



FACTSHEET

BUSHFIRE RISK & READINESS

BUSHFIRE RISK & READINESS PROGRAM

The Victorian Government established the 2016-17 Bushfire Risk and Readiness Program to assess the condition of existing shelter-in-place buildings and undertake maintenance, using the latest bushfire protection building codes as a guide. This program built on the 2010-11 School Bushfire Protection Project, which undertook extensive site and engineering assessments at more than 200 schools. The 2016-17 program was extended to a further 156 schools on the Department's Bushfire At-Risk Register (BARR).

These works were aimed at improving the resilience of the shelter-in-place building in the event of a bushfire, and included:

- reducing the likelihood of ember attack;
- clearing vegetation near the building;
- enhancing weather sealing of doors and windows.

Exact works were contingent on the nature and location of each building, and are outlined in each school's assessment report, available on the [Schools Facilities Profile](#).

Although these works are designed to reduce the impact of bushfire ember attack to the shelter-in-place building, there is no guarantee that any building will survive a bushfire event. This is due to the unpredictable nature of bushfires and extreme weather events.

If you are not prepared to the highest level, leaving high risk bushfire areas early in the day is your safety option.

SHELTER-IN-PLACE

A shelter-in-place building is used only to provide temporary accommodation until emergency services arrive, or as a shelter of last resort if there is insufficient time or it is unsafe to evacuate.

A shelter-in-place building is not resistant to bushfires to the same protection level as a fire refuge. As such, the Department recommends the use of a shelter-in-place building only as a temporary measure or last resort if it is too late or unsafe to evacuate during a bushfire event.

A school's shelter-in-place building must be able to accommodate the whole school population and must be maintained for any bushfire events. A shelter-in-place must be identified in a school's Emergency Management Plan.



MAINTENANCE

Ensuring school premises are safe, secure and well maintained is a shared responsibility between schools and the Department of Education and Training. Schools should ensure that facilities and landscaping are maintained in preparation for any bushfire events, including:

- Regularly clearing gutters of leaves and other debris;
- Keeping the area around buildings free of vegetation to the recommended distance; and
- Ensuring fire shutters and ember mesh remain in good condition.

These activities should be undertaken regularly as part of each school's annual maintenance plan.

Refer to your school's assessment report on the [School Facilities Profile](#) for more information about recommended clear space and to identify any other items requiring regular maintenance.

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLAN

Bushfires and emergency events can have a big impact on people, property and communities across Victoria. Therefore, the Department requires all schools to have an Emergency Management Plan. This plan is followed during and after a critical incident or emergency to ensure the optimum safety of students, staff and visitors. Every government school in Victoria is required to nominate a building (or buildings) as a shelter-in-place as a part of their Emergency Management Plan.

All schools are required to maintain an Emergency Management Plan (EMP). This assesses the risk of hazards and potential threats to the school and must cover prevention, mitigation, response and recovery.

The EMP must be reviewed annually, and immediately after any significant incident, and must detail the school's response to managing bushfire risk including:

- closing the school on Code Red days
- on non-Code Red days in the event of a bushfire or elevated risk:
 - maintaining a heightened state of awareness
 - ensuring lines of communication from local emergency services are open
 - responding appropriately to instructions from emergency services
 - being prepared/on standby to enact their Emergency Management Plan by:
 - evacuating students and staff to an off-site safe area, and/or
 - relocating students and staff to the nominated shelter-in-place within the school if there is insufficient time or it is unsafe to evacuate.

BUSHFIRE AT-RISK REGISTER

Schools, kindergartens and childcare facilities at the highest risk of fire danger are placed on the Department's [Bushfire At-Risk Register](#). Facilities on this register close on [days declared Code Red](#) in their Bureau of Meteorology district.

Once closed due to high bushfire danger, NO-ONE is to remain on site.

For additional information about the Bushfire Risk & Readiness Program, please contact Kirsten Bell, Manager, Statewide Programs, Victorian School Building Authority, on 9651 3439 or by email at bell.kirsten.l@edumail.vic.gov.au.

Additional information about EMP is available on the Department's [Emergency Management Planning](#) page or by emailing emergency.management@edumail.vic.gov.au.