



SCHOOL VISION

To encourage children to strive to be their best self, now and in the future, for the betterment of all humanity and the planet.

We action our Vision through our School's Values

- **COURAGE** to do the right thing.
- **CURIOSITY** to know and learn.
- **CHARACTER** to be one's best self.
- **RESPECT** to live wisely and compassionately with others and the planet.

Our School values of Courage, Curiosity, Character, and Respect have been developed through engagement with key stakeholder groups (students, parents, staff, alumni and our Council) and sit at the heart of our education community, guiding every aspect of our learning and decision making.

Purpose

Growing good people in an intellectually rich, supportive and stimulating environment so that they are ready for life.

SCOPE

There are important things that schools need to do to comply with the bushfire preparedness guidelines. There are additional responsibilities when the School is on the **Bushfire At-Risk Register**. It is important to note that the School's Officer campus is on the **Bushfire At-Risk Register (BARR) – Category 4**.

INTRODUCTION

The bushfire season commences in October and lasts until the end of April. All schools must ensure that they are bushfire ready. This includes plans for offsite activities like camps and excursions. The risk of bushfire in the activity location must be considered. Weather conditions and bushfire ratings should be checked leading up to the activity and on the day of the activity.

Grassfires can start and spread quickly, especially on days when the fire danger rating is High, Extreme or Catastrophic. The fire danger rating will indicate how dangerous a fire will be if one has started. As the ratings increase so does the risk of a fire being uncontrollable. As the Officer campus is near grassland and paddocks there is a significant risk on days of high fire ratings.

THE POLICY

This policy outlines actions schools the School must take in relation to bushfire and grassfire risk.¹ All registered schools, as a component of their registration, must comply with the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA) **Guidelines on Bushfire Preparedness**.² This policy is informed by expert advice from the emergency sector, including the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO).

¹ RiskWare 005

² New guidelines came into effect on 1 Jan 2025.

BARR (Bushfire At Risk Register) ³

The schools and early childhood service facilities in Categories 0-3 are at the highest risks of being impacted by fire in the landscape and are included on the Bushfire At Risk Register (BARR). BARR functions as a triaged risk register to support preparation for, and response to, the annual fire season. This includes enacting pre planned relocations and closures based on risk category on days of forecasted elevated fire danger.

In 2019 it was determined that schools and facilities that were at some risk of fire, those in Category 4 would need to pre-emptively close in response to days of Catastrophic fire risk in the fire weather district. These schools are listed on the separate Category 4 list which reflects the lower level of risk at these sites aligning with lower preparation required for the fire season.

SMBG is rated as a Category 4 school in the Central Fire District.

BUSHFIRE MONITORING

BUSHFIRE MONITORING – MANAGEMENT OBJECTIVES

- Create a higher sense of awareness on high-risk days.
- Monitor the safety of school travel including school bus routes.
- Ensure that the School has the opportunity to advise parents and families as far in advance as possible (2-3 days) of the likelihood of school closure and relocation plans in the event of a Catastrophic Fire Danger Day.
- If early evacuation advice is not issued or the fire is approaching the School and it is deemed unsafe to evacuate, as a last resort the occupants should be moved to the nearest shelter in place available on site.

FIRE DANGER RATING

The rating is your trigger to take action to stay safe.

CFA Headquarters (03) 9262 8444

They are as follows:

Moderate	Plan and Prepare – for all schools and early childhood services be alert for fires in your area and decide in advance what your school or service will do if a fire starts. Follow the advice of emergency services.
High	Be ready to act - for all schools and early childhood services be alert for fires in your area and decide in advance what your school or service will do if a fire starts. Follow the advice of emergency services.
Extreme	Take action now to protect life and property - for all schools and early childhood services if there is a fire in the landscape enact your emergency management plan and follow the advice of emergency services.
Catastrophic	For your survival leave the bushfire risk area – all schools and early childhood services on the BARR and Category 4 list (SMBG) in the fire weather district will close.

³ 2024 Bushfire Preparedness Procedures for Education Facilities - DET

RELOCATION PLAN

SMBG (Officer Campus) is rated as a Category 4 school in the Central Fire District.

