Schools in Category 0, 1 and 2 on the Bushfire At-Risk Register

**School preparedness and pre-emptive actions for the bushfire season**

Chart

Description automatically generated

Schools and early childhood services undertake a range of activities each year to prepare for bushfires and grassfires.

The Department of Education conducts an annual fire risk assessment of schools and early childhood services. Those at the greatest levels of risk are published on the Bushfire At-Risk Register (BARR) and Category 4 list.

Schools at the highest levels of risk (Categories 0, 1 and 2) take pre-emptive actions on elevated fire danger days in their Local Government Area according to their fire risk category to minimise the risk of being caught in a fire in these conditions.

All schools and early childhood services listed on the BARR and Category 4 list will also close when a Catastrophic fire danger rating day is forecast in their fire weather district.

As part of preparing our school for the fire season, we have updated and completed our Emergency Management Plan and prioritised maintenance work and bushfire mitigation works that may assist in preparing for the threat of fire clearing our facility’s grounds and gutters.

***What does this mean for our school?***

Emerald Secondary College is in the **Central** fire districtand the Local Government Area (LGA) **Cardinia.** We have also been identified as being in one of the highest fire risk categories - **BARR 2.**

Our school will enact its pre-emptive action plan for **closure** on a day forecasted as **Extreme fire danger rating** in our **local government area (LGA),** **Cardinia.**

***What is the department’s policy?***

The department’s [Bushfire and Grassfire Preparedness Policy](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/bushfire-and-grassfire-preparedness/policy) requires schools at high risk of bushfire to enact pre-emptive action plans based on LGA level fire danger forecasts. Conditions can vary significantly across the wider weather district, so using local forecasts helps us to respond appropriately to risks in our local area and maintain stability and educational continuity for our students and school community. This policy is consistent for all schools at high levels of risk and this approach is supported by emergency services.

The policy also requires that all schools and early childhood services on the BARR and the Category 4 list close when a Catastrophic fire danger rating day is forecast in their fire weather district. All school bus routes which travel in or through a district with Catastrophic fire danger must also be cancelled.

***When will our school enact our pre-emptive action plan?***

Our school will enact our pre-emptive plan to **close** on days when the fire danger forecast for our local government area, **Cardinia** is **Extreme.**

Our school will use the LGA forecast confirmed by emergency services the day before an Extreme fire danger day in our LGA to trigger our plan. We will advise you when we are enacting our pre-emptive action plan. Please be aware that no one will be on site on days where the school has enacted this plan.

***What do we do when our LGA has a different fire danger rating to the wider fire weather district?***

As we respond to local conditions, there may be days during the fire season when our fire weather district, **central** is forecast as an Extreme fire danger rating, but our LGA is at a lower level of fire danger. On these days our school operations will continue as normal, however we will be taking action in line with fire services advice by:

* checking our Emergency Management Plan and taking any necessary preparedness actions
* actively monitor our local conditions and warnings
* having plans and procedures in place for if a fire starts to support us to take immediate action.

Whilst our school will continue to operate, we encourage our school community to consider their own [bushfire survival plan](https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/plan-prepare/before-and-during-a-fire/your-bushfire-plan) and reassess any travel through bushfire risk areas. We encourage you to follow your family bushfire survival plan and the advice of emergency services.

There may also be days where our LGA is forecast as Extreme fire danger, but Cardinia is not. On these days we **will** enact our pre-emptive action plan.

***When will our school be closed due to Catastrophic fire danger?***

Our school will also **close** on a day forecasted as **Catastrophic fire danger rating** in **Central fire district.**

Closure of the school due to a forecast Catastrophic day will be confirmed on the day prior and we will provide you with advice before the end of the school day. Any information regarding potential or confirmed Catastrophic fire danger days will be communicated to you by Compass newsfeed, email and/or text message.

**Once confirmed, the decision to close will not change, regardless of improvements in the weather forecast.** This is to avoid confusion and help your family plan alternative care arrangements for your child. It is also important to be aware that:

* No one will be on site on days where the school is closed due to a forecast Catastrophic day.
* All bus routes that travel through the Catastrophic area will be cancelled.
* School camps will be cancelled if a Catastrophic fire danger rating day is forecast for fire weather district in which the camp is located, or if the travel involves passing through areas that have Catastrophic fire danger.

Families are encouraged to enact their Bushfire Survival Plan on Catastrophic fire danger rating days. **On such days, children should never be left at home alone or in the care of older children.**

For those of us living in a bushfire prone area, the Country Fire Authority (CFA) advises that when Catastrophic days are forecast, the safest option is to leave the night before or early on the morning of the Catastrophic day.

***What can families and the school community do to help us prepare?***

* Ensure we have your current contact details, including your mobile phone numbers. Keep in touch with us by reading our newsletters, checking our website (https://www.emeraldsc.vic.edu.au/), checking the compass newsfeed and emails, by talking to your child’s teacher or any other member of the teaching staff about our emergency management plan.
* Make sure your family’s bushfire survival plan is up-to-date and includes alternative care arrangements in the event that our school is closed due to elevated fire danger or closed due to a Catastrophic fire danger. Further information can be found on the [CFA’s website](https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/plan-prepare/before-and-during-a-fire/your-bushfire-plan).
* Enact your family’s bushfire survival plan if your own triggers are met. Our school community may be spread out across many areas and some families may be at higher risk than others. Your family’s safety is critical, so please let us know if you are enacting your bushfire survival plan and if your children will be absent on these days.
* If your child is old enough, talk to [them about bushfires](https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/schools/primary-schools/activities) and your family’s bushfire survival plan.

You can find more information on emergencies, and preparedness actions here:

* VicEmergency app – that can be downloaded on your android and iOS mobile devices
* VicEmergency Hotline (1800 226 226)
* Website <https://emergency.vic.gov.au>
* Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/vicemergency>)
* Twitter (<https://twitter.com/vicemergency>)
* ABC local radio, Sky News and other emergency broadcasters