

Purpose & scope of these guidelines

The guidelines are designed to inform and assist Class B Cemetery Trusts with planning and organising funerals, cremated remains placements and other Trust operations at Trust locations during High Fire Danger periods.

Duty of care & vulnerability

All Cemetery Trusts have a duty of care to provide for the health and safety of their staff and volunteers and the public when visiting the cemetery. A bushfire is an obvious threat to the health and safety of anyone caught in its path. These guidelines are provided to assist with managing the safety of all attending the cemetery, by identifying and assessing potential fire risks, and implementing actions to reduce those risks to an acceptable level.

Funerals or other services in a high-risk fire area may expose staff, volunteers, funeral directors and mourners to the risk of bushfire in the right set of conditions. It is important to note that many of the people present 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 or the local area;
- They may have reduced capacity through age, disability, health, grief 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; and
- There may be significant communication barriers.

Making the decision to postpone a funeral or restrict staff operations

Fire Danger Ratings are provided four (4) days in advance on the CFA (and Vic Emergency) website. It is recommended a nominated person/role checks this rating daily as part of standard 'monitoring' activities during the declared Fire Danger Period, to allow maximum planning time (for cancellations, relocations, etc.).

Any non-essential activities at these locations (or travelling to and from them) should be managed in accordance with the advice for the rating (<https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/warnings-restrictions/about-fire-danger-ratings>). This means activities may be postponed/cancelled on Catastrophic fire days, and potentially Extreme and High fire days or if there is a fire in the immediate area.

To assist Class B Cemetery Trust's in making a decision about restricting Trust operations on certain days during the fire period, a variety of resources are available through:

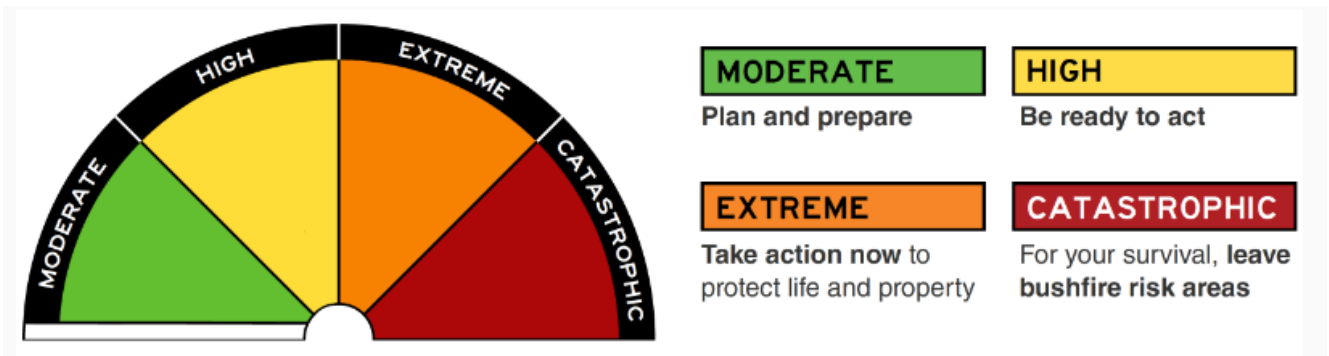
- The CFA website <http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/>
- The Bureau of Meteorology website <http://bom.gov.au>

The Trust should also consider its responsibilities as an employer and land manager with an understanding of:

- Its duty of care to its clients under common law.
- The public liability and professional indemnity insurance cover it holds.
- OH&S considerations for staff, funeral directors and other persons under its supervision and direction.

Fire Danger Ratings

The Fire Danger Rating predicts how a fire is likely to behave if one started, including how difficult it would be to put out. The higher the rating, the more dangerous the conditions. The rating is your trigger to act, so to stay safe you need to stay aware of the Fire Danger Rating in your area.



More information can be found at <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/warnings-restrictions/total-fire-bans-and-ratings/about-fire-danger-ratings>

Every day during the fire season, the Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) forecasts an outlook of the fire danger index (FDI) by considering elements of the predicted weather including temperature, relative humidity, wind speed, and dryness of vegetation. It is expected that in most cases a minimum of 24 hours' notice would be given for the declaration of a Catastrophic Fire Day.

Total Fire Ban days, these can occur at any time during the year, not just during the fire season and occasionally with very little notice.

Catastrophic Fire Danger Rating

Catastrophic represents the worst-case scenario conditions for bush or grass fires. 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.

