BUSH FIRE POLICY- VICTORIA

Bushfires are an inherent part of Australia's environment. Bushfires can significantly impact on lives, property and the environment. The basic factors that determine whether a bushfire will occur include the presence of fuel, oxygen, and an ignition source. The intensity and speed the bushfire will spread depends on the current temperature, fuel load (fallen bark, leaf litter, small branches), fuel moisture (dry fuel will burn quickly, damp or wet fuel may not burn at all), wind speed, and slope angle.

Emergency management arrangements for fire safety differ within each state and territory and are determined by the State Emergency Services or combined emergency service agencies. This policy reflects information related to Education and Care Services located in Victoria.

The National Law requires education and care services to ensure that every reasonable precaution is taken to protect children from any harm or hazard likely to cause injury, including bush fires. Regulations 97 and 168 (2) of the Education and Care Services National Regulations require that every education and care service in Australia has an emergency and evacuation policy and procedure which includes:

- a risk assessment to identify the potential emergencies that are relevant to the service
- instructions for what must be done in the event of an emergency and evacuation procedures
- an emergency and evacuation floor plan and
- the rehearsal of emergency and evacuation procedures every 3 months.

This policy outlines the strategies and procedures the Service will adhere to in the event of a bush fire, including information about Service closure during an emergency evacuation and forms part of our Service's **Emergency Management Plan (EMP).** The EMP records the emergency management arrangements to ensure every reasonable precaution to protect children, staff and visitors from harm and hazard is maintained at all times.

NATIONAL QUALITY STANDARD (NQS)

QUALITY AREA 2: CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND SAFETY		
2.2.1	Supervision	At all times, reasonable precautions and adequate supervision ensure children are protected from harm and hazard.
2.2	Safety	Each child is protected.

2.2.2	Incident and emergency	Plans to effectively manage incidents and emergencies are developed in consultation with relevant authorities, practiced and implemented.
QUALITY AREA 7: GOVERNANCE AND LEADERSHIP		
7.1.2	Management Systems	Systems are in place to manage risk and enable the effective management and operation of a quality service.

EDUCATION AND CARE SERVICES NATIONAL LAW AND NATIONAL REGULATIONS	
S.51	Conditions on service approval (safety, health and wellbeing of children)
S.167	Offence relating to protection of children from harm and hazards
S.174(2)(a)	Serious incident - Any emergency for which emergency services attended
S.174(2)(c)	Any incident that requires the approved provider to close, or reduce the number of children attending the service for a period
4	Definitions 'multi-storey building' and 'storey'
12	Meaning of serious incident
89	First Aid Kits
93	Administration of medication
97	Emergency and evacuation procedures
98	Telephone or other communication equipment
168(2)(e)	Policies and procedures are required in relation to: Emergency and evacuation
168	Education and care services must have policies and procedures
170	Policies and procedures are to be followed
175	Prescribed information to be notified to the Regulatory Authority

RELATED POLICIES

Administration of First Aid Policy Emergency and Evacuation Policy Family Communication Policy Health and Safety Policy	Incident, Injury, Trauma and Illness Policy Supervision Policy Work, Health and Safety Policy

PURPOSE

We aim to ensure every reasonable precaution is taken to protect children and staff from harm and hazards likely to cause injury, including potential injury from bushfires. The potential for extreme fire conditions varies greatly throughout Australia, both in frequency and severity. Each state and territory have varying mandatory regulations for implementing policies and procedures for being safe in areas

where bushfires occur. Our Service will adhere to the regulations outlined by the Department of Education (Victoria) and be familiar with relevant legislation and other special requirements such as building regulations, traffic restrictions or emergency announcements that may apply to the area our service is located.

SCOPE

This policy applies to children, families, staff, educators, management, approved provider, nominated supervisor, students, volunteers and visitors of the Service.

IMPLEMENTATION

It is vital for the Service to be informed and prepared for bush fire conditions and respond appropriately during periods of high fire danger or local bush fire activity. This policy, and related procedure, is to be implemented should a bush fire threaten our Service. During peak bush fire season, the nominated supervisor will monitor fire ratings through relevant authorities with all stakeholders as required. We are aware of our Fire Danger Rating and have appropriate fire safety equipment installed and maintained at all times. Our *Emergency Management Plan* (EMP) ensures all staff are trained to use fire safety equipment and through regular training, understand evacuation procedures in case of an emergency.

DEFINITIONS

The Australian climate is frequently hot, dry, and susceptible to drought. The widely varied fire seasons are reflected in the continent's different weather patterns. For most of southern Australia, the danger period is summer and autumn.

A '**Bush fire prone area'** is an area of land that can support a bushfire or is likely to be subject to bushfire attack. Bush fire prone maps are prepared by local councils and governments within each state and territory. Baseline data for bushfire prone areas is referred to as Bushfire Attack Level (BAL).

