

# Bush Fire / Wildfire Preparedness Policy

Policy No. 7

Approved by School Board  
October 2023

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## Rationale

It is important that all students are safe at Kerang Christian College, as set out in the Student Pastoral Care Policy (Policy no. 8).

Bushfire preparedness is not just a concern for schools listed on the Bushfire At-Risk Register. Student transport to and from school, participation in offsite activities (including camps, excursions and sporting activities) and the risk of localised fire events demonstrate the importance of bushfire preparedness for all schools.

As a bushfire may present a threat to student and staff safety, clear and consistent procedures are required for general preparedness for the fire season different types of Fire Danger Ratings and unpredicted bushfire threats.

These procedures have been designed to ensure that preventative strategies are implemented and to ensure that students and staff are prepared to respond in the event of a bushfire. This response may include pre-emptive planned closures of the College, evacuation or what to do in the event that evacuation is unsafe.

The preparation of this plan has been developed in accordance with the Kerang Christian College *Emergency Management Plan*.

## General Information

The Bushfire Plan is to be reviewed annually to reflect any changes that may have taken place in:

- Department of Education or government policy
- VRQA minimum standards
- Site facilities
- Personnel normally on site.

The Bushfire Plan also outlines activities to be undertaken by staff and students at the different levels of a bushfire emergency:

- on days of Total Fire Ban
- 'Catastrophic'
- When there is a fire in the local district
- When a bushfire is threatening or impacting the site
- During the period immediately after a bushfire has impacted on the site (known as the 'Recovery Phase').

Where applicable, a building is nominated as the **Safer Location** building for this school. The Primary School building is the default Safer Location for Kerang Christian College.

- This building has been prepared for a bushfire emergency and will safely accommodate all persons normally at the school.

The Principal or delegated officer will forward a copy of the Bushfire Plan to the local police and fire authorities for endorsement to ensure that safe and correct procedures have been identified for use during emergencies.

The Principal or delegated officer will forward a copy of the Bushfire Plan to all families of students of the site at the beginning of Term 1 each year. This may be published in the form of a Student Handbook or on the College website.

The Principal will ensure that all new staff members, relieving staff and visitors are briefed about the requirements of the Bushfire Plan during the site induction process.

The Principal will include bushfire season reminders and information in College newsletters in each of the school terms when applicable.

All staff members receive pre-fire season updates during Term 3 and ongoing information and instruction about the contents and requirements of the Bushfire Plan during Term 4 and Term 1 staff meetings.

### **Identifying the Risks**

- The school is at some risk each year during the bushfire season. It is particularly vulnerable to the west with a large area of dry grass located in this area. The north/north-west winds during the summer months increase the risk associated with a potential grass fire.
- The gas cylinders next to the Science Lab presents a risk of exposure to hazardous fumes, possible explosion and fire should a leak occur.

### **Communication**

There are several levels of communication requirements at school level before, during and after bushfire events.

### ***Preparing for Bushfire Season***

- The Principal must ensure all students and staff are aware of the School's bushfire response plan. It is also necessary to ensure that relief staff and parents have been made aware of the school's Bushfire Plan.
- The Principal should establish contact with emergency services, including the local volunteer fire brigade and police.
- Communication plans (including emergency contacts and a telephone tree) need to be in place for evacuation or planned closure.
- The School has an effectively working emergency warning or alert system and emergency communication equipment is available and working.
- The School has in place systems to account for students, staff and visitors in an emergency, such as class rolls (or equivalent) and visitor registers. Consideration should be in place for situations such as a loss of power affecting the ability to print from electronic sources.
- Arrangements are in place in relation to school buses if appropriate (notification of contractors if pre-emptive closure is invoked; the availability of buses if off-site evacuation is required).
- The College is required to manage materials that may easily be ignited around buildings and facilities. The College Maintenance Plan requires a schedule for monitoring and removal of materials that may be easily ignited including branches overhanging buildings, debris and rubbish around and under buildings including gutters and dry grass and vegetation.

