

# Guidelines on bushfire preparedness

## Registered schools and school boarding premises

### 1. Notice

Schools and school boarding premises must comply with these guidelines as part of the requirements of registration under the *Education and Training Reform Act 2006*.

These guidelines were approved by the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) Board on 10 February 2010, revised and approved on 26 June 2017 and on 3 June 2021. They were revised again on 24 November 2022 and 1 August 2024.

### 2. Guidelines for registered schools and registered school boarding premises on bushfire preparedness

In addition to their obligations under the care, safety and welfare minimum standard, schools and school boarding premises must also meet obligations under these guidelines in relation to bushfire preparedness. This includes in relation to the planning of off-site activities such as excursions and camps.

#### Regulatory context: Care, safety and welfare of students

A school must ensure that the care, safety and welfare of students is in accordance with any applicable State and Commonwealth laws and that staff are advised of their obligations under those laws.

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Schedule 4 clause 12 of the Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017

The provider of school boarding services at a registered school boarding premises must ensure that the care, safety and welfare of all students boarding at the premises is in accordance with any applicable State and Commonwealth laws and all staff are advised of their obligations under those laws.

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Schedule 4A clause 5 of the Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017

#### 2.1 All schools and school boarding premises must maintain an Emergency Management Plan (EMP). The EMP must be reviewed at least annually and immediately after any significant incident.

The EMP should include policies and procedures for the planning and approval of off-site activities which consider the risk of bushfire in the activity location. The EMP for school boarding premises should also include closure or relocation plans that consider their location and Bushfire At-Risk Register category (if applicable).

#### 2.2 Schools and school boarding premises listed on the Bushfire At-Risk Register must have an EMP that details the school and school boarding premises response to managing bushfire risk including:

- closing the school and/or school boarding premises on days forecast as Catastrophic fire danger rating in the relevant fire weather district
- on non-Catastrophic fire danger rating days, in the event of bushfire or elevated risk, maintain a heightened state of readiness and continuously monitor the situational bushfire risk by ensuring open lines of communication with local emergency services

- be prepared/on standby to enact their EMP by:
  - relocating students and staff to a nominated 'shelter-in-place' within the school or school boarding premises site that is compliant with relevant regulations, and/or
  - evacuating students and staff to an off-site safe area
  - responding appropriately to instructions from emergency services.

**2.3 Schools and school boarding premises listed on the Bushfire At-Risk Register must inform all students, staff and parents/guardians about their specific bushfire preparedness arrangements and train relevant staff in their bushfire preparedness roles.**

There must be records of:

- the provision of information on bushfire preparedness policy and procedures to all staff (including relief staff) and parents/guardians
- the school and school boarding premises closure arrangements for Catastrophic fire danger rating days as per the school or school boarding premises EMP
- training of staff with specific roles and responsibilities in preparing for, monitoring and executing emergency bushfire procedures including the effective operation of relevant emergency equipment
- the practice of evacuation drills at least once per term during the October–April bushfire season. School and/or school boarding premises evacuation drills must involve all students and all staff moving to either a nominated on-site 'shelter-in-place' or an off-site evacuation point as per the school or school boarding premises EMP.

**2.4 Schools and school boarding premises listed on the Bushfire At-Risk Register must maintain a register updated at least once per school term during the October–April bushfire season of bushfire emergency equipment and ensure it is in working order.**

Required evidence to be compliant or maintain compliance:

- an updated register of bushfire emergency equipment, in working order, which may include water supplies and equipment; fire hydrants, hose reels and extinguishers; sprinkler systems; alarms; first aid materials and medical equipment; fire blankets and communication systems.

**2.5 Schools and school boarding premises listed on the Bushfire At-Risk Register must maintain notices of bushfire evacuation procedures and bushfire emergency contact numbers and locate them appropriately around the school and school boarding premises.**

Required evidence to be compliant or maintain compliance:

- notices of bushfire evacuation procedures and updated bushfire emergency contact numbers are appropriately located around the school and school boarding premises.

In addition to their obligations under the buildings, facilities and grounds minimum standards, schools and school boarding premises must also meet particular requirements under these guidelines in relation to bushfire preparedness. Schools and school boarding premises should consider the different risks and circumstances at each of their school campuses or school boarding premises locations.

**Regulatory context: School and school boarding premises infrastructure**

A school's buildings, facilities and grounds must comply with any laws that apply to the school including local laws and building, planning and occupational health and safety laws.

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Schedule 4 clause 13 of the Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017

A registered school boarding premises' buildings, facilities and grounds must comply with any laws that apply to the registered school boarding premises including local laws and building, planning and occupational health and safety laws.

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Schedule 4A clause 6 of the Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017

## **2.6 All schools and school boarding premises must regularly manage materials that may easily be ignited around buildings and facilities.**

Required evidence to be compliant or maintain compliance:

- 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
- safe storage of flammable materials.

## **2.7 All schools and school boarding premises must regularly monitor emergency access to buildings and grounds.**

Required evidence to be compliant or maintain compliance:

- building exits are continuously kept clear of obstructions
- assembly points are designated and have appropriate access to emergency equipment
- there is access to facilities and grounds for emergency vehicles.

## **2.8 Schools and school boarding premises listed on the Bushfire At-Risk Register must consult with relevant local agencies (the Country Fire Authority, Fire Rescue Victoria, local Council), where possible and appropriate, on their bushfire preparedness and compliance with local bushfire regulation of buildings, facilities and grounds.**

Required evidence to be compliant or maintain compliance:

- a record of annual visitation or consultation with relevant local agencies.

## **2.9 Schools and school boarding premises listed on the Bushfire At-Risk Register with an on-site 'shelter-in-place' must meet the applicable standards, as outlined in the relevant guidelines published by the Victorian Building Authority, commensurate to the school or school boarding premises' categorisation of the Bushfire-At-Risk Register.**

Required evidence to be compliant or maintain compliance:

- documentation demonstrating a completed assessment (and any subsequent schedule of remediation works) of any on-site shelter-in-place, against the Victorian Building Authority guidelines, 'A guide to retrofitting certain existing Class 9 buildings for better protection from bushfire ember attack', within the last 5 years.