

BUSHFIRE: READINESS & SAFETY

Don't leave things to the last minute. With these few simple steps you may mitigate damage and make sure you and your family get through bushfire season safely.

THERE ARE 3 MAIN REASONS HOUSES BURN

EMBERS

Embers are burning twigs, leaves, pieces of bark, and debris and are the most common ways houses catch fire during bushfires.

- ❑ Embers start fires when they land in gaps in the roof, chimneys, land on top of debris in your gutters, under floors and through broken windows. Anywhere burning leaves or twigs enter your home, or get wedged, there is a risk they will start a fire. If embers get inside your home, fire will quickly spread because there are so many flammable objects inside such as curtains and carpet.
- ❑ They are carried by wind and can travel up to 40 kilometres ahead of the fire front and fire speeds can reach over 25 kilometres per hour.
- ❑ For hours before a fire reaches a home and after it has passed, embers land on and around it, particularly in strong winds.

HEAT

- ❑ The heat from fires is intense, (think of how hot a campfire is). When flammable materials get hot enough, they can catch alight without any flame.
- ❑ Heat can also cause glass to break.
- ❑ Woodpiles, outdoor furniture and plants that are near or against your home can ignite and expose it to heat that is hot enough and sustained enough to cause fires and damage.

FLAME

- ❑ Fires typically destroy everything in their path. If you live in a high fire-risk area, it may be impossible to prevent. What you can do is design your property so that you reduce the intensity of the fire when it reaches your home.
- ❑ You can do this by designing your garden to reduce heat and flames reaching your house, by creating firebreaks with gravel or dirt, and keeping plants and trees maintained. By preparing properly, you give your house the best chance to survive fire, even if you plan to leave early.

BEFORE, PREPARE YOUR HOME & PROPERTY

If you know a hot, dry, windy day is coming, start getting your property ready.

- ❑ To protect your house, it is vital that you prevent sparks and burning material from entering through windows, under doors and/or under floor boards. You can do this by:

TRIM

- ❑ Clear leaves, twigs, bark and other debris from the roof and gutters.
- ❑ Make sure trees on your property are healthy with no dead limbs and no vegetation underneath them.
- ❑ Trim low-lying branches two metres from the ground surrounding your home.

MOW

- ❑ Mow your grass regularly and remove the cuttings.
- ❑ On bigger properties, a clearing of about 10 metres of well-mown grass around your home is advisable.

REMOVE

- ❑ Remove materials such as doormats, wood piles and outdoor furniture from around the house.
- ❑ Make sure you remove any fuels from around your windows and doors. These are the most vulnerable parts of your home.
- ❑ Remove excess ground fuels and combustible material (long dry grass, dead leaves and branches).
- ❑ Move combustible outdoor furniture and other items from decks, up against, or under the home.

CLEAR

- ❑ Walk around your home and remove piles of fine fuels such as leaves. It will probably be where embers will land.
- ❑ Move pot plants a few metres from the home.
- ❑ Reduce vegetation loads along the access path.

PREPARE

- ❑ Enclose open areas in eaves and under decks and floors. Underfloor areas that are not enclosed allow sparks and embers to penetrate. If these areas are used to store timber, firewood, or other flammable materials, the risk is increased.

EMERGENCY CONTACTS

**In an emergency always call 000
for Police, Ambulance or Fire brigade.**

www.ruralfire.qld.gov.au

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INSURANCE, BUT FAIR



- Make sure that underfloor areas are kept clear of flammable material during summer.
- Crevices where embers can collect are potential ignition points. Cracks under doors, on window ledges, windows, or along verandas are particularly vulnerable. Vents into the house structure are also common entry points for sparks. They should be covered in fine wire mesh to prevent embers from getting into walls, roof cavity areas or through windows.
- Install fine steel wire mesh screens on all windows, doors, vents and skylights.
- Seal all gaps in the roof area along the ridge cap, gutter line and fascia board.
- Tiled roofs require appropriate fire rated insulation (sarking) immediately below the tiles.
- Purchase and test the effectiveness of gutter plugs.
- Double check that gas bottles are anchored securely with the relief valves pointing away from the house and any flammable materials.
- Conduct maintenance checks on pumps, generators and water systems.
- Seal all gaps in external roof and wall cladding where embers can enter the home.

BEFORE, PREPARE AN EMERGENCY KIT

Having an emergency kit is an important step to prepare for, survive and cope with emergencies. All householders should know where the Emergency kit is kept and update the contents of your kit regularly.

- 3 days supply of bottled water, non-perishable food items like dried or canned food and a can opener including pet food and water for animals.
- Mobile phone/ charger & additional power batteries.
- Portable battery radio, torch and spare batteries.
- Matches, lamps, portable stove, cooking & eating utensils.
- First aid kit and manual, essential medications, prescriptions and adequate supply/ dosage; Insect repellent.
- Toiletries including toilet paper.
- Waterproof jacket, hat and gloves for everyone.
- Keep a list of emergency phone numbers on display.
- Important documents, in sealed bags, including some cash.
- Special items for infants & elderly or people with special needs.



