficult if staff are travelling. How will they stay up to date whilst on the road?

There are a range of ways to stay informed on fire danger conditions and fire incidents as they occur. A list of communication channels has been provided on page 15 of this guide.



Some businesses have a designated staff member who monitors current incidents.

This person is responsible for alerting other staff or the supervisor/manager when an incident starts. For example, the receptionist might receive emails from the CFS warnings mailing list and check if they impact on the service area of travelling staff.

If they do impact on a service area, then pre-determined actions will be undertaken.



Travelling or offsite staff

Considerations

If you have staff who are regularly off-site and travelling, you will need plans and procedures for protecting them.

You will need to consider how you will manage situations such as:

- Staff being caught in a fire danger area, and directly impacted whilst on the road
- Roads becoming blocked by fire
- Monitoring information and providing updates
- Loss of communications systems
- Staff being trapped by encroaching danger, forcing a need to shelter elsewhere.

It should be common practice instilled in staff that before they begin travelling, that they check for current CFS incidents and warnings in the destination area and surrounds.

Travelling staff who work within, or travel through, bushfire risk areas, should be aware of the Bushfire Safer Places and Bushfire Last Resort Refuges locations along their travel routes.

Travelling or offsite staff should also be prepared for loss of mobile phone connectivity, and plan alternative travel routes for when roads may become closed due to bushfire or, when roads are impacted by other emergencies.



The CFS website has a map showing Bushfire Safer Places and Bushfire Last Resort Refuge locations.



During a fire: what to do?

When a bushfire is near, before deciding to leave early, it is very important to assess the situation to ensure that you, and those with you, are not going to be impacted on the road.

Leaving early?

Important considerations

Fires can be fast moving, unpredictable, and often take people by surprise. Because of this, leaving early may sometimes not be an option. Lives have been lost on the road by people who were caught by fire, and were impacted by the heat, smoke, and flames.

All sites should have pre-identified and well-prepared buildings that can be used for sheltering just in case the fire situation and changing conditions mean that it is too late to leave. During a fire, if you are already in a Bushfire Safer Place, then it is safer to remain where you are. Leaving a Bushfire Safer Place will put you at greater risk.

The amount of time and effort required to leave early will be different for different businesses, and in some cases, it may present a greater risk to staff and clients than sheltering in a solid building. A risk management approach, using the most up-to-date and accurate information, should be used when deciding to leave early; especially if large numbers of people need to be transported from the area.

Important things to consider before leaving early in a bushfire event

What is the latest warning/direction from the CFS telling you to do?

How far away is the fire?

How do you know if it is too late to leave?

How long will it take to leave?

What if the roads are blocked by fallen trees, closures, or traffic?

Where will you go and how do you know it is safe there?

How long will it take you to travel?

How will you know everyone has left?

How will vulnerable people in your care be affected by the move?

What will you leave behind?

How long will you be relocated for, and what if you become stranded there?

Is the place you are travelling to expecting you and can they accommodate you?

Do you have supplies for all your staff and clients?

What if you are caught by the fire on the way?

What if the vehicle you are using breaks down?



Sheltering in place?

Deciding to stay put and shelter in place can be a daunting decision. But well prepared and actively defended buildings/structures, can provide a relative level of safety, especially compared to a vehicle.

For a shelter in place plan, you will need to have a pre-identified, suitable structure to shelter in.

Important things to consider for sheltering in place

Is there a well-prepared solid structure on site for sheltering in place?

Does everyone on-site know where to shelter, and what to do during a fire emergency?

What defensive actions will be taken before the fire arrives, and by who?

What will you do if the building catches on fire while you are sheltering?

Where will you move to once the threat has passed?

What actions can people take to actively defend property and are they suitably qualified and able to do so?

How will you account for everyone on site?

What if community members need to shelter with you?

Do your customers and clients on site know what to do in a fire emergency?

Are you prepared to shelter for an extended period of time, if required?

How will you protect against smoke?

How will you manage a loss of power, water, and communications?



| Visit the CFS website for detailed information on what to do, and when

Planning for after a fire

Returning to normal after an emergency may be challenging. Impacts to your business, clients, and the wider community, can be long lasting.

Key considerations

Consider how you can prepare for after fire impacts such as:

Operating with minimal staff. Staff may not be able to attend the workplace due to managing their own losses.

Dealing with post fire road closures. Access may be restricted to your staff and customers.

Managing restricted access, due to road closures, of deliveries and goods you require to operate

Running without power and water in the longer term, as supplies could be disrupted for days or weeks due to damaged or lost infrastructure.

Extended business closure and the potential need to stand down staff.





Stage 5: Learning

Improving your knowledge to improve survival chances

Training and practising your plan is a key part of being emergency ready. By training and practising, you and your employees can identify weak points and gaps in procedures, and therefore be truly ready for a real event.

