

# Code Red Management Plan

## Introduction

The Cemeteries and Crematoria Association of Victoria (CCAV) is the Industry Association for Victorian Public Cemeteries, which are all situated on Crown land.

Our members accept bookings and arrange interment or cremation services for funerals organised and supervised by private companies (Funeral Directors) on behalf of families of the deceased. Attendance numbers at funerals vary significantly but can be many hundreds, with associated access and egress difficulties.

Fire Danger Ratings were introduced for the 2009/10 summer, together with messages to accompany each level of fire danger. The highest level was Code Red and the corresponding message was that those living in a bushfire-prone area should leave the night before or early in the morning.

The declaration of a 'Code Red' day would particularly affect anyone living, working or travelling in any of the 52 townships that had been identified by the Victorian government as representing the highest fire-risk areas in the state.

Many of these townships are heavily-treed, picturesque environments, surrounded by rural land and forests, and some have an operational cemetery within their locality.

The Victorian government had declared that a significant number of schools and early childhood services in these identified towns would close on Code Red days. This was such a new concept and highlighted the need for the cemetery industry to investigate if a plan for their operations was needed, specifically for Code Red days.

As with most Victorians, the CCAV is aware of the reasoning and importance of the Victorian Government adopting the Fire Danger Rating Scale and of the impact cancelling a funeral may have, with the possibility of grieving family members being further distressed, however we are also aware of the real risk of having a large number of people entering an unfamiliar locality with a possibility of being caught in a wildfire on such a day, when local residents are asked to leave early.

In October 2011, the CCAV wrote to the CFA/ DSE and DoH and requested assistance and guidance on what circumstances should lead to cancellation of planned funerals particularly if they are located in the 52 townships that have been identified as representing the highest fire-risk areas of the State as well as providing a management plan that may be implemented for all 522 Victorian Cemeteries so we can prepare our Members during declarations of Severe, Extreme and Code Red days.

In August 2012, the CFA developed a document "Guidelines for Conducting Small Events and Gatherings in High Fire Risk locations". This document provides some recommendations to people organising such events as weddings, parties and funerals in high fire danger areas, not just in the 52 townships that have been identified as the highest risk. The CFA suggests that on Days Declared Code Red, events planned for Code Red days be cancelled, deferred or relocated if they have been arranged in high fire danger areas.

The CFA also recommends that any person or body planning an event on a day of extreme or Severe fire danger rating have a carefully thought out fire emergency plan that is location and event specific and depending upon the size and nature of the event, there should be consideration given to cancellation, deferment or relocation.

## Towns identified “at High Risk”

1. Aireys Inlet (Aireys Inlet/Moggs Creek/Fairhaven/Big Hill)
2. Andersons Inlet (Inverloch, Venus Bay, Waratah Bay, Walkerville)
3. Anglesea
4. Barongarook
5. Barwon Downs
6. Bemm River
7. Bendigo
8. Blackwood
9. Blairgowrie
10. Bolwarra
11. Breamlea
12. Cann River
13. Carlisle River
14. Castlemaine
15. Cockatoo
16. Creswick
17. Dandenong Ranges
18. Daylesford
19. Deans Marsh (Bambra/Pennyroyal)
20. Dereel
21. Dunkeld
22. Eaglehawk
23. Forrest
24. Gembrook
25. Greendale
26. Halls Gap
27. Hepburn
28. Jan Juc (Jan Juc/Bellbrae)
29. Junortoun
30. Kangaroo Flat
31. Kewarren
32. Lavers Hill
33. Loch Sport
34. Lorne
35. Macedon
36. Maiden Gully
37. Mallacoota
38. Marengo
39. Mt Helen/Mt Clear
40. Mt Macedon
41. Nelson
42. Noojee
43. Peterborough
44. Rye/St Andrews
45. Sandy Point
46. St Arnaud
47. Steiglitz
48. Trentham
49. Upper Beaconsfield
50. Warrandyte/North Warrandyte
51. Woodend
52. Wye River (Wye River/Kennett River/Separation Creek)

# CCAV's approach to Code Red days

Being all too aware of the risk and potential impact of bushfires in Victoria, the CCAV made the decision in September 2012, that it would recommend to Members to not operate any services or open any facilities in towns identified by the Government as High Risk, from 12 midnight to 12 midnight (24 hours) on Code Red days.