Bushfire at-risk register (BARR): a register listing schools, kindergartens and childcare facilities within Victoria. This register is managed through the Department's emergency and natural disasters area.

Fire danger rating (FDR): provides an indication of the possible consequences of a fire. This rating is standardised across all Australian states and territories. The higher the fire danger rating, the more

dangerous the conditions. Ratings range from *Low* to *Moderate*, to *Catastrophic*. FDR are maintained and updated by emergency services in each state or territory.

Emergency Management Plan (EMP): identifies the nature and range of possible emergencies and hazards to which children and staff may be exposed and the response and procedure in the event of an emergency. Effective planning and preparation of the EMP within the workplace ensures optimal response to emergencies should they occur. A risk assessment to identify potential emergencies that impact the service form the basis of the EMP.

THE APPROVED PROVIDER/ MANAGEMENT/ NOMINATED SUPERVISOR WILL:

- ensure obligations under the *Education and Care Services National Law and National Regulations* are met
- ensure educators, staff, students, visitors and volunteers have knowledge of and adhere to this policy and procedure
- ensure all new employees, students and volunteers are provided with a copy of this policy as part of their induction process
- ensure the *Emergency Management Plan* (EMP) is updated regularly and is inclusive of Emergency and Evacuation policies and procedures
- consult with relevant authorities for guidance and advice on the management of bushfire risk and emergencies
- establish an Incident Management Team (IMT) to lead the implementation of the Emergency and Evacuation Plan- (e.g., Chief Warden, planning officer, communications officer, operations officer) or in smaller services, assign multiple roles for educators/staff
- ensure a back-up communication device is kept in a permanent location and is always available in an emergency. Example: designated fully charged mobile phone
- conduct a risk assessment to identify a potential bush fire risk to the Service
- review the risk assessment at least every 12 months and following any incident
- ensure the risk assessment considers-
    - prevention measures the Service will take prior and during the bush fire period
    - procedures to be taken when there is a bush fire in the local district including onsite (shelter-in-place) and offsite evacuation procedures
    - response measures the Service will take if confronted with a bush fire hazard or emergency
    - identified evacuation assembly areas and evacuation routes

  - emergency communication arrangements in case of power outages- designated landline, designated mobile phone
  - what assistance will be required to evacuate children at the service (including non-ambulant children and infants)
  - whether the identified evacuation place is safe for children- (consider shade, location)
  - when evacuating children, if the weather is hot, do the children need footwear?
  - what to do with sleeping children, babies or children with addition needs during the evacuation?
  - what mechanisms are in place to ensure the transfer of real-time information, such as weather forecasts, bush fire activity, site closures and emergency operations
  - how parents will know where to locate their child if evacuated
  - procedures to ensure children are only released to persons authorised to collect them
  - mechanisms to ensure visitors and contractors are aware of the service's emergency response procedures
  - location of flammable substances/materials (gas storage bottles and fixed tanks)- ensure these are secured and controlled
- Laverton Community Children's Centre is not listed on the Bushfire-At-Risk-Register or on the at risk of grassfire register (category 4) https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/health/Pages/bushfirerisk.aspx
- ensure a current emergency and evacuation floor plan of the service with instructions for what to do in an emergency are clearly displayed in a prominent position near each exit of the Service (Reg: 97(4))
- ensure exit signs are displayed above emergency exits, emergency exits are free from debris and obstructions and are easy to open
- ensure emergency drills, including a bush fire drill and shelter-in-place on site are practiced with educators and children every 3 months [see *Bush Fire Response Procedure*]
- ensure a record is kept of each emergency evacuation drill practiced
- ensure the Service and educators are prepared for bush fire conditions and prepared to respond quickly and appropriately during high fire danger periods
- ensure all fire safety equipment is installed and maintained regularly- (fire extinguishers, fire panels, smoke detectors, long hoses with nozzles, buckets etc).
- ensure all fire safety equipment is easily accessible, has clear signage with operating instructions displayed and are clear of vegetation or debris
- ensure all outdoor taps are in working order

