

prepare  
making the decision...

# Should I Stay or Should I Go?

A guide to help you take action this bush fire season



# prepare.

## making the decision...

### **Disclaimer**

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# prepare... stay and defend or go early

Living close to or in bushland areas provides a unique way of life for many West Australians. For much of the year, these surroundings provide a sense of tranquillity and the best that nature has to offer. However, with this way of life also comes the high risk of bush fire.

Losses experienced through bush fire can be devastating. Fire and emergency service agencies do everything they can within their capacity to manage situations such as bush fires. You also have an active part to play in protecting your home against the damage of bush fire.

## **Prepare... Stay and Defend or Go Early**

The information provided will assist you to:

- Prepare your home and surrounding property;
- Make a decision **now** that in the event of a bush fire, you and your family will **Stay and Defend** or **Go Early**.





# Basic Bush Fire Information You Need to Know

The following information will help you prepare your home, yourself and your family for the bush fire season.

## Bush fires are dangerous

Bush fires are a natural part of the Australian environment, however, they can be extremely dangerous and can pose a great threat to lives and property. To help you protect your family and home against a bush fire, it is important to understand some basic facts.

### Fuel

During the hot bush fire season, bushland is covered with vegetation that provides fuel for fires - long dry grass, parched native shrubs, dead leaves and twigs. Around the home, dry grasses, leaves, twigs and bark provide fuel for a fire. This fuel contributes to how hot the fire becomes (its intensity) and how fast it spreads.

### Embers

While a fire front may not reach your home, it can still be damaged by burning embers carried by strong winds. Embers landing on materials that easily burn are often the cause of small fires around the home. Gaps and openings in roofing, walls, evaporative air conditioners, windows and doors allow embers to enter your house and start a fire. Research has shown that ember attack is the main reason that houses ignite during a bush fire and embers continue to be a risk for some time after the fire front has passed.

### Radiant heat

Bush fires generate extreme heat. This radiated heat can kill people, plants and animals - it is the main cause of loss of life in a bush fire. Radiant heat may not directly ignite buildings, however, it can crack and break windows which will allow embers to enter.

### Direct flame contact

Direct flame contact can occur when materials close to the house ignite, resulting in flames touching the outside of the building. The length of time that direct flame contact lasts depends on the amount of fuel to be burnt.

### Wind

Generally, strong winds accompany bush fires. As the wind increases, so too does the fire's intensity. The wind pushes flames closer to unburnt fuel, making the fire travel faster. Embers and other burning materials are also carried by the wind which can have a damaging effect on homes several hundred metres from the fire front.

# Getting ready for the bush fire season

## Should I Stay and Defend or Go Early?

The most frequently asked question during a bush fire is should I stay and defend my property or go early. This is a question you and your family should answer before the start of the bush fire season. The following information and checklist will help you make this decision.

If you have prepared your home prior to the bush fire season and maintained that level of preparation, and are physically and mentally prepared, your home may provide you with a safe option from which to 'Stay and Defend' during a bush fire.

If you decide that you will go, **go early**. This is much safer than trying to make a dash by car through the fire front on roads blocked by emergency traffic, falling trees or covered in thick smoke.

## Fire services during a bush fire

During a major bush fire, firefighters will be working to stop the fire from spreading. A fire truck may not be available to defend every home. Home owners are therefore encouraged to accept and manage the risk around them.

## Bush fire action plan

A bush fire action plan helps you to consider and plan for all the tasks you will need to carry out to help protect your family and home whether you choose to stay and defend or go early. Your action plan should be written **before** the start of the bush fire season. In the event of a fire, this will allow you to take timely action and may help avoid last-minute decisions which could lead to unsafe actions being made at a stressful time.

Every household is different and you will need to develop a plan that is workable for you. Your plan should consider alternatives in case your situation changes on the day. Use the information, template and checklists provided to help you create a plan that is suitable for your family and situation.

## Preparing your home

A minimum radius of 20 metres around your home and other buildings should be cleared of all rubbish and materials that can catch alight. Removing the amount of material that can burn easily from around the home means falling embers will have less opportunity to start a fire when they hit the ground, and the embers will be easier to put out. Also, the impact of the approaching fire and flames will be significantly reduced.

**Refer to the Stay and Defend Plan or the Go Early Plan.**



A person wearing a blue hat, a red and white plaid shirt, and blue overalls is seen from the side, using a long-handled tool with a white mop head to clean a wooden wall. The scene is outdoors, with green foliage visible at the bottom.

## Are you physically fit?

The process of defending your home during a bush fire can take several hours. This includes the time needed to carry out strenuous tasks (see Stay and Defend Action Checklist) before the fire front passes and then watching for spot fires following the passing of the fire.

You will need to be in good physical health, with the mobility and ability to maintain a constant watch on your property and areas surrounding the home before, during and after the fire. Many people find it difficult to cope with the stress and trauma of being in this type of situation. Give consideration to any medical conditions that might be impacted by stress (for example, asthma and other respiratory conditions, and heart conditions). These may affect your ability to defend your home.

## Being mentally prepared

The task of defending your property from bush fire can be a stressful and traumatic experience. Give careful consideration to your own and your family's ability to deal with the stress of such a situation.

Picture yourself in a bush fire situation. Ask yourself: "Would I be able to cope with this environment? Would my family cope through this situation? What if friends or relatives are visiting at the time—how would they deal with this?"

