

BUSH FIRE SURVIVAL PLAN



PREPARE. ACT. SURVIVE.



BUSH FIRES IN THE ACT

There are four key considerations when dealing with bush fire:

- The safety of you and your family
- The defendability of your property
- The protection of irreplaceable valuables and important documents
- The maintenance of adequate levels of insurance

The safety of you and your family always comes first. This **Bush Fire Survival Plan** will provide you with the information you need to survive a bush fire.

PREPARE. ACT. SURVIVE.

It is your responsibility to prepare yourself, your family and your home for the threat of bush fire. You need to make the decision to either **Leave Early** or **Stay and Defend**. Regardless of your decision you must prepare your property to give you, your family and your home the best chance of survival.

The increased frequency of extreme bush fires in the last 10 years, and the recent experience of the Black Saturday fires in Victoria, have encouraged fire services throughout Australia to introduce new levels of Bush Fire Danger Rating (FDR).

CATASTROPHIC

The highest level is **CATASTROPHIC**. On a day of Catastrophic FDR leaving early is the safest option to ensure your survival. You must leave early to a safer location, hours or the day before a fire occurs. Under no circumstances will it be safe to **Stay and Defend**.

EXTREME

The next highest level is **EXTREME**. Should a fire occur in your area on a day of Extreme FDR leaving early will always be the safest option. Staying and defending can only be considered for homes that:

- have been designed and constructed specifically to address the threat of bush fire
- have been maintained to those levels
- are currently well prepared, and
- can be actively defended by people with the skills, knowledge and confidence to implement a well-rehearsed plan.

On days of CATASTROPHIC or EXTREME FDR:

- Fires will likely be uncontrollable, unpredictable and very fast moving with highly aggressive flames extending high above tree tops and buildings.
- Thousands of embers will be violently blown into and around homes causing other fires to start rapidly and spread quickly up to 20km ahead of the main fire.



The south east region of Australia remains one of the most bush fire prone areas on earth. In the last thirty years alone over 300 people have lost their lives to bush fire and some 7,500 homes and buildings have been destroyed.

- Fire can threaten suddenly, without warning and be incredibly hot and windy making it difficult to see, hear and breathe as the fire approaches.
- People in the path of the fire will almost certainly die, or be injured and significant numbers of homes and businesses destroyed or damaged.
- Even well prepared and constructed homes will not be safe.
- Expect power, water and phone networks to fail as severe winds bring down trees, power lines and blow roofs off buildings well ahead of the fire.

If you live in or near the bush, it is your responsibility to prepare yourself, your family, and your home to survive a bush fire. There is a wide range of planning and preparation activities that you can undertake which will dramatically increase the chances of you, your family, and your home surviving a bush fire.



PREPARE. ACT. SURVIVE.

The first step in planning to survive a bush fire is to understand your own level of risk. If you live in an Ember Zone or in a Rural Area of the ACT your risk from bushfire will be higher, but all residents of the ACT need to be prepared for bushfires as you may live, work or travel in these areas. By understanding your own level of risk you will be able to make informed decisions that are right for you and your family. One of the most important decisions you need to make is whether you will **Leave Early** or **Stay and Defend** a well prepared property. This decision is the basis of your **Bush Fire Survival Plan**.

If you have already decided to **Leave Early**, turn to page 4 and carefully read the **Leave Early** information before completing your **Bush Fire Survival Plan**.

What will you do?

The following questions may help you make the right decision for you and your family.

- Is your home adequately constructed, maintained and prepared to withstand the impact of a fire, or in other words, is your home defensible?
- Do you need to consider family members who are young, elderly or infirm?
- Are you able to maintain the necessary bush fire preparations for yourself and your property?
- Are you physically and emotionally prepared to actively defend your property?
- What will you do if a rapid onset fire leaves you with no time to leave. Where will you shelter and how will you get there?
- Do you have the knowledge, skills, confidence and equipment to **Stay and Defend** your property?

If you are going to **Leave Early** prepare for where you are going to go, how you are going to get there and what you are going to take.