- The College also requires the safe storage of flammable materials.
- The Maintenance Plan also calls for the ongoing monitoring of emergency access to buildings and grounds.

### ***Pre-emptive Closure***

- The Principal is to notify staff and parents using emergency contacts.
- All other necessary parties are advised including (but not limited to) other schools that may have siblings at your school, community users of the school facilities and on site contractors.
- If appropriate, bus contractors will be contacted to arrange for the evacuation of students to a designated area.
- Notice of Planned Temporary School Closure should be posted both physically at the school and electronically on the website.

### ***During Evacuation***

- The school will contact parents via phone, sms or email.
- The school will notify bus contractors.
- The school has landlines and a mobile phone. It would be preferable that parents restrict calling the school at this time to emergency calls only.

The Principal communicates directly with media as per the College Media Policy. Staff should not comment directly to media.

### ***Reopening the School***

- The Principal will advise the school community when the school will re-open.
- Parents need to know when the school is reopened.
- The Notice of Planned Temporary School Closure should be physically removed from the school premises and website.
- All parties that were advised of closure (e.g. Bus Contractors, Out of hours users) should be advised of reopening.

## **Types of Fire Event**

### ***1. Total Fire Ban***

In the event of a Total Fire Plan the **Bushfire Plan** will be invoked.

This means:

- you must not light or use any fires in the open air;
- all open fires for the purpose of cooking or camping are not allowed;
- 'hot work' such as metal work, grinding, welding, soldering, gas cutting or similar is not allowed unless you have an exemption; and
- you must not undertake any other activities that may start a fire.

It is also necessary to ensure:

- All reasonable precautions are taken to prevent a bushfire starting.

## 2. CATASTROPHIC FDR

In September 2022, a new fire danger forecasting system was introduced. The Australian Fire Danger Rating System (AFDRS). [Australian Fire Danger Rating System \(AFDRS\)](#). If a fire starts in Catastrophic conditions, its impact potential includes death or injury to people and destruction of buildings.

In the event of a Catastrophic weather warning the **Bushfire Plan** will be invoked as per the flow chart at Appendix 2.

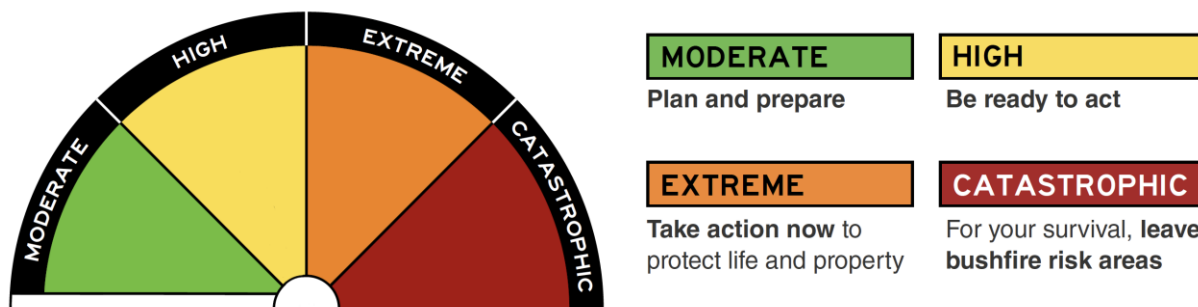


Illustration: Australian Fire Danger Rating System (AFDRS)

Fire Danger Rating	Key messages for the community
<b>Catastrophic</b>	If a fire starts and takes hold, lives are likely to be lost. For your survival <b>leave bushfire risk areas.</b>
<b>Extreme</b>	Fires will spread quickly and be extremely dangerous. <b>Take action now</b> to protect your life and property.
<b>High</b>	Fires can be dangerous. <b>Be ready to act.</b>
<b>Moderate</b>	Most fires can be controlled. <b>Plan and prepare.</b>

### 2.1 Planned Pre-emptive Closure

The lead time for a planned closure varies depending on weather patterns, but every attempt is made to provide as much notice as possible to prepare written documentation for parents.