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 will come from many directions. Homes that are situated and constructed or modified to withstand a bushfire, that are well prepared and actively defended, may provide safety. You must be physically and mentally prepared to defend in these conditions.

High Fire Danger Rating

Expect hot, dry and possibly windy conditions. If a fire starts and takes hold, it may be uncontrollable. Well prepared homes that are actively defended can provide safety. You must be physically and mentally prepared to defend in these conditions.

Site specific factors to be considered with these guidelines

In preparing these guidelines, the following factors were considered in regards to the cemetery operations.

- Is the cemetery site in an area of bushfire risk? Identify if it is a low bushfire risk, moderate bushfire risk or area of highest bushfire risk.
- Size of the cemetery, vegetation surrounding the site and if the site can provide any protection and how the site might be impacted by a bushfire.
- Bushfire risks impacting on the roads/access into and out of the cemetery.
- Where is it practical for attendees to go to be safe?

Trust records management

The Trust should also consider the safe keeping of their records, including, but not limited to, cemetery records and financial records in the event of a bush fire.

A record of all hard copy documents/records should be created and a plan developed to ensure these documents/records are safely secured in the case of a fire.

Other Considerations

CFA provides the following as general recommendations for bushfire preparedness for industry/business:

- Designated evacuation assembly areas are allocated, accessible and clearly signed.
- All fire protection equipment (fire extinguishers, fire hose reels, fire hydrants/boosters, sprinklers, etc. are regularly serviced as per the relevant Australian Standards and site personnel are trained in the safe and effective use of first-aid fire-fighting equipment (fire extinguishers and fire hose reels).
- Site personnel are trained in the site's Emergency Management Plan.
- Bushfire preparedness housekeeping inspections are conducted prior to the Fire Danger Period.
- Vegetation management activities to be conducted across the facility (e.g., grass slashed or mowed; dead/fallen vegetation removed).
- Clearance of extraneous materials or vegetation in any fire breaks (such as at the site perimeter and around any site assets).
- Removal of extraneous or unnecessary materials (fuel loads) from site prior to the Fire Danger Period. E.g., Dilapidated/stored vehicles, plant or equipment; excess fuel/chemicals; any combustible materials.
- All vehicle site access points, including emergency access points, are clear and accessible.
- Consider the installation of an Emergency Information Container, with an Emergency Information Book, at site vehicle entrances
<https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/articledocuments/409/EIB-GuidelinesV2.pdf.aspx>

Note: Cemetery staff or Cemetery trust's authorised representative have the authority to close the cemetery and require all people present to evacuate the cemetery.

Neighbourhood Safer Places - Place of Last Resort

A 'Neighbourhood Safer Place' (also known as a 'Bushfire Place of Last Resort' or NSP-BPLR) is a place of last resort when all other bushfire plans have failed.



What are NSP-BPLRs?

- Locations that may provide some protection from direct flame and heat from a fire, but they do not guarantee safety.
- Not an alternative to planning to leave early or to stay and defend your property; they are a place of last resort if all other fire plans have failed.
- An existing location and not a purpose-built, fire-proof structure. It is important to know that many NSP-BPLRs are simply a clearing that provides separation distance from the bushfire hazard (e.g. forest).
- Not to be confused with Community Fire Refuges, Relief Centres, Recovery Centres or Assembly Areas, each of which have a different and specific purpose.
- Not an appropriate destination when leaving the area early.
- Not a place of shelter from other types of emergencies (e.g. to escape rising floodwaters or severe weather events).

Where are NSP-BPLRs?

- An NSP-BPLR may be an open space at a local sports field, foreshore or park, or they may be located within a community building such as a hall or sports pavilion.
- You can recognise an NSP-BPLR by a green and white sign which includes the words;
 - 'Bushfire Neighbourhood Safer Place - A Place of Last Resort' or
 - 'Bushfire Place of Last Resort – Neighbourhood Safer Place'
- NSP-BPLRs are established by local government. Not all townships have a designated NSP-BPLR in the local area.

You can search for your local NSP-BPLR at <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/plan-prepare/your-local-area-info-and-advice/neighbourhood-safer-places>

All Trusts should identify and include their NSP-BPLR in their High Fire Risk Plans. If no NSP-BPLR exists the Trust should instruct staff or volunteers that if they find themselves in a position that a fire is in the area and they unable to exit the area safely they should:

- look for an open area such as a Ploughed paddock, open grassed area such as the centre of a well maintained cemetery or reserve that is as far from vegetation as possible.
- a solid structure that will provide shelter from radiant heat that is situated as far from vegetation as possible.
- Body of water (beach, lake, pool, dam or river). This does not include a water tank. Dams may not be reliable as their water levels fluctuate and they may be empty in summer.

