School procedures for the bushfire season

The way schools in Victoria respond to bushfires is being constantly revised.

Fire danger ratings and warnings are used in Victoria to provide clear direction on the safest options for preserving life.

Schools – and children’s services – identified as being at highest bushfire risk have been included on the Bushfire-At Risk Register (BARR) and will be closed on days determined by fire authorities to be Code Red. Our school has been identified as a school at highest bushfire risk and is listed on the BARR.

Where possible, we will provide parents with up to three days notice of a planned closure following the issue of a Code Red warning by the CFA. We will contact you directly by SMS or letter sent home with your child with advice on planned closures and will confirm the decision to close by 12 noon the day before the planned closure.

Once confirmed, the decision to close will not change, regardless of improvements in the weather forecast. This is to avoid confusion and help your family plan alternative care arrangements for your child.

- No staff will be on site on days when the school is closed by the risk of fire.
- Out-of-school care will be cancelled on these days.
- School camps will be cancelled if the area where the camp is taking place is at risk.
- There may also be changes to school bus routes. Depending on routes, this may also occur on days when the school is not closed.

On these Code Red days families are encouraged to enact their Bushfire Survival Plan – on such days, children should never be left at home unattended or in the care of older children.

For those of us living in a bushfire-prone area, the safest option when a Code Red day is declared may be to leave the night before, or early in the morning of the Code Red day.

As part of preparing our school for the threat of fire we have updated our emergency management plan; reprioritised any maintenance works that may assist in preparing for the threat of fire and regularly clear our school grounds and gutters.

What can parents do?

- Make sure your family’s Bushfire Survival Plan is up-to-date and includes alternative care arrangements for your children in the event that our school is closed.
- Ensure we have your current contact details, including your mobile phone numbers. Keep in touch with us by reading our newsletters, by checking our website www.thepatchps.vic.edu.au and by talking to your child’s teacher, the Principal or the Office Manager about our emergency plans.
Most importantly at this time of year, if you’re planning a holiday or short stay in the bush or in a coastal area, you should check warnings in advance of travel and remain vigilant during your stay.

If your child is old enough, talk to them about bushfires and your family’s Bushfire Survival Plan.

You can access more information about school closures on the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development website – see 

For up-to-date information on this year’s fire season and Bushfire Survival Planning, visit the CFA website at www.cfa.vic.gov.au or call the 24-hour Victorian Bushfires Information Line on 1800 240 667.

The School’s Shelter in Place Option

The Patch School is fortunate to have our Hall as a Shelter in Place Option to re-locate to in case of any external threat, particularly bushfire.

The Hall is deemed a ‘Shelter in Place’ for the school’s students and staff ONLY.

It was assessed and retro-fitted in late 2010 to meet the new requirements after the February 2009 bushfires; however the hall does not meet the current requirements of a Community Fire Refuge (see below), and cannot be used by other community members.

If students and staff need to re-locate to the Hall due to the imminent risk of bushfire, your children will be as safe as they can possibly be. At the Hall we will have water, firefighting equipment and staff experienced in emergency management. In the event of a bushfire in our immediate area, it is unlikely to be safe for you to drive to school to collect your children.

You may be aware that a Community Fire Refuge has been designated at Ferny Creek Primary School. Community Fire Refuges (CFRs) meet strict building and vegetation requirements to provide short-term shelter for community members from the imminent life-threatening effects of a bushfire event. CFRs are a last resort for people when all other bushfire plans have failed.

We strongly encourage you to:

1. Familiarise yourself with our school’s emergency management plans
2. Practice your family’s Bushfire Plan regularly
3. Know and act upon the trigger to enact your Plan and
4. If your plan involves Leaving Early and keeping your children with you, make sure you do so.

Please remember that the only way anyone’s safety can be guaranteed on a day of significant fire danger, is to leave the area early.

If you choose to keep your child with you on these days, simply provide written notification on your child’s return as per any absence from school.