



State Fire Commission

POLICY STATEMENT Number 1- 07

BUSHFIRE TRIAGE FOR BUILDINGS

Triage in a bushfire context is the sorting of buildings at risk of burning. This enables often limited firefighting resources to be deployed safely and in sufficient quantity to places where they will be most effective. For defendable buildings, the focus for firefighters will be on protecting dwellings and commercial buildings. Consequently, small sheds and out-buildings may not be protected when firefighting resources are limited.

Buildings will be sorted according to their level of 'likely defendability'. Defendability depends on a number of factors including building features and condition, fuels, fire behaviour and available firefighting resources.

The defendability of a building is affected by fire behaviour at the time of fire impact and the direction from which a fire approaches. These factors cannot be established with certainty until shortly before impact. Hence the defendability of any building and the triage category assigned to it may vary over time.

When undertaking triage, buildings and other features will be assessed for the adequacy of defendable space, access and water supplies for firefighting.

Firefighters will note the advice below about fire danger ratings and the defendability of buildings by civilians, and make a judgement as to the defendability of a particular building by firefighters and/or civilians based on the conditions expected at the time of impact and other relevant circumstances.

Such an approach recognises that in some circumstances, even homes that have not been constructed to withstand a bushfire have been successfully defended by civilians, firefighters or both, even under catastrophic fire danger conditions.

The fire danger index (FDI) indicates the likely level of fire severity. The level of defendability decreases as the FDI increases.

For LOW-MODERATE fire danger (FDI 0-11)

There is little risk to people and property. Residents should ensure their properties are well-prepared for the risk of bushfire.

For HIGH fire danger (FDI 12-24)

People in the path of a fire are unlikely to be killed or seriously injured if they take shelter. Well-prepared and actively defended homes can offer safety during a fire.

Residents in bushland areas who don't plan to defend their home should prepare to leave for a safer place, and leave well before fire threatens their home.

For VERY HIGH fire danger (FDI 25-49)

There is a possibility that people in the path of a fire may be killed or seriously injured. Some buildings may be destroyed. However, well-prepared and actively defended buildings can offer safety during a fire.

Residents in bushland areas who don't plan to defend their home should prepare to leave for a safer place, and leave well before fire threatens their home.

For SEVERE fire danger (FDI 50-74)

People in the path of a fire may be killed or seriously injured. Some buildings are likely to be destroyed. However, well-prepared and actively defended buildings can offer safety during a fire.

Residents in bushland areas should not plan to defend any building unless it has a defendable space and is ember-proof. Residents who don't plan to defend their home should prepare to leave for a safer place, and leave well before fire threatens their home.

For EXTREME fire danger (FDI 75-99)

People in the path of a fire may be killed or seriously injured. Many buildings are very likely to be destroyed. Only well-constructed, well-prepared and actively defended buildings are likely to offer safety during a fire.

Residents in bushland areas should not plan to defend any building unless it has a defendable space and has been designed and built specifically (to AS 3959 or similar) to withstand bushfire.

Residents who don't plan to defend their home should prepare immediately to leave for a safer place, and leave if fire breaks out or is burning nearby. Residents should leave well before fire threatens their home.

For CATASTROPHIC fire danger (FDI > 100)

There is a high likelihood that people in the path of a fire will be killed or seriously injured. Many buildings are very likely to be destroyed. Even very well-prepared buildings may not be safe.

Residents in bushland areas should not plan to defend any building, regardless of any preparations they have made. Residents should prepare immediately to leave for a safer place, and leave if fire breaks out or is burning nearby. Residents should leave well before fire threatens their home.

TRIAGE CATEGORIES

Buildings that have been assessed will be assigned one of the following triage categories:

UNDEFENDABLE (Red)

Firefighters will not defend the building because:

- the building does not have sufficient defensible space to withstand the expected fire severity, or
- the condition of the access way prevents firefighters or civilians getting to or from the building safely, or
- there is insufficient water available for firefighting, or
- for any other reason, the building is unlikely to survive a bushfire even if civilians and/or firefighters stay to defend it.

All who stay face an unacceptable risk of harm. Firefighters will encourage any remaining civilians to relocate to a safer place.

DEFENDABLE WITH FIREFIGHTER ASSISTANCE (Orange)

Subject to relevant Community Protection Plans and TFS's position on operational priorities during bushfires, firefighters may defend the building because it has defensible space, can be accessed safely, there is sufficient water available and:

- occupiers are absent or have advised that they will be absent, or
- occupiers have advised that they will stay and defend it but firefighters have assessed that they will need assistance.

Any additional resources or water required may be provided by firefighters. The level of assistance and firefighting resources provided will depend on the level of threat expected at the time of impact.

All who stay face an acceptable risk of harm if properly prepared and equipped.

If adequate firefighting resources are unavailable, the building will be categorised as 'undefendable'.

DEFENDABLE WITHOUT FIREFIGHTER ASSISTANCE (Green)

Firefighters will not need to defend the building because it has sufficient defensible space and firefighters and occupiers are confident that civilians who are planning to stay have the necessary resources to defend it safely.

All who stay face an acceptable risk of harm if properly prepared and equipped.



Mike Brown
Chief Officer

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