If you are going to **Stay and Defend** you must have a plan for how you are going to survive and where you will shelter.

In either case have a backup plan in case things don't go the way you expect.

Once you have completed your **Bush Fire Survival Plan** practise it regularly to ensure everyone involved knows exactly what to do in the event of a fire.

Prepare yourself

Being involved in a fire will be one of the most traumatic experiences of your life. Bush fires can impact the health, safety and welfare of you and your family.

- You need to be both mentally and physically prepared to carry out your **Bush Fire Survival Plan**.
- Include the whole household in creating your **Bush Fire Survival Plan**.
- Prepare your Bush Fire Survival Kit.
- Prepare your Bush Fire Relocation Kit.

Prepare your property

There are a number of measures you can take to prepare your home and property for bush fire. Once your property has been properly prepared a regular maintenance routine will greatly reduce the work required.

Your maintenance routine should include:

- Mowing your grass regularly
- Removing excess ground fuels and combustible material (long dry grass, dead leaves and branches)
- Clearing leaves, twigs, bark and other debris from the roof and gutters
- Trimming low lying branches 2 metres from the ground surrounding your home.

You should also:

- Enclose open areas under your decks and floors
- Install fine steel wire mesh screens on all windows, doors, vents and weep holes
- Relocate flammable items away from your home including woodpiles, paper, boxes, crates, hanging baskets and garden furniture
- Seal all gaps in external roof and wall cladding
- Remember embers can get through gaps as small as 2mm.

Regardless of your decision, an unprepared property is not only at risk itself, but may also present an increased danger for your neighbours and their homes. Firefighters will carefully assess the risk before deciding if they are able to defend unprepared properties.

Know the **Fire Danger Rating** for any given day. You and your family should be aware of the actions you will take at the various **Fire Danger Rating** levels and it is important to ensure this is incorporated into your **Bush Fire Survival Plan**.

In the event of a bush fire you need to act decisively in accordance with your **Bush Fire Survival Plan**. To protect yourself from injury or death, do not adopt the 'wait and see' option. Fires can threaten suddenly and without warning, so you must be prepared to act decisively rather than wait for a warning that may not come.

- Always be aware of the current fire danger rating in your area.
- Act decisively the moment you know there is danger.
- Put your plan into action; do not 'wait and see'.
- Be alert for signs of fire, particularly the smell of smoke or the sight of flames.
- Look and listen for information on radio, television, the internet, mobile phones and by speaking to people in your community.

This section takes you step-by-step through each option – **Leave Early** or **Stay and Defend**. Use it to complete your personalised **Bush Fire Survival Plan** lift-out starting on page 7.

Preparation is the key to survival



If you are in any doubt, **LEAVE EARLY.**

PREPARE. ACT. SURVIVE.

LEAVE EARLY

Thinking “I will Leave Early” is not enough. You must PREPARE to ACT and SURVIVE.

If you plan to **Leave Early**, then you must leave your home well before a bush fire threatens and travelling by road becomes hazardous.

Please remember that leaving late is a deadly option.

Step 1: Preparation

Your property should be well prepared for bush fire even if you intend to **Leave Early**. The better prepared your home, the more likely it will survive a bush fire, regardless of whether residents or firefighters are present to protect it.

Step 2: Bush Fire Survival Plan

In making the decision to **Leave Early**, here are a few things you need to consider.

- When will you leave – have you decided what will be your trigger for action? (for example forecast conditions)
- Will your plan be different for weekdays, weekends or if someone is at home sick or injured?
- Are all members of your household going to **Leave Early**?
- Where will you and your family go to ensure you are all safe?
- What route will you take to get there?
- What will you take in your Relocation Kit when you **Leave Early**?
- What will you do if there are multiple CATASTROPHIC or EXTREME fire danger days in one week?
- Do your friends, family and neighbours know the details of your plan?
- What will you do with your pets?
- Do you have a backup plan in the event it is unsafe to leave?

