

Bushfires- Are you prepared?

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In preparation for the upcoming Bushfire Season, it's worth making sure you are prepared. Bushfires in Australia are a way of life; our sometimes-harsh weather conditions, drought-tolerant vegetation and rugged terrain result in perfect conditions to fuel the flames. Bushfires can significantly impact people, property, and the environment, yet they are essential to Australian ecology, with many species requiring the heat and ash from bushfires to regenerate (CSIRO, 2020).



Wooroloo fires from Perth CBD. Source: [Reddit](#)

90% of Western Australia (WA) is deemed bushfire-prone (DEFS, 2021), making bushfires an issue for regional and metropolitan areas, as we saw earlier this year with the Wooroloo fires.

After a strong wet season in northern WA and a cool wet winter in southern WA, now is the time for us to prepare ourselves, our families, and our properties for the upcoming bushfire season. The three key steps you can take to stay safe and prepare for a

bushfire are understanding the risks and warnings, writing and communicating your bushfire plan, staying organised, and keeping up the maintenance.

Understand the risks and warnings

In WA, the Department of Fire and Emergency (DFES) is the primary government department responsible for preventing, preparing for, responding to, and recovering from bushfires. DFES works closely with the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (DBCA)- Parks and Wildlife Service, local government authorities and volunteer bushfire brigades.

DFES has prepared a map of bushfire-prone areas in WA, available [here](#). By reviewing the map, you can identify if your property is at risk or in the proximity of a risk area and prepare a bushfire plan as outlined below in section 2.

Take the time to educate yourself and other members of your household on what the different bushfire warnings are, what they mean and where you can access them. Fire danger ratings, total fire bans and bushfire alerts are the three bushfire related warnings used across Australia.

Fire danger ratings indicate how dangerous a fire would be if one were to start. The Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) calculates fire dangers ratings late afternoon for the following day based on forecast conditions such as wind, humidity, temperature, and fuel state. Six rating levels range from low-moderate to catastrophic. The higher the fire danger rating, the more dangerous the conditions. If you are in a bushfire-prone area, you should check the fire danger rating each day.



Source: [DFES](#)

Total fire bans are declared on days of predicted extreme or catastrophic fire weather (as per the fire danger ratings) or when active bushfires result in limitations to firefighting resources. A total fire ban means that it is illegal to light an open-air fire or undertake any open-air activity that could result in a fire such as using



Summary/Quote



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machinery near vegetation, undertaking hot works (welding, grinding etc), hot air ballooning or using a barbeque that requires solid fuel. Activities prohibited and allowed can be found [here](#).

Bushfire alerts provide information on how dangerous a bushfire is once it has started. Bushfire alerts have four warning levels. The change in these warnings levels aligns with the increasing risk to lives and homes and decreasing time until the bushfire arrives. The warning level “Watch and Act” is when your bushfire plan decision to leave or defend is enacted. Suppose a bushfire alert is released for your area. In that case, you should monitor alerts regularly and pay attention to your surroundings as they could be the best indication of what is happening.



Source: [DFES](#)

All bushfire warnings in WA can be accessed at [emergency.wa.gov.au](https://www.emergency.wa.gov.au). This information will also be broadcasted on your local ABC radio station or 6PR; alternatively, you can call the DFES recorded emergency information line on 133337.

Write and communicate your bushfire plan

Writing your bushfire plan helps you think through all the risks, options, and time requirements before a bushfire event. Things such as “Will you be safe and leave early or will you stay and defend? When and how will you check warnings? If you leave, what items will you take? What will you do with your pets or livestock? How will you defend?”. These conversations should be had with everyone who lives at the property and communicated with a next of kin who does not reside there.



Source: [My Bushfire Plan](#)

DFES has developed a smartphone app that assists with preparing and storing your bushfire plan. The app is available for Apple and Android phones by searching “My Bushfire Plan”. You can also access and store the information on the web at <https://mybushfireplan.wa.gov.au/>.

Stay organised and keep up maintenance

After deciding your bushfire plan, you need to organise what is needed to implement the plan in an emergency. You need to check things such as putting together your emergency kit, setting up notifications for alerts, purchasing PPE and firefighting equipment. Ensure you and your household know where these things are stored and how to use them.

Also, undertake any maintenance around your property required to keep it safe. There should be a 3-meter zone around buildings with minimal vegetation and combustible items (known as an Asset Protection Zone) and further vegetation management within a 20-meter zone around buildings (known as a Risk Treatment Area). Risk treatment area vegetation management is to be undertaken within the Risk Treatment Standards. DFES has recently released a guide for applying the standards available [here](#).

Undertaking these three key steps will help you prepare and stay safe for this year’s bushfire season.

Integrate Sustainability can assist you in being prepared for bushfires by understanding the bushfire risk to your property and what your requirements are under the Risk Treatment standards. Please contact us to see how we could help on (08) 9468 0338 or enquiries@integratesustainability.com.au.

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References

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