a guide to preparing yourself and your property for bushfires

PREPARE • ACT • SURVIVE
Foreword

Following the tragic events of Black Saturday in Victoria, Australian fire services have collaboratively developed a set of new bushfire safety initiatives designed to keep the community safe. These initiatives build on post-fire research conducted by the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre, and address some of the recommendations from the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission.

They include a Fire Danger Rating system that warns of the level of bushfire threat on any given day and bushfire warning alert levels that clearly outline what actions residents need to take. A national telephone-based emergency warning system is also being implemented to warn the public in the event of major emergencies, including serious bushfires.

This booklet, prepared by the Tasmania Fire Service, explains these new initiatives and provides valuable guidance to help Tasmanians prepare themselves and their properties for the bushfire season.

Tasmania Fire Service recommends that you should not plan to defend your home when the Fire Danger Rating exceeds 50 (severe) in your area unless you have created a defendable space and ember-proofed your home. Unless your home has a defendable space and has been designed and built specifically to withstand a bushfire, you should not plan to defend it if the Fire Danger Rating exceeds 75 (extreme) in your area.

Tasmania Fire Service recommends that you should not plan to defend any home when the Fire Danger Rating exceeds 100 (catastrophic) in your area, regardless of any preparations you have made. If a fire breaks out on these days, you should leave for a safe place well before the fire threatens your home.
living in or near bushland? – make sure you survive the next bushfire

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Cover photo courtesy of Mark Cullen.
bushfires in *tasmania*

If you live in or near the bush, your home is at risk from bushfire. Bush includes bushland, scrub, grassland, farmland, heath, marram grass and buttongrass.

You should use these pages to guide you through the steps necessary to prepare your home so it can be defended against bushfires, except bushfires burning on days of ‘catastrophic’ fire danger (new Fire Danger Rating).

Most bushfires in Tasmania occur during relatively mild summer weather and are easily controlled by firefighters. However, bushfires that break out on very hot, dry and windy days can spread rapidly and may be difficult or impossible for firefighters to control. These fires can burn large areas of forest and farmland, destroy homes and livestock, and sometimes kill and injure people.

A properly prepared home is more likely to survive a bushfire than one that hasn’t been prepared, and the chances increase significantly if able-bodied people are there to protect your home.

Properly prepared and defended homes can provide a safe haven during almost all bushfires.

However, Tasmania Fire Service recommends that you should not plan to defend your home when the Fire Danger Rating exceeds 50 (severe) in your area unless you have created a defendable space and ember-proofed your home. Unless your home has a defendable space and has been designed and built specifically to withstand a bushfire*, you should not plan to defend it if the fire danger rating exceeds 75 (extreme) in your area.

People should not plan to defend their homes under any circumstances on days when the Fire Danger Rating exceeds 100 (catastrophic) in your area.

The safest option always is to leave before a fire threatens your home. If you are not staying to defend your property, you should plan to leave early. Many people have died in bushfires because they have tried to relocate too late, and have been trapped and burnt in their cars or on foot. Fewer lives will be lost if people who choose to leave do so well before a bushfire threatens their home.

*Australian Standard AS 3959 *Building in Bushfire Prone Areas* or equivalent measures
fire danger rating (FDR)

The Fire Danger Rating (FDR) warns of the potential impact of a bushfire on any given day, based on forecast weather conditions. This summer the Fire Danger Rating will be widely publicised.

Categories Severe, Extreme and Catastrophic indicate a fire will be unpredictable, uncontrollable and fast-moving.

If a fire breaks out in Catastrophic conditions, people are urged to relocate to a safe place away from any fires, regardless of plans to stay and defend a property.

It is worth noting that the Fire Danger Rating on Black Saturday in Victoria on 7 February 2009 approached 200.

Ratings above 50 occur in Tasmania around three times a year. Ratings above 75 have occurred only half a dozen times in Tasmania during the last 90 years. However, with the impact of climate change, the potential for such days is increasing.

