

*Sassafras-Ferny Creek Fire Brigade ... Volunteers serving the community*

## Shaping up for summer ... what to do (or not)

A fire brigade captain in the Adelaide Hills recently reflected on the level of hysteria in his community in the aftermath of the 2009 Victorian bushfires. In particular, he is concerned that in the rush to leave, people will avoid their responsibility to undertake adequate preparations around their properties. In evidence to a South Australian parliamentary inquiry, he also expressed the view that some people would leave unnecessarily from areas that are relatively safe.

### Leaving early

The decision about whether you leave your home on days of high fire danger is entirely yours. There are some triggers you need to consider. Once the fire danger rating reaches "Severe" on the new national six-level scale, the chances are it will have been declared a Total Fire Ban. At this level, fires can become uncontrollable and highly dangerous. If your fire plan is to leave your home, then on days when the **prediction** is for severe conditions, you need to leave early in the morning or even the night before.

### Severe ... extreme ... code red (catastrophic)?

Frankly, if your plan is to leave, it doesn't make any difference. If the warning is for any of these conditions and your plan is to leave, then you should go ... and go **early**. On "Code Red (Catastrophic)" days, those who plan to stay and defend their properties must also consider the option of leaving. In such conditions, many more homes will simply not be defensible during a bushfire.

**Do not wait for the declaration of a Code Red day before choosing to leave.**



### Don't panic

Easier said than done. But when the pressure is on, you must stay calm and act rationally and decisively. Emergency service workers train constantly so that their actions under pressure become instinctive, informed and automatic. You must do the same. Practice your fire plan. Play act how you would respond to a real emergency.

### Think locally, act locally ...

Our local conditions mean that you must learn to read and understand the danger signs in your own neighbourhood. Just because the bushfire danger is critical somewhere in Victoria doesn't always mean it will be so here. Gather as much information as you can to help inform your decisions and your planning for bushfire safety.

## Fire Danger Ratings: a new six-step national scale



Victoria has adopted the new nationally agreed Fire Danger Rating scale to help communities understand information about fire danger. This new scale recognises the significant increase in severe bushfire conditions over the past decade and the subsequent greater level of danger to the community, as experienced on 7 February 2009. Every day during the fire season the Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) forecasts an outlook of the fire danger index (FDI) by considering elements of the predicted weather including temperature, relative humidity, wind speed, and dryness of vegetation. When determining the Fire Danger Rating, fire agencies, in consultation with the BoM, consider a

range of other factors relating to that area and day. These factors include:

- the length of time the fire danger index has been elevated
- extent of fire already in the landscape
- fuel and dryness
- likelihood of weather events such as lightning and grass fuel conditions.

A Fire Danger Rating is a prediction of fire behaviour, including how hard it would be to put out a fire once it starts. It provides information on:

- the sort of bushfire behaviour that could be experienced on that day
- the type of threat bushfires may pose to life and property on any day given the forecast weather conditions.

Fire Danger Ratings will be a feature of weather forecasts and alert you to the actions you should take in preparation for and on the day.

## Places of last resort ...

Among the initiatives to flow from government since the February 2009 bushfires is the idea of communal “neighbourhood safer places”.

This concept had its origins in the CFA’s Community Fireguard program, where residents made plans around a local place very close to their home that might be safer if their own home was indefensible during a fire. Often this safer place was another house. Identifying local informal places of “last resort” shelter should remain part of your bushfire planning.

In recognition of the fact that some people’s plans will fail, that others will have made no plans, that some people will be travelling in bushfire areas and that others will panic and flee at the last minute, provision has been made for nominating larger locations that *might* offer sanctuary as an **option of last resort**. Local government is being compelled by legislation to identify such places where possible, subject to assessment by CFA.

Only a limited number of neighbourhood safer places are likely to be identifiable in the Dandenongs due to topography, access or other factors. There may not be one local to your home.

The basic premise of a neighbourhood safer place is that it may afford some protection from radiant heat, the biggest killer during bushfire.

There are significant risks attached.

- Going to a neighbourhood safer place is *an option of last resort when other plans have failed*.
- Neighbourhood safer places are not an alternative to planning to leave early or stay and defend your property.
- They are not inherently “safe” places.
- They will not be better places of last resort than many houses.
- Travelling any distance to a neighbourhood safer place is inherently dangerous. Traffic congestion, fire activity, accidents or fallen trees may block the route there.
- There is no guarantee that you will not be killed by fire when travelling to reach such a location.
- You might be killed by fire or radiant heat when you get there.
- There is no guarantee that emergency services will be present.
- They will be no provision for pets.
- There will be limited parking. Large numbers of vehicles may further compromise what little protection such an area affords.
- No amenities (e.g. food, drinks) will be provided.

## Briefly ... briefly ... briefly

**FIRE READY KITS:** CFA has produced the Fire Ready Kit to help you understand your bushfire risk, prepare your property and develop a Bushfire Survival Plan based on your decision to leave early or to actively defend your property.

Not all homes can be defended from bushfire and survival must be your main priority.

The Kit includes five linking publications plus some smaller brochures. The five linking publications have been designed to work together in a sequence. Prepare a Bushfire Survival Plan now using the following items in the Kit.

A kit will be mailed to every house in our brigade area over the coming weeks. You are urged to read this information carefully. The Kit is just one of the tools you should use to prepare for bushfire.

**COMMUNITY MEETINGS:** Community meetings will continue to be held locally held over the coming weeks.

- Tue 8 December, 7.30pm Ferny Creek Horticultural Society, Hilton Rd, Ferny Creek
- Sun 17 January 2010, 10am Sassafras-Ferny Creek Fire Station, Clarkmont Rd
- Tue 9 February 2010, 7.30pm Ferny Creek Horticultural Society, Hilton Rd, Ferny Creek

A more extensive list is published on the brigade website. Full details of all meetings can be found on the CFA website. Contact CFA Yarra Area for details, ph. 8739 1300.



### Brigade & CFA contacts

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*Brigade website: [www.sassafrascfa.org.au](http://www.sassafrascfa.org.au)*

*CFA Yarra Area Office, Lilydale: 8739 1300*

*CFA Website: [www.cfa.vic.gov.au](http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au)*

*Victorian Bushfire Information Line: 1800 240 667*