Step 3: Travelling in your vehicle near a bush fire

Sheltering inside a vehicle is a high risk strategy that can result in death. Whilst sheltering inside a vehicle offers you a slightly higher chance of survival than being caught in the open, having a **Leave Early** or **Stay and Defend** strategy is a much safer option.

You should never take a journey into areas where the fire danger is Catastrophic or Extreme. You should consider postponing or finding alternative routes if necessary. If you can smell or see smoke in the distance it is best to u-turn and drive away from the danger.

If you are confronted with smoke or flames while on the road **STOP** as soon as it is safe to do so and immediately turn on the vehicle's headlights and hazard warning lights. If you do need to shelter in your vehicle drive your car into a bare, clear area well away from surrounding trees, leaving your headlights and hazard lights on. Turn off the ignition, close all windows and vents then cover yourself with woollen or cotton blankets to protect from radiant heat and take shelter below the window level. Drink water frequently and stay in the vehicle until the fire front has passed. Once the fire front has passed exit the vehicle to inspect the damage and ensure other passengers are safe.

Step 4: Backup Plan

Although you have made the decision to **Leave Early**, bushfire can become unpredictable and sometimes even the best laid plans may become unsafe to implement when circumstances change. Rapid onset of bushfire in your local area may make roads impassable or travel particularly dangerous.

You must have other options:

- Fill out the **Stay and Defend** plan on page 7 of this booklet in case you are unable to leave early. Ensure every member of the family understands it in case one or more of them are caught at home.
- Is your house well prepared? It can provide you with protection from radiant heat and is far safer than being out in the open air or in a vehicle.
- Identify areas within your neighbourhood where you could seek shelter or refuge from fires and radiant heat when a bushfire is impacting such as a neighbour's home.



PREPARE. ACT. SURVIVE.

STAY AND DEFEND

You can not just Stay and Defend without careful planning and preparation. You must PREPARE to ACT and SURVIVE.

Step 1: Preparation

Planning is absolutely critical to successfully **Stay and Defend**. Staying to actively defend your house involves the risk of psychological trauma, injury and death. Your property must be well prepared as the better prepared your home, the more likely it will survive a bush fire. Well prepared properties that are actively defended can provide a safe refuge for you and your family to shelter from radiant heat and ember attack.

Step 2: Bush Fire Survival Plan

In making the decision to **Stay and Defend**, here are a few things you need to consider.

- Is your property defensible?
- Are you physically and emotionally prepared to actively defend your property?
- Do you have well maintained resources and equipment and do you know how to use them?
- Do you have appropriate protective clothing?
- Will your **Bush Fire Survival Plan** need to be different for weekdays, weekends or if someone is home sick?
- Do you have a contingency plan?
- What will you do with your pets?
- Do you have a back up plan in the event it is unsafe to leave?
- Do your friends, family and neighbours know the details of your plan?



Step 3: Things you will need to do if you choose to Stay and Defend

Before the fire approaches:

- Locate your Bush Fire Survival Kit
- Tune your radio to a local station and have a battery back up
- Ensure there is enough drinking water as it will be extremely hot
- Secure livestock and pets in well cleared areas with sufficient drinking water
- Prepare water buckets, a torch and ladder ready to check the ceiling space
- Communicate with your neighbours.

As the fire approaches:

- Remove flammable items from the exterior of your house (e.g. blinds, outdoor furniture, door mats etc)
- Block down pipes and fill gutters with water as well as any available buckets
- Shut all windows and doors and place wet blankets and towels around windows and door edges
- Prepare inside your house (e.g. remove curtains, move furniture away from windows, close doors & windows)
- Patrol the inside of your home as well as the outside for embers or small fires that may start
- Wet vegetation near your house with a hose or sprinkler.

As the fire front arrives:

- Take all fire fighting equipment inside such as hoses and pumps as they may melt during the fire
- Patrol the inside of your home, including the ceiling space, for embers or small fires that may start.

After the fire front has passed:

- Go outside and extinguish small spot fires and burning embers
- Patrol your property inside and out, including the ceiling space, and extinguish any fires
- Stay at your property until the surrounding area is clear of fire
- If your house has caught on fire, protect your life.