We strongly urge you take the time to review and understand the new Fire Danger Ratings so you can react appropriately to any FDR forecast.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIRE DANGER RATING</th>
<th>RECOMMENDED ACTION AND POTENTIAL FIRE BEHAVIOUR AND IMPACT</th>
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</table>
| **CATASTROPHIC** FDR 100+ | **ACTION:** Leaving is the ONLY safe option for your survival – regardless of any plan to stay and defend.  
• Some fires will be uncontrollable, unpredictable and fast moving.  
• Flames will be higher than roof tops.  
• Thousands of embers will be blown around.  
• Spot fires will move quickly and come from many directions, up to 20 km ahead of the fire.  
• Many people may die and be injured. Thousands of homes may be destroyed.  
• Well-prepared, constructed and actively defended homes may not be safe during a fire. |
| **EXTREME** FDR 75-99 | **ACTION:** Leaving is the safest option for your survival.  
• Some fires will be uncontrollable, unpredictable and fast moving.  
• Flames will be higher than roof tops.  
• Thousands of embers will be blown around.  
• Spot fires will move quickly and come from many directions, up to 6 km ahead of the fire.  
• People may die and be injured. Hundreds of homes may be destroyed.  
• Only well-prepared, well-constructed and actively defended houses are likely to offer safety during a fire. |
| **SEVERE** FDR 50-74 | **ACTION:** Leaving is the safest option for your survival.  
• Some fires will be uncontrollable and move quickly. Flames may be higher than roof tops.  
• Expect embers to be blown around.  
• Spot fires may occur up to 4 km ahead of the fire.  
• There is a chance people may die and be injured. Some homes will be destroyed.  
• Well-prepared and actively defended houses can offer safety during a fire. |
| **VERY HIGH** FDR 25-49 | **ACTION:** Only stay if your home is well prepared and you can actively defend it.  
• Some fires can be difficult to control. Flames may burn into the tree tops.  
• Expect embers to be blown ahead of the fire.  
• Spot fires may occur up to 2 km ahead of the fire.  
• There is a low chance people may die or be injured. Some homes may be damaged or destroyed.  
• Well-prepared and actively defended houses can offer safety during a fire. |
| **HIGH** FDR 12-24 | **ACTION:** Know where to get more information and monitor the situation for any changes.  
• Fires can be controlled.  
• Expect embers to be blown ahead of the fire.  
• Spot fires can occur close to the main fire.  
• Loss of life is highly unlikely and damage to property will be limited.  
• Well-prepared and actively defended houses can offer safety during a fire. |
| **LOW-MODERATE** FDR 0-11 | **ACTION:** Know where to get more information and monitor the situation for any changes.  
• Fires can be controlled easily.  
• There is little to no risk to life and property. |
bushfire warning
alert levels

Tasmania Fire Service will provide as much information about bushfires as possible, principally through its website www.fire.tas.gov.au and the media. It will use three levels of messaging to help people make the right safety choices.

However, remember that fires can threaten suddenly and without warning, so you should always be ready to act even if you don’t receive an official emergency warning.

Tasmania Fire Service messages take into account the risk posed by fire, which will depend to some extent on the Fire Danger Rating and how quickly bushfires are spreading.

Three types of alert messages have been developed:

**Advice** –
‘Bushfire Advice’ message – This will advise you that a fire has started but there is no immediate danger, and includes general information to keep you up to date with developments.

**Watch and Act** –
‘Bushfire Watch and Act’ message – This represents a heightened level of threat. Conditions are changing and you need to start taking action now to protect you and your family.

**Emergency Warnings** –
‘Bushfire Emergency Warning’ – This will indicate that people in specific locations are in danger and need to take action immediately as they will be impacted by fire. This message may be preceded by an emergency warning signal (a siren sound).

The three levels of messages have taken into account concerns about over-warning people. These concerns, coupled with a tendency for people to act at the last minute, have determined the choice of message levels. While the intent is to inform people before fires directly threaten them, fires can break out suddenly and without warning, making it impossible to get messages out in time on all occasions.

You should be aware of the forecast Fire Danger Rating each day during summer, and remain alert to the potential for bushfires to break out suddenly and spread rapidly. You should not wait for an official emergency warning if you are threatened by a bushfire.
A national telephone-based emergency warning system is being implemented this summer to warn the public in the event of major emergencies, including serious bushfires.

Under the national emergency warning system, emergency warning messages will be sent by emergency services as recorded voice messages to fixed phones and as SMS text messages to mobile phones.

Technology currently limits the system to sending messages to mobile phones based on the billing address, rather than where the mobile phone is at the time of the emergency.

If you receive an emergency warning about a bushfire or other emergency occurring near you on your fixed or mobile phone, act on the warning – it could save your life.
what it’s like in a
bushfire

Understanding what a bushfire is like will help you choose whether to leave if a fire threatens, or stay and defend your property, and prepare you for the conditions you might experience if you choose to stay.

Most bushfires in Tasmania that threaten homes burn on hot, dry days with strong, gusty winds. If a bushfire is burning towards you on a day like this, it will become increasingly smoky and difficult to see, and your eyes may temporarily become reddened and sore. Breathing in heavy smoke may be uncomfortable. As the fire gets closer, it will get darker and burning embers will begin to land around your home. The closer the fire gets, the more embers there will be. As the fire approaches, you will be able to hear it roaring. Burning embers will rain down on your home and collect in corners and on flat surfaces.