During a bush fire it is common for the following events to occur:

- Before the main fire front approaches, your home will be surrounded by showers of sparks and embers—this may continue for several hours. Embers will collect in corners and will need to be extinguished.
- It is likely that there will be strong winds—as the fire gets close, burning leaves and bark will begin to land around you.
- Thick, heavy smoke will make it dark, and visibility will be poor; breathing may also be difficult. Your eyes may become sore and reddened.
- It will be very hot and you will need to wear protective clothing.
- Noise generated by the fire will be very loud and some people may find this disturbing. You will hear the burning, crackling and roaring of the fire combined with the roaring of the wind. The sounds and sirens of emergency vehicles may also be heard and some people might find this distressing.
- Services such as electricity, telephone and water will more than likely be interrupted.
- The fire front passing your home will normally only last 5–15 minutes and that is when radiant heat will be at its highest. During this time, it will be necessary to monitor the inside of your home for spot fires.

Give careful consideration  
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bush fire...



## Making arrangements for your pets and livestock

During a bush fire animals will need water, shade and a refuge from the fire. If you have livestock that can be moved out of the area, allow yourself plenty of time to do so. If possible, move larger animals to a paddock with little vegetation—at the start of the bush fire season you may consider slashing a paddock to create a 'safe' area. Never turn animals out onto the road to run free. This is dangerous for fire trucks and vehicles on the road, and you may be legally responsible if they cause an accident. You must be aware that pets are not allowed into a public evacuation centre.



**Equipment  
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## **Equipment required**

Basic equipment will assist you to defend your home during a bush fire. It is suggested the following equipment be on hand at the start of the bush fire season:

- **Gloves**—thick, sturdy gloves for hand protection. Do not use plastic or synthetic material.
- **Hoses**—long enough to reach all parts of the house. Use metal hose fittings for taps if possible as these are less likely to melt.
- **Ladders**—both inside and outside the house. These need to be long enough to allow you to check the roof cavity and eaves.
- **Knapsack spray or garden backpack spray** to help you put out spot fires—you may consider having one ready at the start of the bush fire season solely for this purpose. If you use a pack that has been used as a garden spray, make sure that it is cleaned out thoroughly before using it to extinguish fires.
- **Metal rakes and shovels**—use these to break up piles of burning material and for covering embers with sand.
- **Mops and buckets**—cotton mops hold a lot of water and can be used to put out embers. Buckets allow you to move water quickly and easily.
- **Wet towels and wet blankets**—use these under doors and windows to seal gaps to stop embers and smoke from entering the house.



## Alternate water supply

During a bush fire, you should expect that mains water and power supplies are likely to be interrupted. It's important to have an alternative water supply on hand. Think of all the storage options around the home that you could fill with water and use to defend your home during a bush fire.

These can include:

- Rubbish bins (wheelie bins), storage bins.
- Bath, laundry tub, sinks, basins and buckets.
- Troughs or garden ponds.
- Swimming pool, water tanks and dams if available\*.

\* To draw water from a source such as dams, pools or a water tank you will need to use a petrol, diesel or electric powered pump. If you use an electric pump, remember that mains power may not be available during a bush fire, so you will need to also have a generator.

## Wear protective clothing

It is important to wear protective clothing to avoid injury from sparks and embers and the extreme heat radiating from the fire. Cover as much of your skin as you can with two layers of loose-fitting clothing made from pure wool, cotton or denim. Avoid tight-fitting, heavy clothing as the heat will be intense and clothing made of synthetic fibres is not suitable.

Wear a long-sleeved shirt, long trousers such as jeans, closed shoes or boots, and wool or cotton socks.

While outside your home, make sure you wear:

- A hat.
- Goggles or glasses to protect your eyes from embers and ash.
- Gloves.
- A moistened mask (use a cotton cloth or face mask) to filter ash and other particles.



# Should I... stay and defend



# or go early?



Complete the following checklist to help make your decision.



If you answer **NO** to **ANY** of these questions, you are not in a position to safely stay and defend your home. You should make plans to go in the event of a bush fire and **GO EARLY**. Proceed to the 'Go Early Guide' in this kit.

During a major bush fire, a fire truck may not be available to protect every property. You will need to do some preparation well in advance of the bush fire season.

## Should I Stay or Should I Go?

To assist you in making an informed decision, it is important that you read the information in this guide prior to completing the following checklist.

- YES  NO Do you understand the nature of bush fires and the level of risk to you and your family?
- YES  NO Are you committed to undertake and maintain the required level of preparation before the bush fire season?
- YES  NO Are you physically fit to defend your property?
- YES  NO Do you think that **all** members of your household would be mentally prepared for the stress and uncertainty of coping with a bush fire? *(Consider elderly, very young or infirm members.)*
- YES  NO Have you made any arrangements for your pets and livestock in the case of a bush fire?
- YES  NO Do you have equipment such as hoses, buckets, rakes, protective clothing and an alternate water source—for example a pool or pond, or filled bath that could be used to defend your home in a bush fire?
- YES  NO Do you believe your house will offer your family adequate protection from a bush fire after all preparation activities have been completed?



If you have answered **YES** to **ALL** of these questions you have a greater chance of safely staying to defend your home. Proceed to the 'Stay and Defend Guide' in this kit.



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Upon request, this information can be made available in alternative formats such as large type, audio tape, Braille or another language.

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