PREPARE AN EVACUATION KIT

Your emergency kit, including emergency numbers, plus:

- Multiple changes of clothes for all household members, stored in watertight bags. Long sleeve shirts, long pants strong shoes and hats are recommended.
- Pillows and sleeping bags and or blankets for each household member.
- Important documents, such as passports, visas, birth and marriage certificates, bank account cards and details, stock bonds, Medicare cards, health records, insurance records, house mortgage/ deeds, wills and life insurance details.
- Laptop computers and back-ups of important files.
- Valuables, photos, mementos in waterproof bags.
- Inventory of household goods.

BEFORE, BUSHFIRE SURVIVAL PLAN

One of the most important things to do before a bushfire is to decide what you'll do if one should start.

- Clearly understand what you will do to protect your property and life when the fire arrives and discuss details of your plan with family, friends and neighbours.

Who will Leave early?

- If you have any doubts about your ability to cope, you should plan to leave early, well before a fire reaches your area and well before you are under threat.
- People who are at higher risk, such as children, elderly, disabled or with medical problems, should always leave early.
- Leaving early is always your safest option.

When will they go (list of triggers for leaving)?

- It could be smoke in your area, or as soon as you find out there is a fire near you.

Where will people go?

- Where's a meeting place that is safe and away from the fire area? It might be a friends or relatives place, or even a shopping centre.

How will they get there?

- What road will you take? What is your back up if the road is blocked?
- What will they take? Remember to include pets.

Who will we call and tell that we are leaving and the we have arrived safely?

What is our back up plan?

What if things do go to plan? Identify a safer nearby location such as a neighbour's home that is well prepared, or a place of last resort.

LEAVE EARLY OR STAY

Your property should be well-prepared for the fire, even if you intend to leave early. A well-prepared property stands a greater chance of surviving.

- Move cars to a safe location.
- Remove garden furniture, door mats and other items.
- Close windows and doors and shut blinds.
- Take down curtains and move furniture away from windows.
- Seal gaps under doors and windows with wet towels.
- Block downpipes (at the top) and fill gutters with water if possible.
- Wet down the sides of buildings, decks and close shrubbery in the likely path of the bushfire.
- Wet down fine fuels close to buildings.
- Turn on garden sprinklers for 30 minutes before the bushfire arrives.
- Fill containers with water - baths, sinks, buckets, wheelie bins.
- Tune in to warnings to monitor local radio, websites or social media for updates.
- Put on protective clothing.
- Drink lots of water.

If you plan to leave early, then you must leave your home well before a bushfire threatens and travelling by road becomes hazardous.

You will need a Bushfire Evacuation Kit to ensure you and your family have important items and equipment required to relocate for the time needed.

OR STAY?

In making your decision to stay there are a few things you need to consider. Is your property able to withstand the impact of bushfire? Decide to stay only if you're well prepared.

It's not safe to stay with your property under some circumstances, like:

- If the fire danger rating is Catastrophic.
- There is an Extreme fire danger rating and your home is not specially designed or constructed for bush fires.
- Your property is not well maintained.
- You or the people in your home aren't mentally and physically fit and ready.

Under these circumstances, you should leave early.

If you are not sure or not prepared you should leave early.

Who will stay?

- Are you putting anyone in your family at risk by staying? For example, children, the elderly or people with asthma?
- Will you cope in an emergency? In a fire, it will be hot, smoky and physically draining. Even trained firefighters can find it challenging.
- Do you have well-maintained resources and equipment, and do you know how to use them?
- What is our backup plan? Consider unexpected events such as if one of us is home alone, if we aren't home, if the fire moves faster than expected or if the phone lines and electricity are down.

As the fire front arrives:

- Turn off gas mains and/or bottle.
- Patrol the house well before the fire arrives to put out embers and spot fires.
- As the fire approaches, wet the side of the house and garden that faces the fire.
- Disconnect hose and fittings and bring inside.
- Move your firefighting equipment to a place where it won't burn inside.
- Go inside for shelter.
- Drink lots of water.
- Shelter in your house on the opposite side of the approaching fire.
- Patrol and check for embers inside, particularly in the roof space.
- Check on family and pets.
- Maintain a means of escape.
- Continually monitor conditions.

After the fire front has passed, check for small spot fires and burning embers:

- In roof lines and gutters and inside roof space.
- Under floor boards and under the house space.
- On verandas and decks. On window ledges and door sills.
- In garden beds and mulch and in wood heaps.
- Around outdoor furniture.

AFTER THE FIRE HAS PASSED

- If possible, and safe to do so, check all your neighbours are OK.
- Continue to listen to your battery local radio for further information on the event and further warnings and safety messages.
- Heed all warnings and don't go sightseeing.
- Patrol your home for several hours, looking for small fires and burning embers.
- Contact relatives or friends to tell them you are safe.