The School maintains an Emergency Management Plan which is reviewed on an annual basis (Dec each year) and after any significant incident. The EMP includes procedures for the planning and approval of off-site activities which consider the risk of bushfire in the activity location. **The EMP also includes closure, or relocation plans in the event of a relocation on a Code Red Fire Day.**

- In most cases students at the Officer Campus will be relocated to the Berwick campus.
- In some cases, students will continue their learning by remote learning.
- Planning for relocation will take place a number of days before the anticipated **Catastrophic FDR in their fire weather district.**
- Parents and School Bus Companies will be notified with as much notice as possible of the Relocation plans.
- Schools and early childhood services must ensure they understand their bushfire and grassfire hazard exposure, their risk and the actions that they need to take for their emergency management planning, preparedness, ongoing situational awareness and response.
- Schools on the department's **Bushfire At-Risk Register (BARR)** are assessed to be at the greatest risk of fire need to understand the corresponding pre-emptive actions that are required on days of elevated fire danger (High or Extreme fire danger rating (FDR) based on risk categorisation) in their local government area.
- **All schools and early childhood services on the BARR (Category 4), must close on all days forecasted by the Bureau of Meteorology to be Catastrophic FDR in their fire weather district.**
- **Schools must cancel all bus routes which travel through fire weather districts that are forecasted to be Catastrophic FDR.**
- The department and the Country Fire Authority have collaborated to provide guidance to schools and early childhood services on the BARR and Category 4 list on preparing for the risk of bushfire and grassfire. ⁴

RESPONSE: FIRE IN THE LANDSCAPE

The information below provides an overview of actions to be taken when a fire is in your local area.

Triggers for Action:

The need for action by the school is triggered when there is a bushfire or grassfire that:

- is observable, or
- identified via Vic Emergency App within 20 km from the school, or
- there is an Advice, Watch and Act, Emergency Warning or Evacuation message that includes your school.

⁴ See **Bushfire Preparedness Procedures for Education Facilities** © State of Victoria (Department of Education) 2024

Immediate Actions:

If immediate emergency services assistance is required phone '000'.

- Convene your Incident Management Team (IMT) and activate your emergency management plan.
- **If your emergency plan is to shelter in place, ensure that you have called 000** and advise where they are, who they are, how many persons onsite and contact numbers and seek advice as to the next steps.
- Ensure that **Area Wardens** (Yellow Helmets) are issuing Red Helmets and Warden Duty cards and deploying wardens.
- **Direct wardens to assemble staff and students** inside away from the part of the building that will initially be exposed to the fire.
- Check that all staff and students are accounted for.
- Turn off power and gas.
- Close all windows, doors and block crevices, cracks and gaps with wet materials (e.g. towels or clothing). Fill gutters, all sinks and washbasins with water.
- Continue to monitor conditions on your school site such as wind change, size of fire, direction of travel and the presence of smoke or embers.
- Continue to monitor warnings and advice messages through the Vic Emergency App or emergency radio.
- If there is a bushfire or grassfire in your watch zone with an associated warning area that does not cover the school site, seek further advice to determine if any actions are necessary.
- Once the threat has passed direct Area Wardens to assess the buildings for spot fires, burning embers, casualties and report back.
- Remain inside until it has been established that the fire has clearly passed, evacuate the building and remain in a safe area.
- Ensure that staff / students do not hamper Emergency Services or put themselves at risk by going near damaged buildings or trees.

Other sources of Information:

- Vic Emergency Hotline on 1800 226 226 for any information on the incidents and warnings in your area.
- ABC local radio – use a battery powered radio if necessary due to the possibility of power outages.
- CFA Website – for fire ratings information for our district (Officer Central District)

Actions for the School when it is within a Vic Emergency warning area:

Use the VicEmergency App or website to confirm if your school is in a warning area. You can also set a watch zone within the application to get push notifications for warnings.

Remember that Shelter in Place is NOT a bushfire refuge. Leaving early is always the best option.