The Principal needs to send communication to parents and provide each staff member with a memo that clearly states when the closure is planned to occur and that the school is on standby. It may be that between declaration of the closure and the day of closure, weather conditions improve sufficiently to remove the need to close and the school can therefore stand down its pre-emptive closure plans. The Principal will make a final decision to close the school no later than 4:30 pm the day before the planned closure. If weather conditions become less severe after 4:30 pm, the closure goes ahead regardless, in order to provide a level of certainty to parents.

Communication can be provided via on the College Facebook page as well as through the College electronic messaging services.

### 2.2 During a Planned Closure

The Principal must stay informed of current fire danger rating and any fire activity by monitoring local media (local radio, especially the ABC, and television) and by regularly checking for updates with the CFA at [www.cfa.vic.gov.au](http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au).

## **2.3 Re-opening the School**

Parents need to know when the Catastrophic (AFDRS) has been downgraded and that it is therefore safe for their children to return to school after a planned closure. The template letter to parents contains advice on how parents can monitor the situation. The school will need to put communication plans in place, such as placing a notice on the College Facebook page as well through college electronic messaging services and providing a number for parents to call for information about the reopening of the school. Consideration needs to be given to how parents who do not have Internet access or who have diverse needs (e.g. multicultural, special needs) will be provided with information.

## **BUSHFIRE PLAN**

### **3. Bushfire**

In the event of a bushfire threatening the school, the school will notify local fire department by calling 000 and the **Bushfire Plan** will be invoked by way of the school emergency siren.

#### **3.1 Bushfire- Watch community**

During a bushfire, Emergency Services provide as much information as possible through a number of different channels. There are three levels of warning, **ADVICE, WATCH AND ACT** and **EMERGENCY WARNING**. These change to reflect the increasing risk to life and the decreasing amount of time you have until the fire arrives.

##### **3.1.1 Advice**

If the school is likely to be threatened by the fire, activate the Emergency Management Plan immediately. Notify local fire department of your decision and relocation point.

An **ADVICE** provides you with information on a bushfire that is not threatening lives or property but may be causing smoke near the school.

##### **3.1.2 Watch and Act**

A **WATCH AND ACT** message tells you the fire conditions are changing and there is a possible threat to lives and the school. The Principal's decision to leave or relocate students, staff and visitors off site should be based upon assessment of known information and current circumstances, including advice from emergency services or observations at the time of the event.

##### **3.1.3 Emergency Warning**

An **EMERGENCY WARNING** is the highest level of warning and tells you of immediate danger. In some circumstances it may start with a siren sound called the Standard Emergency Warning Signal (SEWS) to get your attention as the fire is about to arrive. SEWS is a distinctive sound that is broadcast immediately prior to major emergency announcements on radio, television and other communication systems. SEWS tells people 'you need to listen- there is an emergency in your area and you need to take action now'. It is used like a siren and is strictly controlled for use by an authorised hazard management agency only.

The School should activate their Bushfire Plan in regards to evacuation. Consideration will include; location of fire and ability to travel safely to the selected relocation point, notify the local fire department of your decision and relocation point.

**If it is not safe to evacuate, direct all students, staff and visitors to the school's *Safer Location*. This location is the Primary School building.**

### **3.2 Bushfire- Act**

#### **3.2.1 Response when a bushfire starts and the school is open**

### **3.2.1.1 Evacuation Procedure**

School to evacuate to off-site on advice from emergency services.

The Off Site safer location for Kerang Christian College during a bushfire is the Kerang Baptist Church basketball court or elsewhere on advice from emergency services.

All classes remain with their teachers and allocated education assistants.

- All other staff and visitors report to the Front Office.
- Teachers account for each child and identify students and support staff with known respiratory conditions.
- Doors and windows must be closed. Students and staff are to remain in classrooms unless directed otherwise by their fire warden.
- Fire wardens are designated to manage evacuation routes, liaise with staff. (See Section 9.0 of *Emergency Management Plan*)
- The Principal and fire wardens, will control this response until the arrival of emergency services who will then take over.
- Students and adults with known respiratory conditions will be identified and given special consideration

#### **Parent Access**

Parents will be informed when and where to pick up students upon advice from the Principal.

