

Bushfire Preparedness Procedure

Purpose

The purpose of this procedure is to outline the arrangements made by Sacred Heart School Casterton (Sacred Heart) to eliminate or reduce, so far as is reasonably practical, the risk of harm to members of the school community and property resulting from elevated fire danger condition including Catastrophic (Code Red) fire alert days.

Schools that have been identified as being at high fire risk and on the Department's Bushfire At-Risk Register (BARR) [DEET BARR Register](#) will close on days determined Code Red by the Emergency Management Commissioner. Sacred Heart has been identified as being one of those at high bushfire risk and is listed on the BARR.

Bushfire preparedness is not just a concern for schools listed on the Bushfire At-Risk Register. Student transport to and from school, participation in offsite activities including camps, excursions and sporting activities and the risk of localised fire events demonstrate the importance of bushfire preparedness for all schools.

Sacred Heart will therefore adhere to all relevant Catholic Education Commission of Victoria & Department of Education, Victoria guidelines where bushfires and Code Red Days are anticipated.

Scope

This policy applies to all members of the Sacred Heart school community, school sites and associated 'off site' activities including camps, excursions and sporting activities and service providers.

Legislative Context

- Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (Vic)
- Emergency Management Act 1986 (Vic)
- Emergency Management Act 2013
- CFA Act 1958 (Vic)
- Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017

Definitions

A complete lists of definitions relevant to this procedure is contained within the Health and Safety Policy.

Policy Statement

This policy should be read in conjunction with the school Emergency Management Plan which details management tasks, contacts and the roles and responsibilities of key

personnel.

Types of Fire Events

Code Red Days	Determined by the Emergency Management Commissioner, a Code Red Day is the highest level of Fire Danger Rating and signifies the worst conditions for grassfires and bushfires. Once a Code Red day has been determined this decision will not change, regardless of any changes in the weather forecast. School's not identified on the DEET BARR Register will remain open on Code Red Days. Those listed on the DEET BARR Register will close with appropriate arrangements communicated to parents and carers up to four days' in advance.
Total Fire Ban Days	School's will remain open on Total Fire Ban Days; however, the following arrangements will be made: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Lighting or use of fire in the open air is not permitted;• All open fires for the purpose of cooking are not permitted;• Hot-works such as metal works, grinding, welding, soldering or similar are not permitted without a permit;• Activities that have the potential to start are fire are not permitted

Actions

Emergency Management Plan

Sacred Heart maintains an Emergency Management Plan (EMP) that applies to all staff members, students, visitors, contractors and volunteers on site or participating in an off-site activity. The purpose of the EMP is to detail the roles, responsibilities and procedures to undertake in the event of any emergency, including bushfire.

The Principal will be responsible for:

- Ensuring that the EMP is reviewed at least annually and immediately after any significant incident. Emergency Management Committee (EMC) will be established including members of the Leadership Team to participate in the review.
- Ensuring that the EMP includes procedures for the planning and approval of offsite activities which consider the risk of bushfire in the activity vicinity.
- Cancelling or recalling at short notice if necessary any activity or excursion that occurs on a day of extreme fire danger or Code Red Day. Where excursions are not cancelled, special fire safety precautions will be required.

All staff will be responsible for:

- Ensuring they are familiar with the Emergency Management Plan and their responsibilities within it, including the procedures for bushfire response.

All Teaching staff will be responsible for:

- Ensuring they are familiar with emergency procedures for each excursion they participate in and in particular, emergency procedures pertaining to campsites. Emergency procedures should be explained to students as soon as practical after arrival at campsites.
- Planning for arrangements to be made if an excursion needs to be cancelled or recalled because of the threat of bushfire.

Evacuation Drills

Regular emergency drills should be conducted at least once per term and at different times of the school day and with different emergency scenarios. The purpose of the emergency drill is to:

- Familiarise staff and students with emergency procedures;
- Identify weaknesses in the management of the evacuation procedures;
- Assist staff and students to respond appropriately in an emergency;
- Equip staff to be sufficiently flexible to manage a range of different emergencies.