On catastrophic days, winds will be strong enough to blow roofs from houses, and bring down trees and power lines. These winds may occur well before a fire threatens, and cut off your means of escape.

As the fire reaches your home, the radiant heat from the flames may become unbearable, and you will need to shelter inside.

By the time the bushfire has passed and it is safe to leave the shelter of your home, the noise will have abated. Outside it will be very hot, smoky and windy.

You will need to wear appropriate clothing to protect you from radiant heat and embers that will continue to fall for several hours.

Fires look a lot worse at night than during the day, even though they are usually much milder at night.

Fighting a fire under severe, extreme and catastrophic conditions may be one of the most frightening things you ever experience. Many people who have successfully defended their homes in bushfires have later made decisions not to defend them again as they found the experience too traumatic. The strong winds created what they have described as an ‘ember storm’. Others have reported that under no circumstances would they expose their children to such an experience, while others have said that their average fitness levels were inadequate to cope with firefighting in the very hot and stressful conditions.

The risk of dying or being seriously injured defending a home under extreme and catastrophic conditions (Fire Danger Rating exceeds 75) is real. Many people have died defending their homes under these conditions, sheltering passively inside their homes or fleeing at the last minute.

Tasmanian homes under threat
why houses burn down in **bushfires**

Homes burn down in bushfires for one of the following reasons.

Flames and radiant heat from burning vegetation and other bushfire fuels too close to the home cause it to catch fire. Homes exposed to flames and radiant heat begin burning as the bushfire passes by.

**Homes with too much vegetation close to them are difficult to protect from bushfires.**

Burning embers collect on combustible surfaces or blow through cracks in a home’s external cladding.

Embers begin falling before the fire reaches the home, and may continue falling for several hours after the fire has passed. Often homes only exposed to this ember attack don’t burn down until several hours after the fire has passed. If residents are there, homes can be defended successfully.

**Well-prepared homes that are only subjected to ember attack can be defended by able-bodied people in most bushfires.**

**Unattended homes are three times more likely to burn down than homes that are actively defended.**

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why people have died in **bushfires**

Many people who have died in bushfires were caught by the fire in the open, either in their cars or on foot. Sadly, many were caught because they decided to flee at the last minute. In many cases, the homes they fled survived the bushfire.

Others have died when they have stayed to defend poorly prepared homes, while others have perished when they have stayed to defend generally well-prepared homes and properties unable to withstand a fire burning under extreme or catastrophic fire danger conditions.

Some fatalities were the result of remaining and sheltering passively in the home, which has then caught fire. Some sheltered in their baths, thinking this was a safe place to be, but were unable to get out of the bathroom and escape as their house burned down.

Others were unaware of the frightening conditions they would experience, and became overwhelmed and panicked, leading to poor decision-making.

A properly prepared home can be defended by able-bodied people under most conditions.

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**prepare to survive**
prepare a **bushfire plan**

If you live in or near the bush, you should make a plan that sets out what you will do to prepare your home for bushfire, and what you will do if a bushfire approaches. A written plan will help you think through the actions logically, and give you something to refer to if a bushfire breaks out nearby.

The plan should be prepared carefully and thoughtfully. Once you have prepared it, stick to it. If you have prepared your home and decided to defend it, don’t panic and flee in your car at the last minute – you will be much safer at home where you can shelter from radiant heat.

Your plan should include:

- The steps you are going to take to prepare your home for bushfire.
- If you are planning to stay, the steps you are going to take to make sure you can defend your home safely.
- The steps you are going to take to make sure you can leave early for a safe place (even if you are planning to stay).

The plan should also include what your family members should do if they are not at home, for example children at school.

Let your family, friends and neighbours know what you are planning to do.

Remember that if your home has not been prepared and is closely surrounded by flammable vegetation, there is a high probability that it will burn down if threatened by an intense bushfire, even if firefighters are there to protect it. Firefighters will concentrate on saving homes that can be protected with minimum resources and without putting lives at risk.

Therefore, regardless of whether you plan to stay with your home if it is threatened by bushfire or leave early for a safe place, the Tasmania Fire Service urges you to prepare your home so that it can be defended.

If you do not prepare your home and property so you can defend it against a bushfire, you should plan to leave early, well before fire threatens your home. Leaving early is always the safest option.
make a decision – will I stay or will I leave?

After preparing your home for bushfire and well before a bushfire breaks out, you should decide whether you will leave early or stay and defend your home if a fire breaks out.

Before making a decision, consider the following principles:

• The safest option is always to leave early rather than to stay and defend.

• Not all homes are defendable in all circumstances and you are advised to undertake an individual assessment of the defendability of your home.

