

Western Australia Position Statement on Evacuation and Protection of People and Property Endangered by Bushfires

FESA, CALM and local government are the designated Hazard Management Agencies (HMA) for bushfire. These agencies have responsibility for the protection of life, property and the environment from fire and will make decisions in relation to community dangers posed by bushfires. The Western Australia Police Service has an obligation for the protection of life and property. Agencies with fire management related responsibilities and the Western Australia Police Service will work together to protect life and property during bushfires in the best interests of the community.

This position statement is consistent with State Emergency Management Committee (SEMC) Policy Statements 5 (Evacuation) and 7 (Western Australian Emergency Management Arrangements), WESTPLAN Wildfire, the *Fire Brigades Act 1942* and the *Bush Fires Act 1954*. It is endorsed by the Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA), however adoption of its principles should be assessed independently by individual local governments.

The principles of the position statement are outlined as follows:

1. Where adequate fire protection measures have been implemented, able bodied people are encouraged to remain in their homes during the passing of the fire front.

However, exceptions may include the aged, young children and people who in the opinion of the fire Incident Controller (IC), or his/her delegated authority¹, are considered incapacitated. These people should leave well before the approach of the fire when it is safe to do so. If people self evacuate, then it is advisable that they do so early to facilitate their relocation from imminent danger and avoid being cut off by fire response activity and road closures.

If people are going to leave – they must leave early.

Residents who remain to protect their property must be, in the opinion of the IC, or his/her delegated authority, capable, appropriately dressed and equipped to extinguish any fires that start in and around their property.

Residents evacuating should be advised that they may not be able to return for some time because of a lack of access to their property.

2. Where adequate fire protection measures have not been undertaken, the occupants of houses should relocate to a welfare centre (or other safe area) well before the approach of the fire for their own safety.

A decision on the need for evacuation will be given by the IC. The police will be requested to effect and control evacuation of persons to a location to be determined by the IC. Evacuation will occur in a planned and safe manner, co-ordinated by the police.

In the opinion of the IC, or his/her delegated authority, able bodied people should be allowed to return to their homes as soon as possible after the main fire has passed. (Subject to 4).

3. A police officer will seek the advice of the IC prior to effecting an evacuation. However, when loss of life or injury is imminent, and a decision from the IC is not readily available, a police officer may make a decision to evacuate.

Mass evacuation is not the favoured option.

4. Road closures must be determined by the HMA to ensure public and emergency personnel safety.

- The IC will determine the location and timing of any road closures.
- Roads will be closed before they become unsafe and will remain closed until the IC determines that they have returned to a safe condition.
- When loss of life or injury is imminent, and a decision from the IC is not readily available, a police officer may make a decision to close a road with immediate notification to the IC.
- While roads are closed, every effort should be made, in consultation with the IC, to safely escort able bodied residents to return to their homes as soon as possible as they may be needed to protect their homes from ongoing ember fires.

5. Information and warnings are vital to allow householders to make informed decisions during bushfires.

The Hazard Management Agency will ensure that timely information and advice is available to the community to allow them to make an informed decision on whether to relocate.

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"Prepare ... stay and defend or go early"

¹ A delegated authority could include the Western Australia Police Service, SES, CALM, and local government.