

Bushfires: Worksheet 7

Surviving Bushfires

It is not always the flames or the smoke that presents the greatest danger in a bushfire. The scorching radiant heat is often just as deadly. This invisible heat surrounds the flames and scorches plants, animals and people caught in its path.

Some of the best ways to increase your chances of survival if you are caught in the path of a rapidly approaching bushfire are listed in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Bushfire survival guide

Personal survival (indoors)

- Wear as much cotton or woollen clothing as possible; avoid wearing cloths made from synthetic-fibres.
- Crouch or lie down on the floor of a room that is away from the approaching fire; the air close to the ground contains less smoke.
- Take as many of the precautions shown in Figures 3 or 4 as is possible in the time available.
- The fire front and its radiant heat usually pass in two to four minutes. Even if the house is set alight, it is safer to stay indoors until the fire front has passed.

Personal survival (outdoors)

- Don't panic. Find the clearest or most open area. Move across-slope, away from the fire-front, then down-slope towards the rear of the main fire front. Don't try to outrun a fire, or go uphill, or through even low flames unless you can clearly see a safe area close by.
- If possible, lie down in a depression in the ground, a pond or dam, or cover yourself with loose earth or rocks. Thick, woollen clothing or a woollen blanket offers some protection from the radiant heat. DO NOT take shelter in a tank of water.
- If in a car, park by the roadside in the clearest area possible. Stay in the car, wind up the windows and put on the headlights. Crouch down and shelter under a rug, floor mat or anything similar that is available. See Figure 2.

Figure 2: Bushfire survival in vehicles

Position the car to minimise exposure to radiant heat. You can do this by parking away from dense bush – try to find a clearing; parking behind a barrier such as a wall or rocky outcrop if one is available; and face the car towards the oncoming fire front.

Park off the roadway and turn hazard lights on. Car crashes are common in bushfires due to poor visibility.

Call Triple Zero 000. Give them your name and location.

Stay in the car, and tightly close windows and doors.

Turn the engine off.

Shut all vents and turn the air conditioning off.

Drink water to prevent dehydration.



Curl into a ball and get down on the floor - below the window line. Cover up with woollen blankets if available.

Once the fire front has passed you need to get out of your vehicle. Move to burnt ground, but stay close to your vehicle and wait for help.

Protecting your home

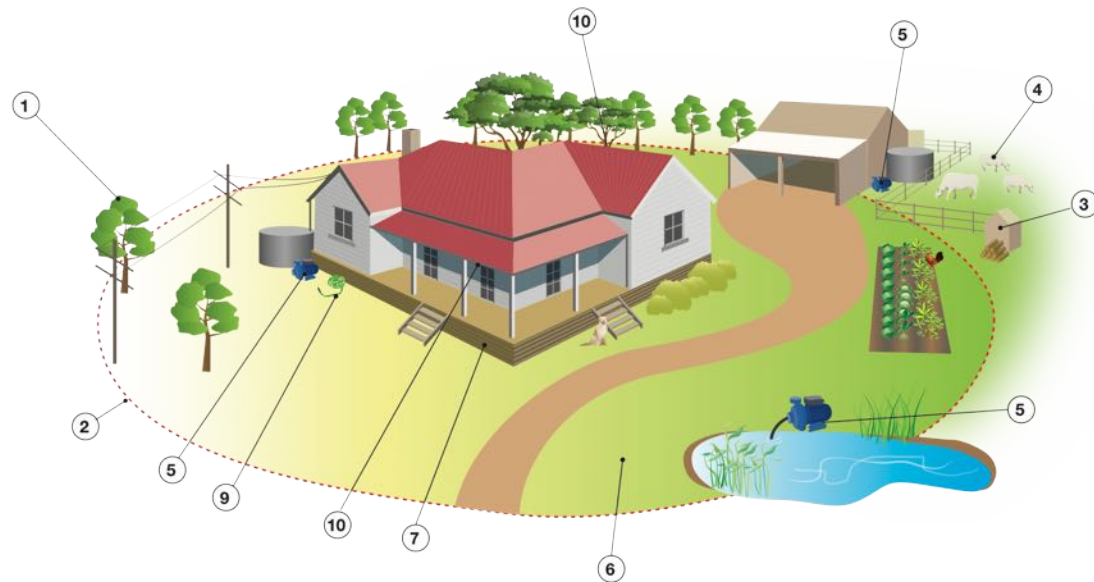
There are also steps you can take to prepare your home in the case of an approaching bushfire. These are shown in Figures 3 and 4.