• Unless a property is defendable you should leave early.

• You should consider the impact of topography, fire weather and fire intensity on the defendability of your home. Your home may be defendable when the Fire Danger Rating is, say, very high, but undefendable when the Fire Danger Rating is, say, severe. The table on p.3 describes what fires will be like at different fire danger ratings. Check your daily newspaper for the forecast FDR in your area.

• The risk of staying to defend includes the risk of physical injury and death.

• Contingencies are needed as well-prepared plans may fail.

• Even if you plan to stay, you should make preparations to leave, including the preparation of a relocation kit specifying the location of community fire refuges and other places you may go.

You should also consider the psychological impacts of staying to defend your home. Families with young children, older people and people with disabilities should plan to leave early. You should appreciate the dangers of leaving late, and understand that a warning may not be received.

Staying to protect a properly prepared home against most bushfires is a safe option for physically and mentally fit people.

Even for less intense fires, if your home has not been properly prepared and radiant heat from nearby vegetation makes it difficult to defend and unsafe to shelter inside, it will be safer to leave early for a safe place.

Remember, regardless of how well prepared your home may be, leaving early may be the best option for young children, the elderly or people with disabilities, people who are not physically fit, and people who do not feel comfortable about staying.

PEOPLE SHOULD NOT FLEE AT THE LAST MINUTE.

If you are going to defend your home and are likely to be away when a bushfire breaks out, you need to have a means of learning about the fire. When bushfires are likely to break out, you should regularly monitor the Tasmania Fire Service website, or the emergency broadcaster ABC Radio, and plan to return home as soon as it is safe to do so.
prepare your home – create a defendable space

Your home is more likely to survive a bushfire if you have prepared it properly. The most important job is to create a defendable space, an area around your home where you have modified the vegetation and removed most flammable material to reduce the fire’s radiant heat intensity. Flames and radiant heat from an approaching bushfire will be reduced, so sparks and embers will have less fuel to ignite when they land, and any spot fires will be easier to put out.

A defendable space makes it much easier to defend your home. And if you choose not to stay, a defendable space will help firefighters protect your home, or may even protect your home if firefighters cannot reach it.

Tasmania Fire Service recommends that you should not plan to defend your home when the Fire Danger Rating exceeds 50 (severe) in your area unless you have created a defendable space and ember-proofed your home.

Once a defendable space has been created, it needs to be maintained during each fire season to be effective.

A defendable space includes two ‘zones’:

- An inner zone where flammable materials are minimised.
- An outer zone where a low level of flammable material is permitted.

In the inner zone, flammable materials on, under and around your home should be moved away from the house. Use Table 1 opposite to work out the distance you need to apply.

In the inner zone:

- Include non-flammable areas such as paths, driveways, and mowed lawns.
- Use non-flammable mulch, do not use woodchips or bark.
- Locate any dams, orchards, vegetable gardens and any effluent disposal areas on the fire-prone side of the home.
- Use radiation shields and windbreaks such as stone or metal fences and hedges using low-flammability plants.
- Remove fire hazards such as wood piles, rubbish heaps and stored fuels.
- Replace all highly-flammable plants with low-flammability plants.
  (Contact Tasmania Fire Service to obtain a copy of the Fire Retardant Garden Plants brochure.)
- Prune lower branches on trees and remove flammable shrubs from under and between trees.
- Rake up bark and leaves and keep roofs and gutters clear of flammable debris.

It is not necessary to remove all vegetation from the inner zone. Individual trees rarely cause houses to burn in bushfires. And trees can screen a building from windblown embers while protecting it from radiant heat. Smooth barked trees are less likely to catch fire than those with rough bark. No tree should be able to fall on the home.
Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SLOPE</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>DEGREES</th>
<th>PERCENT</th>
<th>RATIO</th>
<th>GRASSLAND</th>
<th>FOREST</th>
<th>FOREST</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flat</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>10 metres</td>
<td>20 metres</td>
<td>15 metres</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Gentle</td>
<td>5°</td>
<td>9%</td>
<td>1:11</td>
<td>10 metres</td>
<td>20 metres</td>
<td>25 metres</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Moderate</td>
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<td>17%</td>
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<td>25 metres</td>
<td>30 metres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mod. - steep</td>
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<td>27%</td>
<td>1:3.7</td>
<td>15 metres</td>
<td>30 metres</td>
<td>45 metres</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Steep</td>
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<td>36%</td>
<td>1:1.27</td>
<td>15 metres</td>
<td>40 metres</td>
<td>50 metres</td>
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</table>

In the **outer zone**, small-sized natural fuels (such as leaf litter, bark, sticks, tussocks and some shrubs) should be removed and larger fuels (trees and shrubs) should be cut back to reduce the intensity of an approaching bushfire.