The Principal will be responsible for:

- Ensuring the practise of evacuation procedures and drills each school term and at least once per term during the October - April bushfire season;
- Ensuring all staff and all students regularly practice using the onsite refuge during drills and moving to it from a number of areas around the school;
- Providing information on the bushfire preparedness policy and procedures to staff (including relief staff);
- Providing information on bushfire preparedness to parents and guardians and issuing reminders of procedures during the Oct - April bushfire season;
- Maintaining notices of bushfire evacuation procedures and bushfire emergency contact numbers and locating them appropriately around the school;
- Ensuring training of staff with specific roles and responsibilities in preparing for, monitoring and executing emergency bushfire procedures, including the effective operation of relevant emergency equipment.

All staff will be responsible for:

- Ensuring they participate fully in all drills when conducted on their campus;
- Undertaking training provided by the school for any specific roles they have as part of the emergency management plan.

Self Assessment

Each year the Principal completes the Bushfire and Emergency Management Self-Assessment to assist the development and review of the schools Emergency Management Plan by identifying areas of concern.

Site Preparedness

Sacred Heart keeps a maintenance schedule and conducts regular maintenance on all buildings and facilities to ensure that they do not pose an increase risk in the event of a fire. Maintenance personnel also ensure that, where possible, items that may easily ignite are removed from the school site.

All maintenance staff will be responsible for:

- Completing the Planned Maintenance and Compliance Schedule of works in Oct and January of each school year to monitor and remove materials that may be regarded as bushfire hazards. This would include branches overhanging buildings, debris and rubbish around and under buildings including gutters and dry grass and vegetation.

All staff will be responsible for:

- Ensuring all flammable materials within their area of responsibility are identified on the schools chemical register and arranging for appropriate storage in flammable resistant cabinets
- Ensuring all buildings exits are continuously kept clear of obstructions. Staff should cooperate to maintain integrity of classroom and office exit points at all times.

Immediate Bushfire Threat

In the case of a bushfire threatening the school during a day of normal school attendance, where evacuation of all those on the school site in one trip cannot be performed, the Emergency Management Plan Bushfire Procedures will be enacted.

The school has an on-site Safer Location nominated in their Emergency Management Plan.

The Safer Location has been assessed and prepared for a bushfire emergency. It has access to emergency equipment, first aid supplies, communication systems, water and toilets and will safely accommodate all persons normally at the school. Emergency drills should include evacuation to this refuge from a number of areas around the school.

First aid materials and medical equipment are the responsibility of the first aid officer and communication systems must be maintained by the Principal and Monivae IT Services.

Essential Safety Measures

The Principal is responsible for:

- Maintaining the register updated at least once per school term during the October-April bushfire season of bushfire emergency equipment and ensuring it is in working order. (An updated register of bushfire emergency equipment, in working order, includes water supplies and equipment, extinguishers, alarms and fire blankets.) This information is supported within the Essential Services records.
- Ensuring that there is appropriate access to facilities and grounds for emergency vehicles.
- Ensuring all assembly points designated on the Emergency Management Plan have appropriate access to emergency equipment

Bushfire at Risk Register (BARR)

In addition to the requirements of this policy, schools listed on the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) Bushfire at Risk Register (BARR) must have in place a number of further procedures and processes. Schools considered to be at greatest risk of bushfire have been included on the DEECD Bushfire At-Risk Register and informed of their status on the register. Sacred Heart is listed on the BARR and must develop and maintain systems that show evidence of compliance with all requirements.

School Closure on Code Red Days:

When a Code Red Day is declared within the district, the school will be closed. Where practical; Sacred Heart will provide all parents and carers with up to four days' notice of a potential closure via letter or the relevant school application. Parents should, however, expect that in some instances fewer than four days' notice may be provided.

A Code Red day will be determined by the Emergency Management Commissioner no later

than 1.00pm the day before the potential closure. Once the school has been advised of the confirmation of the Code Red day, it will provide this information to parents/carers prior to end of the school day.

Once confirmed, the decision to close will not change, regardless of improvements in the weather forecast. This is to avoid confusion and help families plan alternative care arrangements for students.

It is also important to note that:

- No staff will be on site on days where the school is closed due to a forecast Code Red day.
- Out-of-school-hours care will also be cancelled on these days.
- School camps/excursions will be cancelled if a Code Red fire danger rating day is determined for the Bureau of Metrology district in which the camp or excursion is located.

On Code Red days, families are encouraged to enact their Bushfire Survival Plan if applicable. On such days children should never be left at home or in the care of older children.