Vic Emergency Warning	What it means	School Actions
Advice Warning	<p>An incident is occurring or has occurred in the area. Access information and monitor conditions.</p> <p>This advice warning can also be used as a notification that activity in the area has subsided and is no longer a danger.</p>	<p>Before the school day:</p> <p>Monitor warnings and weather conditions as they may change and seek advice by emergency services and the department if concerned.</p> <p>During the school day:</p> <p>Monitor warnings and weather conditions as they change and seek advice by emergency services and the department if concerned.</p>
Watch and Act Warning	<p>An emergency is developing nearby. Take action now to protect yourself and others.</p> <p>Evacuation is a formal process by the incident controller and the related action statements can occur at both the Watch and Act and Emergency Warning levels. Evacuation messages appear with a flashing icon on VicEmergency to highlight that procedures are in place to evacuate.</p>	<p>Before the school day:</p> <p>Check in with emergency services and the department to get further advice about the situation and the recommended course of action. Closure is a possible course of action if the fire is likely to continue or threaten the site, taking into consideration school activities and feasibility to respond dramatically (logistics of evacuating the facility, traffic impacts, likelihood of compromising broader response activities, etc.)</p> <p>During the school day:</p> <p>Enact your emergency management plan. Check in with emergency services about the recommended course of action to keep students, staff and the community safe. Evacuation or sheltering in place is likely to be recommended.</p>

Vic Emergency Warning	What it means	School Actions
Emergency Warning	<p>Issued when the community is in imminent danger of an incident/event and need to take action now.</p> <p>Evacuation is a formal process by the incident controller. Evacuation messages appear with a flashing icon on VicEmergency to highlight that procedures are in place to evacuate.</p>	<p>Before the school day:</p> <p>Assess the situation and seek additional advice from emergency services and the department about a recommended course of action to keep students, staff and the community safe. Evacuation or sheltering in place is likely to be recommended.</p> <p>During the school day:</p> <p>Enact your emergency management plan. Check in with emergency services about the recommended course of action to keep students, staff and the community safe. Evacuation or sheltering in place is likely to be recommended.⁵</p>
Prepare to Evacuate	<p>Prepare to Evacuate – Issued when it is recommended that the community should quickly prepare to leave the area. This may include undertaking actions to prepare their family, gather critical items and protect their property.</p>	<p>If your school is in an Evacuation area; comply with evacuation instructions provided and seek advice.</p>
Evacuate Now	<p>Evacuate Now – Issued when the community is recommended to immediately leave, or processes are in place to evacuate communities.</p>	<p>If your school is in an Evacuation area; comply with evacuation instructions provided and seek advice.</p>

Actions for your school to Shelter-in-Place

- Call 000 for emergency services and seek and follow advice.
- **Move all students, staff and visitors to your pre-determined shelter-in-place location – Junior Middle School Block in Officer campus (see School Map) – Richards Building.**
- Take your emergency kit/first aid kit (including your students and staff attendance lists and a copy of this EMP, a mobile phone (fully charged or other similar means of communication) to enable immediate communication to and from parents or carers and emergency services.
- Check fire equipment including torches, water, batteries, radio, water, mops, buckets, school portable phone, P2 smoke masks, personal protective equipment and mobile phone are in the shelter in place.

⁵ It is unlikely that a school would remain open if the situation proceeded to the 'Prepare to Evacuate' or 'Evacuate Now' stage.