Natural fuels, both on the ground and between the ground and any larger trees, should be reduced by selective removal of vegetation, both horizontally and vertically, followed by ongoing maintenance.

In the outer zone:
- Retain established trees to trap embers and reduce wind speeds.
- Selectively remove small trees and shrubs to create clumps (rather than a continuous wall of trees) separated by open areas.
- Remove the vegetation between the ground and the bottom of the tree canopy, to a height of at least two metres.
- Minimise fine fuels at ground level, such as grasses and leaf litter.

There is no need to remove most trees as they are beneficial in trapping embers and reducing wind speeds, and will not be involved in a bushfire once the fuels on the ground and the understorey have been modified. Effective landscaping design should provide for safety while retaining a pleasant environment. The final impression from a distance is that all the vegetation has been retained, while up close the impression is of more open vegetation.

If you plan to remove bushfire fuels by burning them during a Fire Permit Period, you may need a permit issued by a Fire Permit Officer (call 1800 000 699). If it is a Non Fire Permit Period, contact your local council for information about local restrictions.

**More information:**
For more information about how to prepare yourself and your home for a bushfire, read the Tasmania Fire Service brochures *Using Fire Outdoors, Fire Retardant Garden Plants* and watch the DVD *Bushfire: Prepare to Survive.*
provide access for firefighters

In some cases, firefighters may be able to help you defend your home. If your home is set back from the road and a fire truck needs to use your driveway, it should have a minimum width of 2.4 metres, clear to a height of four metres. Any bush two metres either side of the driveway should be cleared as for the outer zone. The inner radius of any turns should be no less than 10 metres, and there should be adequate room at the end of the driveway for a fire truck to turn around.

provide water for firefighting

Whether you are staying to protect your home or leaving early, it is essential to have water available. Firefighters might need it even if you are not there.

Putting water on fires that threaten your home is the best way to extinguish them. However, during a bushfire, mains water pressure may drop or fail altogether.

Consider alternative water sources such as a nearby pond or dam, creek, swimming pool or water tank. The Tasmania Fire Service estimates that if you are relying on one of these alternative water supplies, in the most intense bushfires you may need up to 10,000 litres or 2,500 gallons of water to defend your home.

You should make it accessible by fire trucks, and it is advisable to have a 64 mm 5V thread male outlet fitted to the base of your water tanks to allow for direct connection by firefighters.

If staying and you rely on one of these alternative water supplies and an electric pump, this will be useless if power supplies are interrupted - a generator or a diesel or petrol-powered pump is an important backup.

Pumps can be heavy, so consider mounting the pump on a trolley to make it easier to move around. It is important that all those likely to stay and defend your property know how to start and operate the pump.

Caution: Petrol-powered pumps and generators are suitable if they are shielded from high ambient temperature, which is likely to cause petrol in the carburettor to vaporise and the engine to stall. Petrol engines in above or below-ground insulated boxes and well-ventilated under-floor spaces may continue to operate effectively.

Plastic tanks and pipes melt

Plastic tanks, exposed plastic pipes, fittings and hoses may melt in the heat of a fire - just when you need them the most. To avoid this:

1. Install steel or concrete tanks. If installing a plastic tank, ensure it is at least 30 metres from the bush, and not too close to any other fuels such as a woodpile, shed, shrubs and other flammable fuels.
2. Use metal pipes and pipe fittings rather than plastic fittings above ground, and
3. Bury any plastic pipes (PVC and poly pipes) at least 30 centimetres underground.
If you choose to leave

Even if you have decided to leave early for a safe place well before a bushfire threatens your home, you should take steps to prepare it for bushfire. If you do:

- Firefighters are more likely to defend it, and
- Even if firefighters are unavailable, your home will be more likely to survive on its own.

When and where to go

If you have chosen to leave your home if it is threatened by bushfire, you should leave early, hours before the fire reaches your home.

Many people who die in bushfires do so because they leave just before the fire arrives, are overrun by the fire in the open, are trapped by fallen trees and power lines, or crash due to poor visibility. If leaving, leave early, well before fire threatens your home and your escape route.

On days when extreme or catastrophic Fire Danger Ratings are forecast, winds are likely to be strong enough to bring down trees and power lines well before any fire threatens, making travel difficult. If there is the possibility of fire threatening your home, you should plan to leave well before gale-force winds develop.

When leaving, lock up your home and tell neighbours where you can be contacted.

Go somewhere safe, such as relatives or friends who live in areas that are not close to the bush. Or you might decide to spend the day shopping, at the library or at the beach.