- communicate with staff, educators, and families about bush fire preparation information and provisions
- discuss the *Bush Fire Response Procedure* at team meetings and make any amendments as required
- ensure local emergency services have current contact details, including mobile number for emergency contact after hours
- ensure clear and effective communication procedures during an emergency are rehearsed to test their effectiveness in an emergency
- organise and communicate with off-site evacuation sites about emergency arrangements
- ensure the Fire Danger Rating (FDR) is checked daily. **Australian Government Bureau of Meteorology** http://www.bom.gov.au/?ref=hdr *or* **Country Fire Authority** *https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/warnings-restrictions/total-fire-bans-and-ratings*
- ensure gutters are cleaned out and free from dry leaves and other debris
- trim trees to 2m from the Service building (best practice recommendation)
- ensure boundaries, outdoor areas and driveways are clear of dry grass, long grass, dead vegetation, thick and continuous shrubs, leaves, dead limbs/trees and other combustible materials
- consult with neighbouring property/landowners or local council if neighboring properties pose a fire risk
- ensure driveways are accessible for fire emergency vehicles, clear of overhanging branches and archway structures
- ensure rubbish and recycle bins are secure with closed lids, emptied on a regular basis and located away from the Service's shelter-in-place location
- consider the Service's onsite (shelter-in-place) and off-site location ensuring it is accessible and can accommodate all children and staff, with access to toilets and water
- ensure flammable items are removed from the Service
- ensure all emergency exits are clear and accessible at all times
- conduct an emergency evacuation kit checklist to ensure emergency contact information and supplies are current
- ensure all records of attendance of children, staff, visitors and volunteers are accurate each morning
- ensure current emergency phone numbers are near the phone, and in the contacts of designated mobile phones, including emergency services and the Regulatory Authority
- monitor the bush fire situation when the rating is above High through internet or radio

- ensure the *VicEmergency* app is installed on designated Service mobile devices
- upon advice from relevant authorities (Department of Education or Fire Authority) not accept children for care on days when there is a catastrophic danger rating
- cancel any outdoor activities on days where air quality due to bushfire smoke may cause harm to children [see *Bush Fire Response Procedure*]
- be prepared for Code Red or Catastrophic fire ratings and consequent closure of the service if listed on the BARR or at risk of grassfire (Category 4) in Victoria
- notify the Regulatory Authority in the event of any closures or damage to premises within 24 hours or as soon as possible via the NQA ITS or phone if there is no access to the internet
- at a reasonable time after the incident has occurred, consider asking emergency services to review the service's incident response.

EDUCATORS WILL:

- assist in the development and review of the Service's Emergency Management Plan (EMP)
- examine the Service grounds during their daily indoor and outdoor safety checks to ensure flammable and/or combustible materials (e.g. dead leaves and bark, chemicals) have been removed
- ensure they are familiar with the daily Australian Fire Danger Rating System (AFDRS)
- ensure the emergency evacuation kit is organised and stored in an area that is easily accessible
- become familiar, confident with and implement the Service's emergency evacuation policies and procedures
- participate in emergency drills, including *Bush Fire Response* procedures at least every 3 months
- become familiar with the Service's emergency exits
- be aware of the designated assembly area/s
- eliminate all papers around the Service, including artwork, posters, displays and emptying garbage and recycle bins if advised that bush fires are in the local district
- keep up to date with professional development and training about bush fires, emergency equipment and emergency evacuation procedures
- be familiar with their role and responsibilities in the event of a bush fire.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT/REFLECTION

Our *Bush Fire Policy* will be reviewed on an annual basis in consultation with children, families, staff, educators and management.

RESOURCES

ACECQA Managing Emergency Situations in Early Education and Care Services

Australian Government Department of Education – Help in emergency

Be You resources- Bushfires and mental health

Country Fire Authority: https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/home

Country Fire Authority Fire Danger Rating updates https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/warnings-restrictions/total-fire-bans-and-ratings

Department of Education Victoria Emergency Management Plan 2023-2024 Template

Department of Education Victoria. Managing bushfire and grass fire risks in early childhood services.

Emerging Minds Bushfire preparedness for your family

Victorian Government. Early Childhood Services at the highest risk of fire danger are placed on the Department's Bushfire At-Risk Register (BARR). Inclusion on this register is a trigger for Early Childhood Services to pre-emptively close on days declared Code Red in their Bureau of Meteorology district

SOURCE

Australian Children's Education & Care Quality Authority. (2014).
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Community Early Learning Australia. Bushfire advice for children's services
Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010. (Amended 2023).
Education and Care Services National Regulations. (Amended 2023).
National Council for Fire and Emergency Services (afac). 2022. https://www.afac.com.au
Revised National Quality Standard. (2018).
Victoria State Government Education and Training. Emergency management requirements: https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/regulation/Pages/emergencymanagementrequirements.aspx

REVIEW

POLICY REVIEWED BY	Krystle Hills	Centre Manager	02/07/2024
POLICY REVIEWED	JULY 2024	NEXT REVIEW DATE	July 2025
MODIFICATIONS	• annual policy maintenance • additional reference to preparing a personal emergency evacuation plan (PEEP) for staff members or children with additional needs • specific territory information included in resource section • minor editing • sources checked and updated as required		

	• removed Appendix (these are available as separate documents in the CCD library)	
POLICY REVIEWED	PREVIOUS MODIFICATIONS	NEXT REVIEW DATE
March 2023	• annual policy maintenance • hyperlinks checked and repaired as required • minor formatting edits within text • Continuous improvement section added • Appendix 1 additional points	JUNE 2024