Step 4: Backup Plan

Although you have made the decision to stay and actively defend, a change in circumstances on the day may require you to reconsider your **Bush Fire Survival Plan**. These changes may include a family member being caught at home alone or unexpected visitors, an illness or a fire danger rating of **Catastrophic** or **Extreme**.

- Fill out the **Leave Early** plan on page 7 of this booklet so you understand the things you need to consider should you have the opportunity to **Leave Early**.
- Have task lists for able bodied visitors or ensure they are aware of the safer locations in your neighbourhood where they can seek shelter or refuge from fires.
- Communicate with neighbours about backup plans.



PREPARE. ACT. SURVIVE.

CRITICAL ADVICE AND WARNINGS

During a bush fire your survival and safety depends on your preparations, and the decisions you make.

Your main priority is to ensure that you and your family are safe. The lives of you and your family are more important than any building.

Preparation is the key to surviving a bush fire so whatever happens:

- Make a **Bush Fire Survival Plan**
- Ensure everyone in your household understands the bush fire survival plan
- Don't wait and see, act decisively
- Always be aware of the Fire Danger Rating (FDR)
- Seek out information, do not assume you will receive a warning
- Practice your plan.

The safest option is always to be away from the fire, but that may not always be possible so regardless of your plan to **Leave Early** or **Stay and Defend** a well prepared property, you must have a back up plan.

Bush Fire Alerts

If you receive an emergency warning about a bush fire or other emergency, take notice – it could save your life.

Fires can threaten suddenly and without warning making it impossible to get messages out in time. For this reason it is important that your **Bush Fire Survival Plan** does not rely solely on receiving an alert. You should always be aware of what is happening and be prepared to act regardless of whether you receive an official emergency warning. Fire agencies provide as much information as is possible through a wide range of mechanisms.

There are three types of alert messages to help you make the right safety choices. These messages will change if the risk to you changes:

Bush fire Advice message – a fire has started - general information to keep you up to date.

Bush fire Watch and Act message – represents a heightened level of threat. Conditions are changing, a fire is approaching; lives may come under threat. Take appropriate action.

Bush fire Emergency Warning – is the highest level message advising of impending danger. It may be preceded with the Standard Emergency Warning Signal (SEWS). An Emergency Warning means there is a threat to lives and protective action is required immediately.

Fire Danger Ratings

The Fire Danger Rating (FDR) is an early indicator of potential danger and should act as your first trigger for action. The higher the rating, the greater the need for you to ACT. The FDR is an assessment of the potential fire behaviour, the difficulty of suppressing a fire, and the potential impact on the community should a bush fire occur on a given day.

FIRE DANGER RATING	Recommended Action and Potential Fire Behaviour
CATASTROPHIC: FDI 100+	The safest option is for you and your family to leave early, hours or the day before a fire occurs. Even well prepared and constructed homes will not be safe.
EXTREME: FDI 75 – 99	Leaving early (hours before) will always be the safest option for you and your family. Staying and Defending should only be considered if your home is well prepared, specifically designed and constructed for bush fire and you are currently capable of actively defending it.
SEVERE: FDI 50 – 74	Leaving early will always be the safest option for you and your family, Staying and Defending is only an option if your home is well prepared, and you are currently capable of actively defending it.
VERY HIGH: FDI 25 – 49	Be prepared to implement your Bush Fire Survival Plan and keep informed of current fire activity by monitoring local media and regularly checking for updates on the RFS website or Information Line.
HIGH: FDI 12 – 24	Ensure that you, your family, your home and property is well prepared for the risk of bush fire.
LOW-MODERATE: FDI 0 – 11	Review and rehearse your Bush Fire Survival Plan .



YOUR BUSH FIRE SURVIVAL PLAN

Complete your personalised Bush Fire Survival Plan lift-out.