If you have a shack that is well protected or not in the path of a bushfire, you may plan to relocate there for a few days.

If you have nowhere to go, listen to ABC Radio for the location of any community fire refuges. This should be a safe alternative place to relocate to. Leave in plenty of time to arrive safely.

How to get there

Plan the route you will take, and avoid driving in areas where fires are burning. If driving, make sure your car has enough fuel for the journey and is mechanically sound. If nervous about driving, consider using a taxi or asking a friend to collect you.

What to take

You should plan to be away from home for at least 24 hours, and if the worst happens and your home is destroyed, you should ensure that you have taken with you important documents and other valuable items and memorabilia.

Take cash and credit cards, insurance policies, family albums and other easily carried items of value. Take spare clothes and other items you would normally take on a short trip. Ensure you take sufficient water and food for the trip.

Pets can be frightened by bushfires. If possible, take them with you, or make sure they have plenty of water and food.
Getting back

Plan to return home as soon as it is safe to do so. Often homes don’t burn down until several hours after the fire has passed, so if you can return safely, you still may be able to save your home.

Be aware that fire trucks, fallen trees, power poles and wires and burnt bridges may close some roads for several hours or days. Electricity workers will be working to restore power supplies to affected areas as quickly as possible.

In some cases road blocks will have been established. This is because the area you plan to enter is unsafe. Take advice from the authorities and avoid trying to re-enter unsafe areas. Access may be restricted and residents may be unable to return home for several hours or days.

For details of road closures listen to ABC Radio or local radio stations, or visit the Tasmania Fire Service website.

If your home is destroyed, contact your local council for assistance in the first instance.
Community fire refuges & neighbourhood safer places

This summer the Tasmania Fire Service may identify a number of places close to areas at risk from bushfires where people may shelter during a bushfire.

Community fire refuges

People who have decided to leave early rather than defend their homes when threatened by bushfires, and have not decided where they will go, may choose to temporarily relocate to a community fire refuge. In most cases, community fire refuges will be located outside the area directly impacted by a bushfire. If within the fire impact area, they will provide shelter from a bushfire’s radiant heat, smoke and embers. Firefighters are likely to be in attendance.

Community fire refuges will usually be public buildings offering basic amenities, including temporary shelter, drinking water and toilet facilities.

The location of refuges will be announced by the Tasmania Fire Service when major fires threaten multiple homes.

Once the fire threat has passed, people may return to their homes or seek alternative housing in the event their homes have been lost.

Neighbourhood safer places

People who are unprepared to defend their homes and have left it too late to relocate to a safe place away from a bushfire may be able to relocate to a neighbourhood safer place.

The use of neighbourhood safer places at the last minute is not the safest option – people planning to leave should do so well before a fire threatens and go to a safe place away from the fire impact area.

Fleeing a bushfire at the last minute is extremely dangerous.

A neighbourhood safer place is likely to be an open area that offers some protection from radiant heat. Recreation grounds, golf courses, school yards, green fields, beaches and carparks may be used as neighbourhood safer places. If possible, people using these places should shelter in their cars from burning embers, parking as far as possible from flammable vegetation.

Sheltering at a neighbourhood safer place may be uncomfortable, even basic facilities may be unavailable, and firefighters are unlikely to be in attendance. Neighbourhood safer places will be identified in consultation with local communities, and their whereabouts made widely known within communities.

Once the fire threat has passed, people may return to their homes, or seek alternative housing in the event their homes have been lost.
When the fire arrives, shelter inside

if you choose to stay

Tasmania Fire Service recommends that you should not plan to defend your home when the Fire Danger Rating exceeds 50 (severe) in your area unless you have created a defendable space and ember-proofed your home. Unless your home has a defendable space and has been designed and built specifically to withstand a bushfire, you should not plan to defend it if the Fire Danger Rating exceeds 75 (extreme). Tasmania Fire Service recommends that you should not plan to defend any home when the Fire Danger Rating exceeds 100 (catastrophic) in your area, regardless of any preparations you have made. If a fire starts on these days, you should leave for a safe place well before the fire threatens your home.

Personal protection

If staying to defend your home against bushfires, it’s important to protect yourself from radiant heat and from the numerous embers the fire will generate.

Wearing the clothing you would normally wear on a hot summer day will not provide you with protection during a bushfire.

Wear clothing made from natural fibres (cotton or wool), such as overalls or a long sleeved cotton shirt and cotton trousers or jeans. Wear leather boots and a wide-brimmed hat or safety helmet. Cotton or leather gardening gloves will protect your hands and goggles or safety glasses will help keep sparks and embers out of your eyes. A good dust-mask will help protect your throat and lungs.
As the fire front passes your home, it may be necessary to shelter inside from the radiant heat and ember attack.