### **3.2.1.2 Safer Location Procedures – if evacuation is not possible**

The school may be advised to stay on site.

- All classes remain with their teachers and allocated education assistants.
- All students move to the Primary School building if directed by their fire warden.
- All other staff and visitors report to the Front Office.
- Teachers account for each child and identify students and support staff with known respiratory conditions.
- Doors and windows must be closed. Students and staff are to remain in classrooms unless directed otherwise by their fire warden.
- Fire wardens are designated to manage evacuation routes and liaise with staff.
- The Principal and fire wardens, will control this response until the arrival of the CFA or emergency services who will then take over.
- Students and adults with known respiratory conditions will be identified and given special consideration.

#### **Parent Access**

Parents advised **NOT** to pick up students and to monitor local media for specific access information.

### **3.2.2 Response when a bushfire starts and the school is closed**

The Principal is to notify staff and parents using the emergency contact list of Closure.

### **3.2.3 Recovery**

The priorities for the school during recovery are

1. Health and Safety of individuals;
2. Social Recovery;

### 3. Physical (Structural) Recovery.

#### **General**

- When possible, return to normal routine.
- Attend to staff and student welfare, considering counselling support.
- Provide information for families and the community of any impact (including if there is none) on the school and school routine following the bushfire.
- Undertake a check of any equipment or stock used and arrange replacement/replenishment.
- Address any physical damage to the school, isolating areas if required and if necessary relocate to alternative accommodation.
- Attend to security if necessary.
- Manage Administrative details including insurance.

#### **Debrief**

- What worked, what didn't?
- Was anything overlooked?
- What could you do better next time?
- Should roles change?
- If changes are made, incorporate them into the formal plan and advise the appropriate parties including staff and other authorities.
- Share the knowledge with other schools.
- Test the revised bushfire management plan and procedures.

#### **BUSHFIRE Procedures on Camp, Excursion or Event**

Camp leaders should check the Fire Danger Rating on **1800 240 667** if conditions are causing concern. If the Fire Danger Rating is Catastrophic, procedures will be enacted to evacuate the camp.

The DET advises: "If an off-site activity is threatened by fire, your school will enact its emergency management plan. Off-site activities in areas affected by a predicted Catastrophic day will be cancelled or recalled."

Teachers confronted by fire should secure the safety of students and then, if able, contact the base camp, the external provider or the School.

Relevant procedures should be followed by teachers in order to reduce the risk of starting a fire. These include taking great care with regard to camp fires and solid fuel fires for cooking or heating. These are not permissible on days of Total Fire Ban but are permissible during the Fire Danger Period restrictions, with the following restrictions applied:

- Must be located in a properly constructed fireplace (i.e. one that contains the fire) or in a trench at least 30 cm deep.
- Clear above and around for 3 metres of flammable material and 7.5 metres from any log or stump.
- The fire is to be the minimum size necessary for its purpose, not exceeding 1 square metre.

- The air movement in the vicinity of the fire must be no stronger than 10 kmh (a very light breeze felt on the face or a rustle in the leaves from the trees).
- An adult must be in attendance at all times.
- Thoroughly douse any campfire with water and cover it with clean earth before leaving campsite.

### **Emergency response procedures:**

In the event of a bushfire, if possible, retreat to a safe area such as a river, broad track, rock or cleared area. Fire usually travels much faster up hill than down hill. However, it is virtually impossible to outrun a fire whether it is travelling up hill or down hill.

### **In case of an approaching or nearby fire:**

- Keep calm and reassure the group.
- Drink as much as possible and carry water.
- Saturate and cover up with clothing.
- Ensure the group stays together.
- Avoid dense undergrowth.
- Look for open or already-burnt ground.
- Keep to tracks if possible.
- Decide on the intended route and signals, and ensure everyone knows them.
- Place experienced walkers in the front of the group to lead and in the whip position.
- Conserve as much energy as possible and take rests, if viable.