The Principal will be responsible for:

- Directly advising parents and guardians of any planned closure as soon as possible and at least prior to the planned closure day. Information may also be published on the school website, newsletter and parent access module;
- Directly advising staff of any planned closure as soon as possible and at least prior to the planned closure day.

Staff will be responsible for:

- Advising any visitors or contractors known to them and normally expected on site on the day of a planned closure, as soon as possible.

Off-Site Activities:

The safety of students and staff members is paramount and off-site activities may be cancelled, postponed or relocated where the potential threat of bushfire has been determined. The Student Activity Locator (SAL) will be completed by supervising staff members prior to attending the off-site activity. SAL is completed on-line and registers the camp, excursion and sporting events etc. with the relevant education department.

The school Principal and supervising staff members will also regularly monitor forecast conditions for all off-site activities throughout the summer period. Where conditions are forecast to be extreme a decision will be made as to whether or not the activity will proceed.

Off-site activities planned to take place in district where a Code Red Day has been declared will not take place. When a Code Red Day has been declared after an off-site activity has commenced, i.e. during a camp, staff and students will be required to return to school.

Off-site activities include any activity undertaken by staff members and students away from their normal school facility. This can include camps, excursions, sporting activities and training or conferences for staff.

Promoting the Safety of Children with a Disability

Sacred Heart acknowledges that people with a disability have the same rights and responsibilities as other members of the community and should be empowered to exercise those rights and responsibilities. In particular, people with a disability have the same rights as other members of the community to live free from abuse.

The school will ensure that appropriate considerations are made for students with disabilities when making arrangements for events that have a bushfire risk. Likewise, students with a disability will be appropriately considered when making decisions about school closures.

Sacred Heart can promote the safety of children with a disability by:

- Acknowledging that children with a disability are particularly vulnerable and ensure our risk assessment processes considers their needs;
- Developing individual Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEP) to assist in the specific evacuation of students with a disability.
- Ensuring our school clearly demonstrates a zero tolerance to discrimination and actively welcomes all children;
- Making sure the environment does not pose access difficulties;
- Being responsive to families regarding specific measures that may be required to ensure the safe participation of a child with a disability;
- Supporting our staff, other children and their families to understand and be inclusive of people with a disability; and
- Thinking about how we can encourage participation and feedback from children with a disability and their families.

Consultation with Local Authorities

Schools listed on the bushfire at risk register must consult local agencies where relevant on their bushfire preparedness and comply with local bushfire regulation of buildings, facilities and grounds. A record of annual visitation or consultation should be maintained.

Parents and Guardians are responsible for:

- Providing the school with up to date emergency contacts and keeping them current throughout the year;
- Informing the school of any student absence on the morning of that absence prior to the commencement of the school day or in advance of an absence where possible. In the event of an extreme fire danger day, parents and caregivers may make an informed choice to keep students at home. The school needs to be notified of this decision as per the normal absence notification;
- Formulating their own family bushfire survival plan and informing the school if their plan includes picking students up from school during the school day and advising who will be responsible for picking up students; and
- Making alternate care arrangements for their children in the event of a planned Code Red Day closure. No child should be left at home alone or under the supervision of older children.

Supporting Documents

Internal Documents

- Emergency Management Plan (EMP)
- Planned Maintenance and Compliance Inspection Schedule

External Documents

- Victorian Bushfire At-Risk Register (BARR) [DEET BARR Register](#);
- Victorian Department of Education & Training (DET) – *Bushfire Preparedness*;
- Victorian Department of Education & Training (DET) – *Code Red Days*;
- Victorian Registration & Qualification Authority (VRQA) - *Guidelines on Bushfire Preparedness Registered Schools*

Responsibility

Approval Authority Responsible for monitoring the implementation, outcomes and scheduled review of this policy	Policy Sponsor Responsible for maintaining the content of this policy as delegated by the Approval Authority	Administration Responsible for the administration support for the maintenance of this policy as directed by the Policy Sponsor
Governing Authority	Principal	Compliance and Risk Manager

Promulgation

This policy will be communicated throughout the Sacred Heart school community in the form of:

- policies section of the Sacred Heart website;
- policy library section of the Sacred Heart intranet; and
- distribution of email to all staff.

Implementation

This policy will be implemented throughout Sacred Heart via:

- policy library section of the Sacred Heart intranet;
- staff briefing session; and
- training sessions.