If possible, keep clear of large windows on the side of the house nearest the fire or you may be injured by breaking glass.

The coolest place is likely to be on the side of the house furthest from the fire. Don’t shelter in a part of the house you cannot easily escape from if your home catches fire, such as the bathroom, which often has windows too small to squeeze through.

Only leave your home if it catches fire and you are forced out, or when it is safe to leave. Put out any fires burning on or near the outside of your home. A wool blanket will give you added protection from radiant heat.

**Firefighting equipment**

If you create a defendable space around your home and choose to stay and defend it, your chances of success will improve if you have some basic tools available.

As a minimum, you should have a ladder for access to roof gutters and into the roof space, a torch for moving safely inside the roof space, a hose and fittings, a rake and a strong bucket. A wet mop can be handy for putting out embers and small fires.

If you can’t rely on mains water and have an alternative supply, you should purchase a small firefighting pump and hose. Look under ‘fire protection equipment’ in the Yellow Pages. A pump kit should include the pump and its petrol or diesel-driven motor, a suction hose, strainer and float (to get water to the pump), sufficient 19 mm or 25 mm diameter firefighting hose or 19 mm garden hose to reach around all sides of your home, a firefighting nozzle for each hose, and spare fuel. Practice using the equipment regularly.

During the fire, make sure that the pump and hose are protected from high ambient temperatures and radiant heat and sheltered from embers and sparks. Any plastic pipes and fittings should be buried below ground or covered so they won’t melt.

Smaller fire-fighting pumps should be taken inside as the main fire front passes. Larger fixed pumps should be protected with a non-combustible cover or pump-housing.

**Protecting your home**

The biggest threats to your home in a bushfire are radiant heat and burning embers. The defendable space you create will reduce the radiant heat to acceptable levels. However, you need to make sure your home is protected against ‘ember attack’.

Embers will build up on horizontal surfaces, particularly in corners. They can enter your home through small gaps around window and door frames, eaves, cladding and roofing. Timber decks can be ignited, particularly if embers can build up beneath them.

Small gaps should be sealed with protection strips or non-combustible filler, and larger under-deck areas should be protected with non-flammable screens.

Measures to ember-proof your home should be taken well before the beginning of summer.
If a bushfire is burning nearby and you have chosen to stay:

1. Listen to ABC Radio for news of the bushfire (use a transistor or car radio if the power is off), or visit the Tasmania Fire Service website.
2. Dress in protective clothing.
3. Drink water every 10 minutes to avoid dehydration.
4. Clear roof gutters of leaves and sweep or rake leaves from decks and lawns near the house.
5. Block your downpipes (a sock full of soil/sand will help) and fill your gutters with water.
6. Move flammable outdoor furniture, doormats and hanging baskets away from your home.
7. Close all doors and windows, remove curtains and close shutters if you have them.
8. Put tape across the inside of windows so they remain in place if broken.
9. Fill the bath and any buckets and containers with water.
10. Put a ladder inside to access the roof space.
11. Connect garden hoses and prepare your firefighting pump or generator.
12. Extinguish any sparks, embers and spot fires burning on or close to your home. A hose or a wet mop is handy for this.
13. Don’t stand on the roof with your hose. In bushfires, often more people are injured falling from roofs than suffer burn injuries.
14. Don’t waste water wetting down roofs and walls. Use the water only for extinguishing burning material.
15. Ensure all family members and pets are safe. You should consider relocating children, other vulnerable people and pets well before the fire arrives.

When the fire arrives:

1. If you need to shelter, store your pump and firefighting hose where it won’t get burnt.
2. Take a garden hose and fittings inside and fit them to a tap in the laundry.
3. Check around the inside of your house constantly for fire, including in the roof space.
4. If fire breaks out, extinguish it using water you have collected in the bath and in buckets or with the hose attached to your laundry taps.

Once the fire has passed:

1. Extinguish any part of your house that is alight. Your neighbours may be able to help.
2. Check under the house and any decks, on the roof and inside the roof space. Check around window frames and door jambs, and under the eaves for any fire.
3. Sparks and embers will continue to fall, so keep checking for several hours.
4. Have a drink of water every 10 minutes to avoid dehydration.
if it gets hotter than expected ...

A well-prepared home will protect you from a bushfire’s radiant heat in most circumstances.

**Do not attempt to flee in your car at the last minute.**

If you are defending your home against a bushfire and it catches fire and you can’t put it out, you will need to leave before toxic fumes overcome you. If it is unsafe to leave immediately, close all interior doors and shelter inside at an exit as far from the fire as possible. Leave once it is safe outside, and before it becomes unsafe inside.