### **If trapped by fire:**

- The heat radiated by fire is intense (320° Celsius compared to flames at 50° Celsius) and can badly burn skin, even some distance from the flames. Therefore:
  - Cover as much exposed skin as possible, preferably with woollen and thick clothing (synthetic clothing can melt whereas natural fibres are more fire resistant).
  - Wrap clothing and other material, such as a woollen jumper, around the head.
  - Saturate clothing if possible.
  - Wet a cloth to place over the face.
  - Drink as much water as possible to guard against dehydration.
  - Keep low (there is more air available to breathe near the ground).
  - Shield the body from radiated heat (the intense heat is greatly impeded by opaque materials and passes over very quickly) by lying or crouching behind a log, stacked rucksacks, mounds of earth, wombat burrows (feet in first) or the bank of the river nearer the fire front. Never get into a water tank as the water can boil.

### **If walking and caught in a bushfire:**

**Do not run** unless to a clearly indicated way of escape. Do not try to out run the fire uphill as fires travel faster uphill. Look for areas that are flat and contain very little vegetation. Seek shelter from the fire, which can include:



- a running stream or wet gully
- eroded gullies free of vegetation
- a hut or building structure
- road side culvert (drainage lines) or concrete bridge
- deep wheel ruts or cuttings on the road
- rocky outcrops or open areas with little or no vegetation, including gravel pits
- an area that has been recently burnt

Clear any leaves or vegetation matter that can burn near your shelter.

Stay in your chosen shelter until the fire has passed.

Cover any exposed skin with clothing, soft earth, anything to shield you from the heat.

Keep low and breathe air close to the ground where it is cooler and contains less smoke.

If there is no immediate shelter around and the fire is advancing, you have very little chance of survival in the open. Try to move away from the hottest part of the fire.

**Only as a last resort, run through the flames onto burnt ground:**

Choose a place where the flames and heat are lower and where there is, or will be, little burning material on the ground behind the fire front.

Wait for a lull and, when you can see over and through the flames, take a deep breath and briskly walk through, covering your face as much as possible. Stay in the burnt area. Flames greater than your height are too hazardous to run through.

**If caught in a vehicle during a bushfire:**

Don't leave your car. Park your vehicle in an area that is bare and away from dense vegetation. For example against an embankment in a cutting, in an old gravel pit or roadside clearing, or on the section of the road which has the least amount of scrub alongside.

Close all windows and vents, and turn your headlights on. Lie on the floor and cover yourself with anything that will shield you from radiant heat (eg. coat or blanket). Stay in your car till the fire front has passed.

While this information provides some safety tips, it's better to avoid bushfire situations where possible!

**Bush Fire at Risk Register (BARR)**

In addition to the requirements of this policy, schools listed on the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) Bushfire at Risk Register (BARR) must have in place a number of further procedures and processes. Schools and education and care services considered to be at greatest risk of bushfire have been included on the DEECD Bushfire At-Risk Register and informed of their status on the register.

Kerang Christian College is Category 4 for 2023-24 on the Bushfire at-Risk Register (BARR), that is, in an area considered to be at some risk of bushfire or grassfire.

**Responsibilities**

The Principal has overall responsibility for the implementation of this policy.

## **Evaluation**

This policy will be reviewed as part of the school's three-year review cycle.

## **Related Policies**

Emergency Management Plan  
Maintenance Policy  
Student Pastoral Care Policy

## **References**

Country Fire Authority [www.cfa.vic.gov.au](http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au)

Emergency Alert warning system [www.emergencyalert.gov.au/](http://www.emergencyalert.gov.au/)

Australian Standard AS 3745-2010 [www.as3745.net.au](http://www.as3745.net.au)

[the AFDRS information sheet](#)

[Bushfire and Grassfire Preparedness policy on the Policy and Advisory Library](#)

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Previously incorporated into *Emergency  
Management Plan*

Amended: March 2011

Amended: March 2014

Amended: February 2016

Amended: November 2017

Amended: March 2019

Amended: February 2020

Amended: February 2021

Amended: March 2022

Amended: March 2023

Amended: October 2023