This included Funeral Services operated in cemetery-owned buildings, cremation and burials, placement of cremated remains and any other services that are usually expected at the cemetery.

Similarly, there would be no outdoor works conducted by cemetery staff in these towns on Code Red days.

It may be possible that administration staff will be able to attend the administration building and office as usual, however this depends on the cemeteries Wild Fire Risk Plan. If staff are on site, it is suggested that the radio is switched on and broadcasting ABC. 774 on the AM channel.

The CCAV is aware that the possibility of postponing a funeral is a difficult decision, with many stake holders being impacted, however the risk of mourners, funeral directors, and cemetery staff being caught in a wild fire is a real risk that needs to be minimised.

Having these people at risk on such a day may have impact on Public Liability, Professional Indemnity and Work Cover Insurance.

## Communicating the Code Red day arrangements

The decision to close services and facilities on a Code Red day will require adequate public notice prior to the commencement, and throughout the fire danger period.

This way, if a funeral has been arranged for a specific day, and then that day is declared a Code Red day, most likely, the family would already be aware of this prior to being informed by their funeral director.

Ideally, the industry as a whole would be able to notify the public of service arrangements for Code Red days through a joint communication plan, however at times, it may be more viable to use local media, and this would be arranged through the cemetery.

The aim of a communication plan is to create community awareness of the cemetery industries service arrangements on Code Red days, thereby encouraging those who live, work or visit in these areas to consider that funerals and other services will be impacted on these days.

Target audiences includes:

- residents throughout the identified areas;
- funeral directors who reside or perform funerals in these areas;
- the general population of Victoria who may plan to attend a funeral in these areas
- businesses and contractors operating in these areas;
- agencies community workers and volunteers;
- relevant government departments, neighbouring municipalities and emergency services.

Communication methods may include some or all of these:

- letters to specific funeral directors and the Australian Funeral Directors Association (AFDA);
- CCAV, AFDA, DoH and local cemetery websites;
- newspaper advertisements;
- fliers for funeral directors to give to families during arrangements.
- media releases;
- email to ABC Radio;
- community-based newsletters;

There are two stages identified for these communications:

- **Stage 1** (at the commencement of the fire season):

Key message: These are the CCAV recommendations on a CODE RED day and this is how cemetery services will be affected.

- **Stage 2** (when a Code Red day is advised by Bureau of Meteorology)

Individual Cemeteries to notify local funeral directors and if time permits, possibly place specific notice local newspaper.

## Conclusion

The CCAV is aware of the impact cancelling a funeral may have, with the possibility of grieving family members being further distressed, however we are also aware of the real risk of having a large number of people entering an unfamiliar locality with a possibility of being caught in a wildfire on such a day, when local residents are asked to leave early.

The CCAV recommends that Members speak to their local Fire Authority to ascertain if their cemetery is at risk of Wildfire. If their site has been deemed "at risk", they need to develop a Bushfire Management and Emergency Plan.

The CCAV also recommends that all Members who operate cemeteries within these identified localities adopt this Code Red Management Plan that may be implemented on declarations of Severe, Extreme and Code Red days." Cemeteries outside these localities may also have a Wildfire risk, and these cemeteries will also need to develop their own Bushfire Emergency Plan to ascertain what level of risk their site is.

If you require additional local information, please contact your local CFA, DSE Office or the Department of Health's Cemetery Program.

If you require assistance with press releases or public statements, please contact the CCAV on (03) 9863 6911.