Relocate to a safe place nearby. If necessary, shelter from radiant heat. This might be in your vegetable garden, the park across the street or your next door neighbour’s house. You should identify this ‘safe haven’ in your bushfire protection plan. Choose a place that is very close, will be safe to get to and will be safe when you get there.

Fleeing at the last minute can be fatal
### Home and Property Preparations

- Non-flammable areas (paths, driveways, lawns) installed around the home
- Vegetable garden, orchard and dam located on fire-prone side of home
- Wood piles, rubbish heaps and other fuels removed to a safe distance
- High-flammability plants replaced by low-flammability plants
- Lower branches of trees in inner zone pruned (see table below)
- Flammable shrubs under and between trees in inner zone removed
- Shrubs and small trees in outer zone selectively removed
- All vegetation under trees in the outer zone removed to a height of at least 2 metres
- Roof and gutters cleared of leaf debris
- Dry leaves and bark removed from lawns and gardens in the inner and outer zones
- Areas under decks and floors enclosed
- Vents into roof space screened with fine wire mesh
- Gaps in external roof and wall cladding sealed

### Water Supplies and Fire-fighting Equipment Preparations

- Firefighting water supply
- Firefighting pump, hoses and nozzles, buckets, mop, rake
- Ladder and torch
- Battery-operated radio

### Personal Protection (for all who are staying)

- Bushfire plan prepared and well understood by all
- Long trousers and long sleeve shirt (cotton or wool)
- Sturdy leather boots and leather or cotton gloves
- A helmet or broad brimmed hat with neck strap
- Close-fitting goggles or other protective eye wear
- A face mask or handkerchief to tie over the nose or mouth
- First aid kit
- Adequate drinking water supplies

### Action When Fire Breaks Out If Leaving

- Pack planned belongings into car and leave in accordance with bushfire plan, if safe to do so – many hours before the fire arrives
checklist

** ACTIONS WHEN FIRE BREAKS OUT IF STAYING **

- Prepare fire pump and attach garden hoses to taps
- Remove garden furniture, door mats and other flammable items from adjacent to home
- Check roof and gutter for leaf debris and clear
- Plug all downpipes (using sock filled with sand/soil), and fill gutters with water
- Fill baths, sinks and buckets with water
- Remove dry leaves and bark from lawns, gardens, decks, patios etc
- Close all doors, windows and window shutters
- Ensure all family members and pets are safe
- Place wet towels and blankets against gaps under doors and windows
- Dress in appropriate clothing and drink water frequently
- For news of the fire’s progress, listen to ABC Radio or access www.fire.tas.gov.au

** ACTIONS WHEN THE FIRE ARRIVES **

- Extinguish sparks, embers and spot fires close to home
- When too hot to stay outside, go into the house to protect yourself from radiant heat
- Take fire fighting equipment, ladder, hose and fittings inside
- Connect hose to laundry tap
- Check inside the house and in the roof cavity for any fires
- Extinguish any fires that break out inside

** ACTIONS AFTER THE FIRE HAS PASSED **

- Go outside as soon as possible and extinguish any fires posing an immediate threat to your home
- Patrol your home for several hours and douse any embers that land on or near your home
- Check the roof cavity frequently from inside your home for any fires
- Drink water frequently to avoid dehydration
- Help your neighbours if possible

This is a guide only. For more information about how to prepare yourself and your home for a bushfire, read the Tasmania Fire Service brochures Bushfire: Prepare. Act. Survive. Using Fire Outdoors, Fire Retardant Garden Plants or watch the DVD Bushfire: Prepare to Survive.
For a copy of the free DVD *bushfire prepare to survive* please call 1800 000 699 or visit the website: www.fire.tas.gov.au

Please visit our website or call 1800 000 699 for more information on:

- Preparing yourself and your home for a bushfire
- Guidelines for development in bushfire prone areas in Tasmania
- Fire retardant plants for the urban fringe and rural areas
- Using fire outdoors
- Fire permits
- Total fire bans
- Bushfires burning in Tasmania (or listen to local ABC Radio)

While the State Fire Commission has made every effort to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the information contained in this booklet, the State Fire Commission does not accept any responsibility for the accuracy, completeness, or relevance to the reader’s purpose, of the information contained in this booklet and those reading it for whatever purpose are advised to verify its accuracy and to obtain appropriate professional advice. The State Fire Commission, its officers, employees and agents do not accept any liability, however arising, including liability for negligence, for any loss or damage resulting from the use of, or reliance upon, the information contained in this booklet. © Copyright Tasmania Fire Service 2009

www.fire.tas.gov.au
In an emergency dial 000