Figure 3: Protecting your home – a suburban property



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| 1 | Clear leaves from gutters and cut back overhanging vegetation | 8 | Maintain a minimum two-metre gap between your house and tree branches. Make sure that no trees overhang the house. |
| 2 | Seal any openings under the house or eaves. Fit wire screens to doors, windows. | 9 | Turn on sprinklers. Remove all flammable substances, such as gas cylinders and paints, from around the house. |
| 3 | Keep lawns and shrubs trimmed. Rake up leaves. | 10 | Make sure that everyone (including pets) is inside. |
| 4 | Install a non-electric-driven sprinkler system that uses water stored in swimming pools and/or tanks. | 11 | Put wet towels against spaces under doors. Close all windows, curtains, blinds and doors. Fill buckets, basins, baths and sinks with water to put out spot fires. |
| 5 | Ensure that hoses are in good order and long enough to reach all parts of the property. | 12 | Install metal (rather than timber) fencing that shields the property from an advancing fire-front. |
| 6 | Wear clothing as described in Table 1. | 13 | Store wood, gas, petrol and oil-based paints well clear of the house. |
| 7 | Block downpipes and fill gutters with water. Hose down the house and surrounding areas. | 14 | Keep ladders handy for roof access (inside and out). |

Figure 4: Protecting your home – a farm-based property



- 1 Trim tree branches away from power lines
- 2 Create a firebreak around the homestead and other farm buildings
- 3 Store firewood, petrol and gas well away from the house
- 4 Move livestock to a well grazed paddock
- 5 Use a diesel powered pump to access water from farm dams, water tanks and swimming pools
- 6 Keep lawns short and shrubs away from farm buildings
- 7 Seal underfloor spaces to prevent embers entering
- 8 Install gutter guards and keep gutters clear of leaf litter
- 9 Have a hose ready to put out spot fires
- 10 Block downpipes and fill gutters with water. Hose down the house and surrounding areas.

Being a responsible citizen

There are things you can all do to make sure that we act as responsible citizens in times of bushfire emergencies. These include:

- making sure that you obey all total fire bans. At all other times, never light a fire without adult supervision
- checking to see that your family has a bushfire emergency plan
- leaving the house when advised to do so by authorities
- ensuring that any elderly and/or disabled neighbours are taken care of.

Community information campaigns

Community awareness is critical to any bushfire emergency. During a bushfire emergency community briefings are held on a regular basis. Letterbox drops of Community Information Updates are also used to keep people informed. Telephone-based warning systems are activated and the media is used to provide the public with information.

Activities

1. Study Figure 1. As a class, discuss the actions you can take to protect yourself in the event of a bushfire both indoors and outdoors.
2. Study Figure 2. Write a story. My family is caught in a bushfire while out driving. What should we do to protect ourselves?
3. Study Figures 3 and 4. Select either a suburban or rural-based property. Draw an illustration of your home and highlight the ways in which you can protect your family's home.
4. Project-based activity:

Complete ONE of the following:

- a. Write a instruction manual outlining the actions you would encourage people to take in the event of a bushfire. Include procedures for: choosing appropriate clothing to wear, finding a safe place to stay during a bushfire; and ways of protecting your house in the fire.

Or

- b. Prepare a radio talk outlining fire safe procedures to carry out in the event of a bushfire.

Or

- c. Study Figures 2 and 4 and then write a letter to a neighbor outlining the actions they could take to protect their home in a bushfire.