

# CFS FACT SHEET - PLAN NOW TO STAY AND DEFEND OR LEAVE EARLY



Bushfires threaten life and property throughout South Australia each summer. Making the right decision to 'stay and defend' or 'leave early' for yourself and your family is critical for your safety and survival.

## Houses as Shelters

Research across Australia has revealed that most homes are destroyed by sparks and embers blowing into them. Houses will generally survive the initial passage of a bushfire providing preparations and fuel reduction have occurred around the house. Therefore, people who are well prepared can shelter in their homes and have an excellent chance of surviving a bushfire.

However, building standards do not go beyond a fire danger index of 100 and therefore even the most prepared houses may not be able to offer protection when the Fire Danger Rating is predicted to be Extreme or Catastrophic.

## Leaving Early

If people don't feel they could cope or have family members who may not be able to fend for themselves in a bushfire, they may choose to leave to go to a safer place early in the day or even the night before a fire danger day. If the decision is delayed the risk of being caught out in a bushfire increases dramatically and so do the risks to life.

## The Danger of Leaving Late

Experience throughout Australia has shown lives are more likely to be lost when individuals make a last minute panic stricken attempt to flee a bushfire. Smoke, noise, heat, flames, fire-fighting vehicles and panic all make fleeing in a vehicle or on foot dangerous. Leaving at the last minute is a deadly option. The risk of being overrun by fire is very real and has resulted in numerous fatalities. People caught in the open are likely to face severe and often fatal levels of radiant heat.

You should prepare and plan to leave early, well before a bushfire threatens your home. Tomorrow's Fire Danger Rating is available from 4pm and should be one of the main triggers to enact your plan to leave early –either that night, or early in the morning.

However, in the event that you are unable to leave your home well before a bushfire arrives, you should take immediate protection in a solid structure for your best chance of survival. Under these circumstances, people are safer in houses than in cars in a bushfire, and safer in cars than in the open.

## CFS Protecting your Home

It is impossible for the CFS to protect every individual home or property in a major bushfire. It is therefore extremely important to plan for your family's safety and be self reliant. If you have not prepared your home appropriately, ensured you have the necessary equipment or physical and mental ability to actively stay and defend your home then you should leave early well before a bushfire threatens.



*The majority of lives lost during the 1993 Ash Wednesday Fires resulted from people attempting to flee either on foot or in vehicles.*



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## Making a Decision to Stay and Defend or Leave Early

Even if you are unsure whether to stay and defend your property on fire risk days, both you and your property need to be well prepared. On days where the Fire Danger Rating is predicted to be Extreme or Catastrophic for you and your family's survival leaving early is the best option.

Consider the following:

- Is your home constructed to meet the latest regulations for building in bushfire prone areas?
- Is your property prepared and maintained for bushfires?
- Are you physically fit to fight spot fires in and around your home for up to 10 hours or more?
- Does your home have a defensible space of at least 20 metres cleared of flammable materials and vegetation?
- Do you have the resources, equipment, necessary skills and knowledge to effectively fight a fire?
- Are you mentally and emotionally prepared to actively defend your property?
- Are you able to implement your plan while caring for distressed young children, elderly or disabled people in your home?

If these questions make you doubt your ability, the preparedness of your property, or if you are for any reason unsure about staying and defending your property, then you should prepare a plan to leave early.

## Preparing to Stay and Defend

If you plan to stay and defend you must prepare your property to ensure your family, pets and home will survive a bushfire. Refer to the CFS Fact Sheet - "Preparing to Stay and Defend" and "What to do in the event of a Bushfire" for further information on what you need to do.

Contingency planning is encouraged in case you are absent from your property and are unable to return to defend your home during a bushfire. Care should be taken if you *are* considering returning home - a decision is difficult to plan in advance and can only be assessed on the day of the fire. Fires can move rapidly, change direction or start ahead of the fire front due to spotting. Personal survival is more important than property so consider the following factors when making your decision:

- *Will you have time to get home safely?*
- *Is access going to be an issue?*
- *Will you be obstructing the authorities from accessing the fire scene?*

Alternatively, if your lifestyle allows it, you may choose to stay home on a Total Fire Ban or fire risk day.

## Preparing to Leave Early

If you decide to leave early then you must plan as carefully as you would to stay. Refer to the CFS Fact Sheet - "Preparing to Leave Early" and "What to do in the Event of a Bushfire" for further information on what you need to do. Consider these points in your Bushfire Survival Plan:

- When will you make your decision?
- Where will you go and when will you leave?
- How will you travel and what will you take?
- What if family members get separated?
- What will you do with your pets?

As with preparing to stay and defend, contingency planning is vital in case you are unable to leave early.