Personal Details

Important phone numbers: 000 (Fire, Police & Ambulance)

Family:	Family:	Family:
Work:	Friends:	Friends:
School:		

Important contact details – name and phone number:

Insurer:	Policy Number:	Phone:
Electricity:		Phone:
Water:		Phone:
Gas:		Phone:
Phone Company:		Phone:
Canberra Connect:		Phone: 13 22 81

Leave Early

For those who have decided to Leave Early list their names and contact phone numbers then complete Section 1

Names:	Phone number:
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Stay and Defend

For those who have decided to Stay and Defend list their names and contact phone numbers then complete Section 2

Names:	Phone number:
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EMERGENCY CONTACTS

Check ACT Road Closures www.tams.act.gov.au
Check fire activity at www.esa.act.gov.au or call
Canberra Connect on 13 22 81

lift out

PULL THIS BUSH FIRE SURVIVAL PLAN LIFT-OUT FROM THIS DOCUMENT AND KEEP IN A SAFE PLACE



LEAVE EARLY – SECTION 1

Leaving Early will always be the safest option for you and your family. It is extremely important for you to prepare a detailed Leave Early plan to ensure everyone understands what to do and when. Use the boxes below to list tasks to do.

When to go – Think of different triggers that will cause you and your family to **Leave Early**.

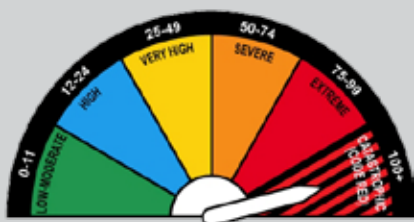
Remember to put on Personal Protective Clothing before you leave home. See page 11.

Where to go – Identify one or more safer locations. You don't have to travel far to be safe.

How to get there – What roads will you take to your destination and have an alternate route. Have a map of alternative routes.

What to take – Make a list of your most valuable items (e.g. Insurance papers, computer, photo albums, passports, birth certificates and other important documents). See Relocation Kit on page 13.

EVERYONE MUST HAVE A BACK UP PLAN



On **CATASTROPHIC** days the safest option is for you and your family to **Leave Early**, hours or the day before a fire occurs. Even well prepared and constructed homes will not be safe. Fires will likely be uncontrollable, unpredictable and very fast moving with highly aggressive flames extending high above tree tops and buildings.

On **EXTREME** days **Leave Early** (hours before) will always be the safest option for you and your family. **Stay and Defend** should only be considered if your home is well prepared, specifically designed and constructed for bush fire and you are currently capable of actively defending it. Fires will likely be uncontrollable, unpredictable and fast moving with flames in the tree tops, and higher than roof tops.



STAY AND DEFEND – SECTION 2

Anyone who is NOT going to Leave Early MUST be involved in completing this Stay and Defend plan to ensure they know what to do. Every Stay and Defend plan will be different depending on your circumstances. Use the boxes below to list tasks to do.

Before the fire approaches – Start getting yourself and your property ready for a bush fire.

Remember to put on Personal Protective Clothing. See page 11.

As the fire approaches – Prepare for ember attack on or near your home.

As the fire front arrives – Stay safe by monitoring the fire from inside your home.

After the fire has passed – Patrol your property and extinguish any spot fires or burning embers. You may need to keep this up for several hours.

EVERYONE MUST HAVE A BACK UP PLAN OR PLAN B

Back up plan – what will you do if you can't activate your plan? Remember that leaving late can lead to loss of lives.

Know where you will seek shelter or refuge from fires and radiant heat when a bushfire is impacting.

