

Plan and Survive

You don't have to live in the country to be at risk of fire. If you live near areas that have significant bush, forest, long grass, or coastal scrub, then you need to plan ahead for the fire season.

Not everyone thinks clearly in an emergency and Council is encouraging all households to prepare a written, and preferably well-practised plan, to help residents remember what needs to be done during a crisis. To make the process easier, the Country Fire Authority (CFA) has done all the work for you.

There is an easy to use bushfire survival planning template on the CFA website at www.cfa.vic.gov.au/plan-prepare/your-bushfire-plan/ to help you write down your plan.

Just as every family or household is unique, every fire plan will be different and Coordinator Grants/Emergency Management (MRM), Penni Ellicott, said there were many ways to go about your planning.

“Would you remember a plan that's just in your head if you're surrounded by smoke, heat and flames? A written plan will take the pressure off you, and avoid arguments and delays,” she explained.

“In Gippsland the bushfire season is long and a written plan will help reduce uncertainty and anxiety.”

At an absolute minimum, the CFA is encouraging families to talk through the ten decisions below:

1. Which Fire Danger Rating is your trigger to leave?
2. Will you leave early that morning or the night before?
3. Where will you go?
4. What route will you take – and what is your alternative in the event that a fire is already in the area?
5. What will you take with you?
6. What do you need to organise for your pets or livestock?
7. Who do you need to keep informed of your movements?
8. Is there anyone outside your household who you need to help or check-up on?
9. How will you stay informed about warnings and updates?
10. What will you do if there is a fire in the area and you cannot leave?

In developing your plans, Mrs Ellicott said it was important to understand the definitions of 'leaving early' and 'staying to defend'.

“Leaving early means being away from high-risk areas before there are any signs of fire,” she explained. “Leaving early does not mean waiting for a warning or a siren - it does not mean waiting to see or smell smoke.”

Planning to stay and defend is a big decision. The CFA warns most homes in high-risk bushfire areas are not defensible on Code Red days. The Defending Your Property page on the CFA website can help you decide whether or not you are capable of defending your property – and tells you about the risks and preparations involved.

“Because fires can start and spread very quickly in some conditions, leaving early is by far the safest option for anyone in a high-risk bushfire area,” Mrs Ellicott advised.

“There are some invaluable resources available to help you and we encourage every household to use them. It could mean the difference between life or death.”

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