Such places are truly a last resort, to be considered only when all other plans have failed.

Sample High Fire Risk Policy for ABC Cemetery Trust

The ABC Cemetery Trust recognises the potential of fire danger to contractors, funeral directors and their staff, members of the public, Trust members and other community volunteers. This policy has been developed in the interests of public safety.

The ABC Cemetery Trust is aware 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.

This policy specifies:

- No fire may be lit in the ABC Cemetery on a declared Total Fire Ban (TFB) day or High, Extreme or Catastrophic Fire Days. This includes the lighting of candles.
- On declared Catastrophic Fire Days:
 - The ABC Cemetery will be closed to the public;
 - Graveside services & interments will be postponed;
 - The operation of motorised outdoor tools (including brush cutters, chainsaws, mowers etc.) is not permitted;
 - Grave digging operations will not proceed;
 - No cemetery works will proceed.
- On declared Total Fire Ban days or High or Extreme Fire Days:
 - Graveside services and interments may proceed subject to advice from the CFA;
 - Grave digging operations may not be carried out without the permission of the Trust Chairman or Secretary;
 - The operation of motorised outdoor tools (including brush cutters, chainsaws, mowers etc.) is not permitted;
 - Cemetery works may not be carried out without the permission of the Trust Chairman or Secretary.
- In the event of a fire in the vicinity of the ABC Cemetery the Cemetery may be closed without notice.

Appendix 1 – Fire Danger Rating Examples

Catastrophic Fire Danger Rating example:

ABC Cemetery has been assessed as a very high bushfire risk due to the high vegetation around the locality and the poor routes available to exiting the area.

For these reasons, ABC Cemetery Trust will not perform any grave digging on Catastrophic declared days. The Trust will also not perform any other tasks or have staff or contractors on site on these days.

Extreme Fire Danger Rating example:

ABC Cemetery only perform grave digging on Extreme days if the following conditions are agreed upon:

- The interment will take place prior to 11:00am and that staff can commence backfilling the grave by 11:30am and leave the site by 12:00noon.*
- There are no fire threats in the surrounding townships that pose a risk to the township.*
- The Funeral Director or their staff on site will comply with instructions received by Trust staff on site in regards to CFA warnings, safety and evacuation procedures.*
- The Funeral Director will remain on site until all mourners have left the site and be prepared to instruct mourners on safety and evacuation procedures.*
- No “Watch and Act” warning has been issued for the area and towns being travelled through.*
- No “Emergency Warning” has been issued for the area and towns being travelled through.*

At no notice, any services may be postponed if Watch and Act or Emergency Warnings are issued on the morning of the funeral.

If the Watch and Act warning is issued while the service is taking place, immediate backfilling will take place and all mourners, funeral director staff and cemetery staff will leave the cemetery immediately via the safest route, as recommended by emergency authorities.

If the Emergency Warning is issued prior to lowering of the coffin, the coffin will be placed back into the hearse and all mourners, funeral director staff and cemetery staff will leave the cemetery immediately via the safest route, as recommended by emergency authorities.

High Fire Danger Rating example:

ABC Cemetery Trust will only perform contract grave digging on severe days if the following conditions are agreed upon:

- *There are no fire threats in the surrounding townships that pose a risk to the township.*
- *The Funeral Director or their staff on site will comply with instructions received by Trust staff on site in regards to CFA warnings, safety and evacuation procedures.*
- *The Funeral Director will remain on site until all mourners have left the site and be prepared to instruct mourners on safety and evacuation procedures.*
- *No “Watch and Act” warning has been issued for the area and towns being travelled through.*
- *No “Emergency Warning” has been issued for the area and towns being travelled through.*

At no notice, any services may be postponed if Watch and Act or Emergency Warnings are issued on the morning of the funeral.

If the Watch and Act warning is issued while the interment is taking place, immediate backfilling will take place and all mourners, funeral director staff and cemetery staff will leave the cemetery immediately via the safest route, as recommended by emergency authorities.

If the Emergency Warning is issued prior to lowering of the coffin, the coffin will be placed back into the hearse and all mourners, funeral director staff and cemetery staff will leave the cemetery immediately via the safest route, as recommended by emergency authorities.