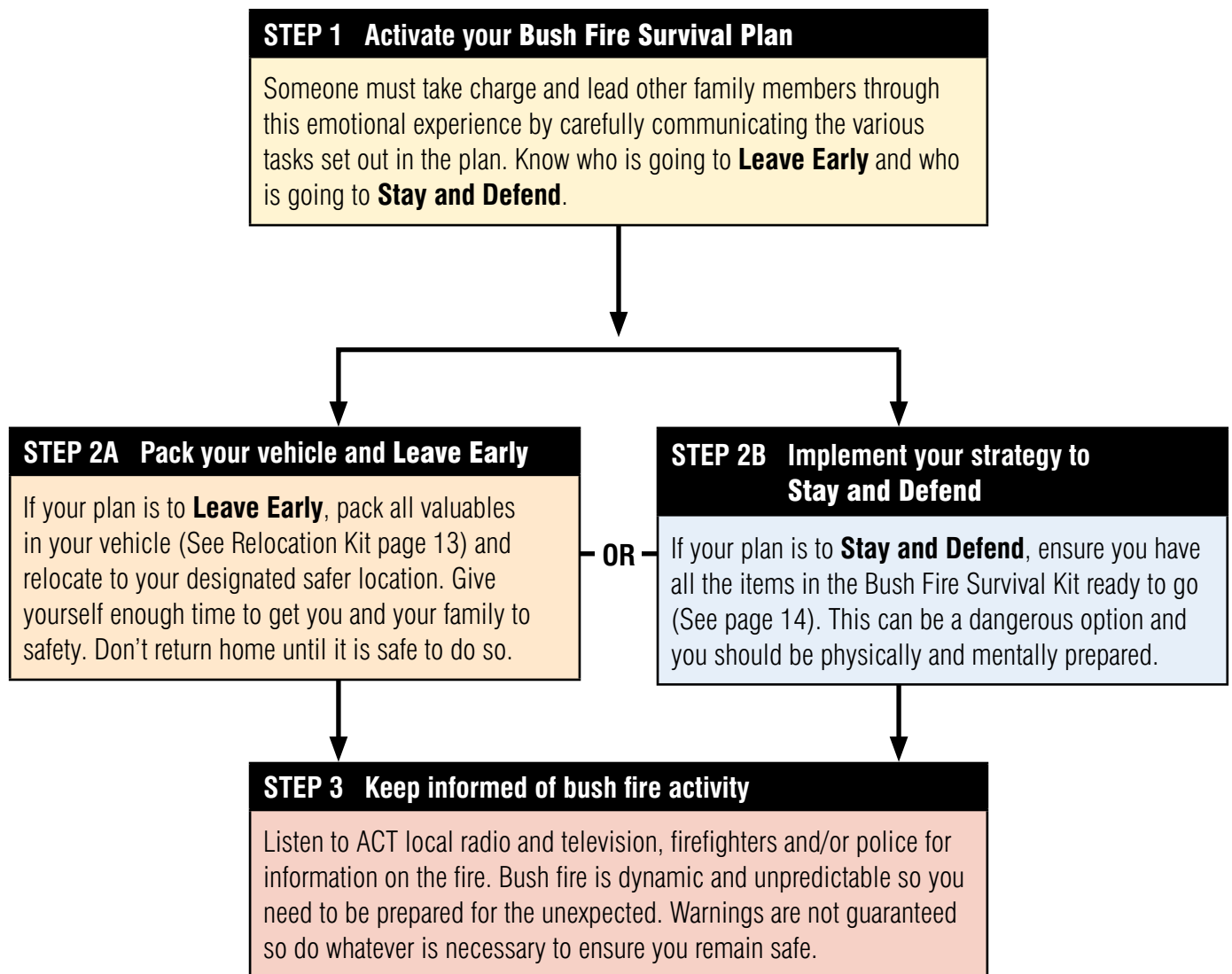
Identify other safer locations which could include a neighbour or friend's house, sporting field or recreation oval close to your home that will offer you a better level of protection.

