



# CFA Guidelines for Conducting Small Events and Gatherings in High Fire Risk locations.

## Purpose of these guidelines

These guidelines are produced by CFA to inform and assist persons planning and organising small events or activities (less than around 250 people) that:

- involve gatherings of people which may be held in High Fire Risk areas; and
- may fall on days of severe and above fire danger rating.

## Scope of these guidelines

These guidelines have been produced to assist organisers of 'small' events such as:

- outdoor weddings
- funerals
- school/scout/church camps
- car rallies
- orienteering events
- community events including street markets/fairs

Outside the scope of this document:

- Major events; and
- Providing detailed prescriptions for event organisers.

These guidelines are to apply to any area where there may be bushfire risk, and not limited to the 52 towns identified as high risk by the Victorian Government.

All established venues in high fire risk locations should have a Bushfire Emergency Plan. The bushfire emergency plan may constitute a sub set of an emergency management plan. The development of a Bushfire Emergency Plan is outside the scope of these guidelines. CFA's ***Guide to developing a Bushfire Emergency Plan in Victoria (Interim: July 2012)*** can assist venues to develop their Bushfire Emergency Plan. It is recommended that any event organiser reads both sets of guidelines if they are planning to hold an event at an existing venue.

## Fire Danger Ratings (FDR) and what they mean for events

The Fire Danger Rating predicts how a fire would behave if one started, including how difficult it would be to put out. The higher the rating, the more dangerous the conditions. Fire Danger Ratings are forecast by the Bureau of Meteorology during the fire season based on weather and other environmental conditions and forecast up to four days in advance. CFA provides the following advice for event organisers where the fire danger ratings outlined below apply to areas where they have planned an event.

## **Code Red Fire Danger Rating**

Code red designation represents the worst case scenario conditions for a bushfires (including grass fires). These are the days when catastrophic outcomes are most likely if a bushfire starts and takes hold. Most buildings are not designed or constructed to withstand fires in these conditions. The safest place to be is away from high risk bushfire areas. Avoid forested areas, thick bush or long, dry grass.

*CFA recommends that events planned for Code Red days be cancelled, deferred or relocated.*

## **Extreme fire danger rating**

Expect extremely hot, dry and windy conditions. If a fire starts and takes hold, it will be uncontrollable, unpredictable and fast moving. Spot fires will start, move quickly and come from many directions.

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

## **Severe fire danger rating**

Expect hot, dry and possibly windy conditions. If a fire starts and takes hold, it may be uncontrollable.

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

## **Duty of care and vulnerability**

Any organiser of an event or gathering may be perceived to have a duty of care to provide for the health and safety of those participating. A bushfire is an obvious threat to the health and safety of anyone caught in its path. Event organisers need to plan to ensure the safety of all attending an event, by identifying and assessing potential risks, and implementing actions to reduce those risks to an acceptable level.

Events or gatherings in a high risk fire area may expose participants to the risk of bushfire in the right set of conditions. It is important to note that many of these participants may have increased vulnerability for one or more of the following reasons:

- They may have little or no education or knowledge in relation to bushfire;
- They may have reduced capacity through age, disability, health or other impediment to evaluate the risks and to respond adequately to the bushfire threat;
- They may present organisational difficulties for evacuation and/or management;
- They may be vulnerable to physical stresses and anxiety arising from the bushfire threat, including heat and smoke;
- There may be significant communication barriers.

## **Site specific factors to consider for events**

In planning an event, time should be taken to consider factors that are relevant to the specific site, such as:

- Is the intended site in an area of bushfire risk? The Department of Planning and Community Development website can help identify whether a particular location falls within a designated Bushfire Prone Area (moderate bushfire risk) or A Bushfire Management Overlay (area of highest bushfire risk)
- Size of the premises/location
- Bushfire risks impacting on the roads/access into and out of the proposed event site
- Whether the venue/premises has an existing Bushfire Emergency Plan.
- Whether participants are full time residents or visitors
- Language or cultural issues to manage
- How the premises/ site might be impacted by a bushfire
- Where is it practical for attendees to go to be safe?

Consideration of these matters will help inform decisions on actions to deal with severe and extreme days.

## **Making the decision to cancel, defer or relocate an event**

To assist event organisers to make their decision about their planned event, a variety of resources are available:

- The CFA website can provide access to general information such as ignition controls where these are relevant (eg events involving fireworks or other sources of naked flames):
  - Can I or Can't I?
  - Fire restrictions in particular municipality
- The Bureau of Meteorology website can provide information about weather forecasts a few days ahead

Event organisers should also be informed by their own context:

- A clear understanding of their duty of care to their clients under common law and any specific legislation
- Detailed understanding of their public liability and any relevant professional indemnity insurance cover
- OH&S considerations for their staff and other persons under their supervision/direction

Where the decision has been made to go ahead with an event, on a severe or higher fire danger rating day, organisers should provide details of their planned event to the local fire brigade. They should make sure that essential details such as times, numbers and types of people, are included as part of the implementation of their plan.