

Policy number	030	Last Approved by Executive	August 2021
Drafted by	Mary-Anne Revell	Scheduled review date	August 2024
Responsible person	Steven Nicholas		

BUSHFIRE PREPAREDNESS FOR COLLEGE CAMPS, OFFSITE ACTIVITIES AND EXCURSIONS

Bushfire facts

Conditions when bushfires are likely to 'blow up' after being triggered by a source include:

- air temperature 26 degrees or more
- wind speed 30 kph to 70kph in gusts
- wind direction west-north/west
- previous dry spell or drought lasting some 6 weeks
- humidity low, less than 15%-20%

Other factors include vegetation type, dryness and denseness, the angle of slope and topography

- the speed of the fire approaching may be in excess of 100kph
- the front may typically extend 3-5km or more
- spot fires from air embers may be ignited up to 30 km away from the fire front
- fire burns move much more quickly uphill than downhill on the flat. Never try to outrun a fire uphill

NB. Firefighting crews may establish fire breaks in advance of a fire, so don't get caught between the two (communication with PARKS/CFA/000 is the key to avoiding this)

Preparation

Prior to undertaking an offsite activity in a bushfire risk area or season, organizing and supervising staff must ensure that there is adequate pre-excursion planning and emergency preparation, including preparing students undertaking the activity in anticipation of bushfire risk. A Risk Assessment must be completed and lodged at the office.

Preparation should include regular checks of CFA website for alerts; having a College based person monitor any developments and be in regular contact with those off site in the event of a developing situation; seeking advice from external activity organizer's and checking their own bushfire emergency preparedness; giving consideration to alternative sites/activities to reduce bushfire risk/hazard.

Complete list of all students, staff and others participating in an out of College activity and their times and location(s) must be provided to designated contact persons on the College site

Approval

Prior to the excursion the approval of the College executive must be obtained. In approving the excursion, consideration should be given to:

Contribution of the activity to the College curriculum

Adequacy of the planning, preparation and organization in relation to:

- College policy, guidelines and advice provided by the DEECD and in the safety guidelines for Education Outdoors website information provided by community groups and organisations that specialize in the activity proposed appropriateness of the venue
- consideration of seasonal and locality factors that might increase risk (ie bushfire season)
- provisions made for the safety and welfare of students and staff
- experience and competence of staff relevant to the activities being undertaken
- adequacy of student supervision

Offsite activities emergency management

All excursion staff and, where appropriate, students need to be familiar with the procedures for dealing with the emergencies on the excursion. Emergency procedures pertaining to campsites should be explained as soon as practicable after arrival and a trial evacuation exercise should be carried out immediately to familiarize staff and students with emergency evacuation protocols and ensure the procedures are appropriate.

On days of extreme fire danger, Principals may need to cancel excursions on short notice. Where excursions are not cancelled, special fire safety precautions will be required.

Bushfire protocols in the event of a fire with a potential to impact of an offsite activity. Once you have established that there is a fire in the vicinity, try to confirm whether it poses a threat to the group and ensure that you have everyone in the group together

If communication is possible, consider ringing PARKS VIC and/or CFA bushfire hotline to ascertain the location and severity of the fire. Make them aware of both the fire and your current location and planned travel route/times. Consider completing an INCIDENT COMMUNICATION FORM before calling them

If you think that the fire does pose a threat look at your potential options for complete evacuation or for moving to a much safer location. Look for open spaces free of forest fuels and vegetation, such as a beach or cleared area. If these are unavailable look for shelter amongst rocks, behind huge logs or in very wet gullies/creeks or on rocky outcrops, pre-burnt areas. Remember it is generally the 'radiation of heat that potentially kills'. If necessary, gather all students and staff into canoes and raft up on the water. Depending on your location and the conditions paddle to a safer landing. If this is not available, paddle to a safe distance (considering radiant heat and wind direction) and raft up while the fire passes.

Have group dress in woolens preferably and in long sleeves and pants, gloves, beanies, sunglasses as well as to breathe through a damp cloth held over the mouth/nose.

If time alert the COLLEGE as per EMERGENCY COMMUNICATION PROTOCOL sheet

- DO NOT RUN unless to a clearly indicated way of escape. Do not try to outrun the fire uphill If caught:
- CLEAR any leaves or vegetation near you;
- STAY in your chosen shelter until the fire has passed;
- COVER any exposed skin with clothing, soft earth, etc
- KEEP LOW and breathe air close to the ground

Only as a LAST RESORT, run through flames to burn ground. Wait for a lull and choose smallest flames with area behind that will have little burning material on the ground. Don't attempt flames higher than you!

If possible keep PARKS and EMERGENCY SERVICES informed of your situation and inform them, as well as the College, once the fire front has passed.

If Emergency Management Team called in, manage remaining students until they arrive to take responsibility

Staff to liaise with emergency crews to organize the remaining students return to the base with non-physically injured students to be looked after and reassured by a nominated staff person.

As soon as practical the Principal and Business Manager are to be informed of events.

Contact should then be made with PARKS VIC and/or CFA bushfire hotline or CFA website to ascertain the severity of the situation. Depending on the seriousness of the situation the decision will then be made to contact the DoE 24-hour Emergency Communication Centre to activate the Counter Disaster Committee.

Principal, Asst Principal or Business Manager should contact parents of affected students.

- Parents of affected students are to be kept informed.
- Parents of other students to be reassured that it is not their child that is involved and that everything is being done to help the group.
- Counselling to be set up for other students and family
- General media release to be prepared

Evaluation: This policy will be reviewed as part of the three-year review cycle