lift out

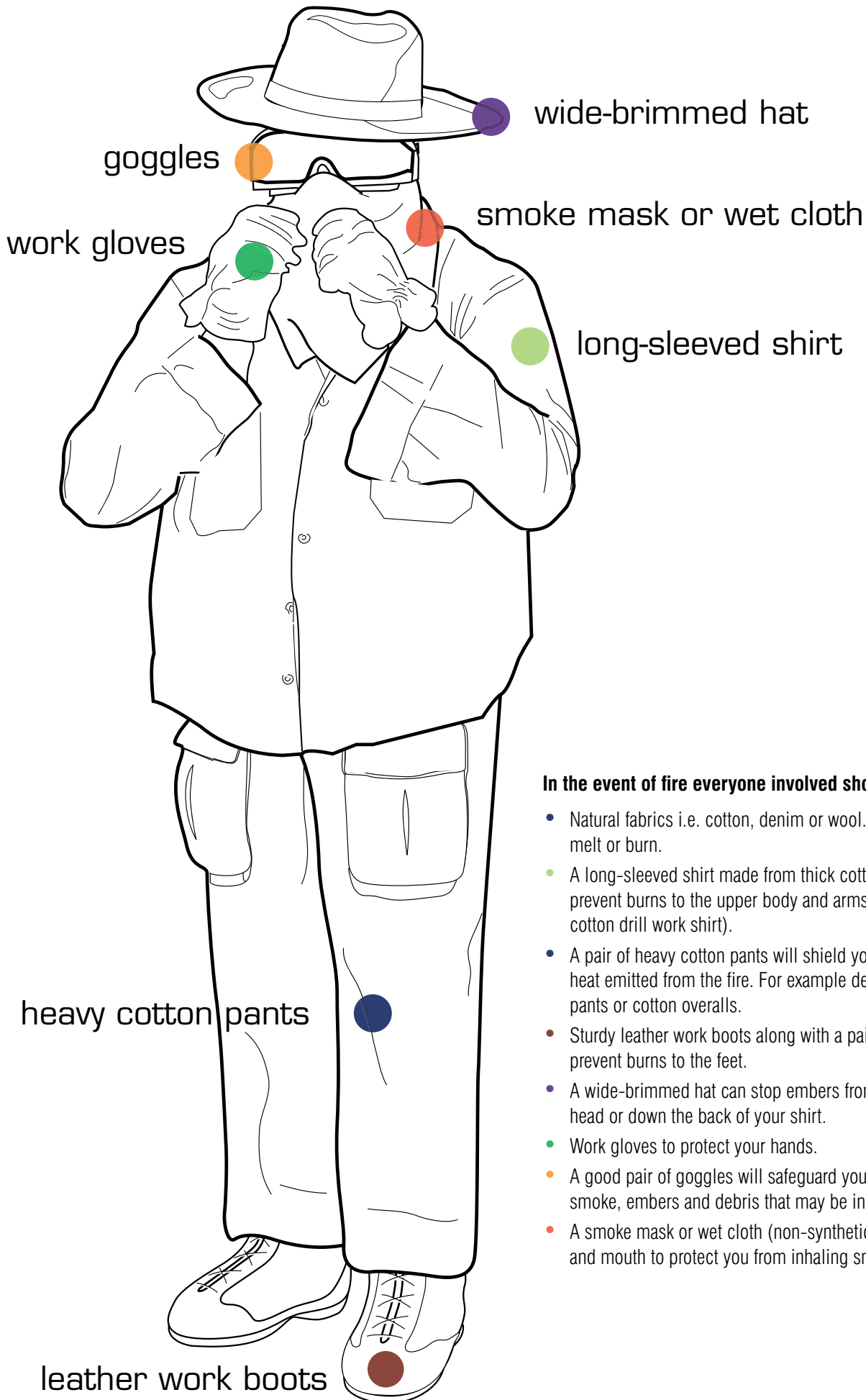
PULL THIS BUSH FIRE SURVIVAL PLAN LIFT-OUT FROM THIS DOCUMENT AND KEEP IN A SAFE PLACE

ACTIVATING YOUR BUSH FIRE SURVIVAL PLAN

Once you have prepared your **Bush Fire Survival Plan** and completed your preparations, it is absolutely essential that you regularly practise and review your plan. This will make sure you and your family are well organised in the event of a bush fire. If there is a risk to you and your family because of a fire or the forecast **FDR**, you need to **Activate** your **Bush Fire Survival Plan**.