Training can be in the form of drills, walk throughs, or discussions. Practice can involve running through the whole plan or focusing on specific parts of a plan.

If everyone knows what to do in an emergency event due to practice, then when a real bushfire event occurs, people have greater capacity to deal with unexpected and unpredictable scenarios.

Testing plans and analysing gaps

You can test your plans by running hypothetical scenarios and determining where there are gaps in your training and understanding.

Practice scenarios can also help with decision making and understanding what an emergency could be like, which can help with emotional preparedness.

Inducting staff

Consider how effectively new staff are inducted into your business. Do your current induction procedures appropriately inform your staff of their obligations and your policies?



If a new staff member started today and there was a major impact tomorrow, would they be adequately prepared?

Involving your customers and clients

If you have customers or clients that will be in your care, it is important to have them involved in training and practice.

At the very least, consider what information they might need so they are prepared in case of emergency. This may help to alleviate some anxiety should an emergency event occur.

Increasing the capability of your workforce

What if a key decision maker is not present or available at the time of an emergency? Who in your business can step in and make decisions? Are your staff capable of acting alone?

Learning from experience

It is important to recognise opportunities for learning. By having a process and plan for how you will learn from your experiences, your business can continually improve its practices, safety, and efficiency. Opportunities for learning may occur after the following.

After a day of elevated risk

After a day of heightened bushfire risk with elevated Fire Danger Ratings.

After a bushfire: close call

After an incident where you activated your procedures and plans but were not directly impacted in the end.

After a bushfire: direct impact

After your site, personnel, or clients were impacted directly by a bushfire. This could mean a range of scenarios such as being heavily impacted by smoke, ash, and embers, direct fire impact, or significant impacts on operations. This can also be applied to any emergency or potential threat.



Resources: learning from experiences frameworks

Learning from experiences frameworks are useful tools to help guide how to put learnings into practice.

Some frameworks are more formal than others, and the framework you choose will be influenced by factors such as your business resources, size, and personnel capability.



For in-depth information on lessons management visit the [*Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience*](#) (AIDR) website and download its Lessons Management Handbook.

A lessons management framework can be applied to real events, simulations, or drills. When learning from experiences you should consider who needs to input into the feedback and planning.



Aside from your internal stakeholders such as staff, do you need to involve external stakeholders such as your customers and clients, contractors, and suppliers?

A simple learning from experiences framework may include the following:

1. Collect observations

Observations are records of

“noteworthy facts, or occurrences that someone has heard, seen, noticed, or experienced as an opportunity for improvement or an example of good practice.” Lessons Management Handbook AIDR, page 24.

Observations from events can be collected in a variety of ways, including:

- Debriefs (formal and informal, and including hot debriefs)
- Surveys/questionnaires
- Facilitated discussions
- Accident and near miss reports, and
- Reviewing logs.

2. Analyse observations

After observations from an event are collected, they can be verified and analysed. This will allow you to determine what worked well, what didn't work, and identify root causes of challenges.

3. Implement changes and maintain current practice

After identifying problems, opportunities, and examples of good practice from the analysis of observations, you can determine how best to address each in your business. It could mean planning for additional staff training, changing procedures and policies, changing equipment, or maintaining existing arrangements.

4. Monitor and review

After implementation, you will need to confirm that change has been made, and that the changes have been successful.



Shared learnings

It could be useful to tap into your industry contacts and other networks, to gain learnings from their experiences, and to also share yours. Many sectors will have representative bodies or advocacy groups that often hold conferences or networking events. These are great opportunities to learn from the experiences of others, or to share your own.

Consider when you undertake your own reviews and have identified your own learnings, if these might be useful to share with others in your industry or community.



Plan for action

The approaches and methods outlined in this guide can be used for planning for all types of emergencies that you and your business may be exposed to.

The Bushfire Ready Cycle for businesses that you have just gone through will allow you to continue to mitigate your risks, prepare and plan for emergencies, respond to threats and danger, and ultimately keep your people safe and your business operating.

There are no quick and easy fixes to being prepared for bushfires and other emergencies. Without putting time and effort into your bushfire and emergency preparedness, you are relying on luck to survive, cope and adapt.

If you are unsure of where and how to start or the process appears overwhelming, focus on one part of your preparedness at a time and ask for help.

Make sure to check the CFS website regularly for updates and new resources that can help you with your planning and preparedness.



South Australian **Country Fire Service**



View all resources associated with this booklet and bushfire preparedness for businesses and organisations at

cfs.sa.gov.au/business



Enquire about more print resources and CFS bushfire preparedness workshops at

cfs.communityengagementsupport@eso.sa.gov.au



For information on bushfire warnings, Total Fire Bans, Fire Danger Ratings, and your nearest Bushfire Safer Place or Bushfire Last Resort Refuge call the Information Line

1800 362 361 (TTY 133 677)

National Relay Service 1300 555 727



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