- Check that all students, staff and visitors are accounted for.
- Ensure any students, staff or visitors with medical or other needs and including those that are non-ambulant are supported and have access to any required medications.
- Ensure communications with emergency services are maintained. The Communications Officer or a nominated person is to monitor the phones and/or radios to ensure that communication is maintained.
- Advise parents or carers that the school is sheltering in place, and they should not come to pick their students up. If parents or carers arrive, encourage them to stay with their child at the school.
- Check all windows and doors in the shelter-in-place are closed (but doors are not locked). If shutters are installed on the windows close the shutters.
- Turn off the gas supply.
- Turn on any sprinkler system around the school grounds (if this does not compromise other water-based defence systems).
- If safe to do so, relocate cars and any other movable combustible objects to greater than 20m from the Shelter-in-Place and the evacuation path between the shelter-in-place and On-site Bushfire Evacuation location and Off-site Bushfire Evacuation Location.
- Staff should attend to students who show signs of or are known to be susceptible to smoke. If possible, supply these students with P2 smoke masks and any medication they require.
- Once in your SIP any decision to leave the Shelter-in-Place should only occur on advice of emergency services
- Continually monitor Shelter-in-Place for embers or building ignitions and immediately put them out, when safe to do so.
- Staff, where possible, should wear full length, fire resistant natural fibre clothing (e.g. wool or cotton) and other personal protective equipment including goggles, leather gloves and P2 smoke masks, for patrolling the Shelter-in-Place for embers and building ignitions.
- If the Shelter-in-Place has ignited and is not safe to extinguish – evacuate to the on-site Evacuation Location or off-site Bushfire Evacuation Location (if appropriate), via the defined route.
- Maintain a record of actions/decisions undertaken and times.
- Contact parents/carers as required or as per school policy.

Actions after shelter-in-place procedure

- Ensure any students, staff or visitors with medical or other needs are supported.
- Determine whether to activate your parent/carers reunification process.
- Determine if there is any specific information staff, students and visitors need to know (e.g. reunification process or areas of the school to avoid).
- Print and issue pre-prepared parent/carers letters as appropriate.
- Undertake operational debrief with staff and IMT to identify any shelter-in-place and procedural changes that may be required.

- Complete your Post Emergency Record form (see Emergency Management Plan).

BUSHFIRE PREPARATION PROCEDURES ⁶

- All schools must maintain an Emergency Management Plan (EMP). The EMP must be reviewed at least annually and immediately after any significant incident.
- Schools on the Bushfire At Risk Register must have an EMP that details the School's response to managing the bushfire risk including
 - Closing the School on days forecast as Catastrophic fire danger rating in the relevant fire rating district.
 - On non catastrophic 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 n standby to enact the EMP by
 - Relocating staff and students to a nominated 'Shelter in Place' within the School or
 - Evacuating students and staff to an off-site safe area.
 - Responding appropriately to instructions from emergency services.
- Schools on the BARR must inform all students, staff and parents / guardians about their specific bushfire preparedness arrangements and train relevant staff in their bushfire preparedness roles. ⁷
- Schools on the BARR must maintain notices of bushfire evacuation procedures and bushfire contact numbers and locate them appropriately around the school.
- All schools and school boarding premises must regularly monitor emergency access to buildings and grounds.
- 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. ⁸
- 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. ⁹

⁶ See 2025 Guidelines on Bushfire Preparedness for education facilities © VRQA Dec 2024.

⁷ School 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 EMP.

⁸ Required evidence for VRQA purposes – a record of annual visit or consultation with relevant local agencies.

⁹ 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.

COMMUNICATION

Communication between the School and parents is essential. Relocation plans should be sent to parents as soon as possible (ideally two or three days before Code Red days).

RELATED POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

This policy should be read in conjunction with the Officer Emergency Management Plan.

RESOURCES

Bushfire preparedness procedures for education facilities (PDF) © DET 2024 – outlines what schools and early childhood services need to do to prepare for bushfires and grassfires

2025 Guidelines on Bushfire Preparedness Registered Schools and School Boarding Premises © VRQA Dec 2024

School Site Bushfire / Grassfire Readiness Review Checklist.¹⁰

A Guide to Retrofitting Certain Class 9 Buildings for better protection from Bushfire Ember Attack.¹¹

CONTACT INFORMATION

Any questions or queries about this policy should be directed to the Associate Principal at middletons@smbg.vic.edu.au.

REVIEW

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¹⁰ Schools can use the site readiness review checklists to guide their preparations for the start of the bushfire season each year. This can also assist schools on the Bushfire At Risk Register (BARR) to comply with the VRQA Guidelines on Bushfire Preparedness.

¹¹ VBA and CFA – AS 3959-2009 © Standards Australia Ltd – copied by the VBA with permission of Standards Australia under License 1711-c011.

Appendix 1

Diagram showing Evacuation Assembly Area and Shelter in Place Location

Officer Campus