PROTECTIVE CLOTHING



In the event of fire everyone involved should wear:

- Natural fabrics i.e. cotton, denim or wool. Synthetic fabrics can melt or burn.
- A long-sleeved shirt made from thick cotton or wool is ideal to prevent burns to the upper body and arms (e.g. flannelette or cotton drill work shirt).
- A pair of heavy cotton pants will shield your legs from the radiant heat emitted from the fire. For example denim jeans, oil-free drill pants or cotton overalls.
- Sturdy leather work boots along with a pair of woollen socks prevent burns to the feet.
- A wide-brimmed hat can stop embers from dropping onto your head or down the back of your shirt.
- Work gloves to protect your hands.
- A good pair of goggles will safeguard your eyes against any smoke, embers and debris that may be in the air.
- A smoke mask or wet cloth (non-synthetic) to cover your nose and mouth to protect you from inhaling smoke and embers.

RELOCATION KIT

Write a list of all items your family will need before, during and after your relocation. The list below shows items that you might like to put in your relocation kit.

Protective clothing for the whole family

Battery operated radio and spare batteries

Eye glasses

Mobile phone and battery charger



Medications

Wallet/purse and money

Clothing (2 sets of clothes for each family member)

Identity information (passports, birth certificates)



Bottled water (enough for each relocated family member)

Family and friends phone numbers

Items of high importance (e.g. family photos, valuables, important documents)



Blankets (natural fibres)

Children's toys



BUSH FIRE SURVIVAL KIT

You should have a bush fire survival kit stored in an area of the house that is safe to access.

The kit should contain:



- Protective clothing for the whole family (e.g. boots or sturdy footwear, jeans, long sleeve shirt made from natural fibres or cotton drill overalls)



- Drinking water
- Woollen blankets
- Fire extinguishers



- First aid kit
- Hoses



- Shovel
- Ladder
- Towels
- Medications



- Buckets
- Mop



- Goggles
- Gloves
- Battery operated radio



- Torch
- Spare batteries



- Smoke mask (Respirator mask)



OTHER CONSIDERATIONS

There are a range of other things to be considered regardless of your decision to Leave Early or Stay and Defend:

- Professional firefighting equipment such as pumps, canvas hose or sprinkler systems are recommended as they will withstand higher temperatures.
- Your pets, livestock and other animals require proper care and attention during fires. Consider food, medication, transportation and sleeping arrangements for your animals.
- Firefighters may need access to your property during a bush fire so it is in your best interests to allow enough space for fire trucks (4m wide by 4m high) to access your property and be able to turn around.

Myths versus Reality

MYTH	REALITY
There will be a fire truck available to defend my home.	Fire trucks and firefighters are a limited resource so it is important they are deployed in an appropriate manner to best manage the fire. The larger a fire the more likely it is that you will not see a fire truck before, during or after the bush fire.
I know the back streets in town like the back of my hand so it is OK for me to leave at the last minute.	If your decision in your Bush Fire Survival Plan is to Leave Early , then you should leave well before the fire front reaches your property. Irrespective of your local area knowledge you must stick to your plan and Leave Early . Leaving late can be fatal.
Someone from an emergency service will knock on my door when it is time to leave.	Emergency services personnel are not always available to alert the community of potential risks by door knocking and encouraging you to leave. You need to be ready to Leave Early if your life or the people in your care are at risk.
My house will not burn down because there is more than 50 metres between my home and nearby bushland.	Most houses lost in bush fires are lost as a result of ember attack. Under certain conditions embers can cause ignitions up to 20kms in front of the main fire. A combination of your level of preparation and your homes construction will determine the survivability of your home.
I only have to clean my gutters and mow my lawns to prepare my property for bush fire.	Fire requires fuel, heat and oxygen to occur. This means that flames or embers do not necessarily rely solely on your gutters and lawns for fuel. They might utilise overhanging trees, woodpiles, old building materials under the deck or chemicals in the garden shed to sustain them. Do yourself and your neighbours a favour by taking the time to properly prepare your whole property, which includes yourself, your house and your land.

More information can be found on www.esa.act.gov.au



**For more information on
bushfires go to
www.esa.act.gov.au
or call
Canberra Connect
13 22 81**



ACT Emergency Services Agency

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email: esahaveyoursay@act.gov.au
web: www.esa.act.gov.au
Canberra Connect 13 22 81

