

SECTION 3 HEALTH & SAFETY POLICIES

3.15 Bushfire Policy

POLICY STATEMENT

Bushfires threaten life and property throughout South Australia each summer. Making the right decision to stay or go is critical for the safety and survival of the children, staff and visitors at The Gums Childcare Centre. As a result of the Victorian bushfire disaster in 2009 the CFS has revised its bushfire emergency warning and rating system and the Department of Education and Child Development (DECD) has instigated specific school closure days for kindergartens and schools in the Yorke and Mid North District. While we are not a DECD site, we have chosen to adopt DECD recommendations from our closest DECD site, Clare Primary School.

This policy outlines the strategies and procedures that The Gums will follow, including information about the conditions under which the Centre will close. Advice from the CFS is that no building is safe on a catastrophic day and as such the Centre will close on these days in our region. Families need to consider our plan when developing their own home bushfire response plan.

RATIONALE

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

Experience throughout Australia has shown that lives can be lost when people make a last minute panic stricken attempt to flee a bushfire. CFS and other emergency services cannot guarantee the presence of a fire fighting vehicle and crew to protect every building in a major bush fire. Therefore it is extremely important that, in conjunction with a policy of closure on catastrophic bushfire risk days, The Gums plans for the safety and survival of children, staff and visitors.

STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES

The Gums has plans for two situations:

1. Centre closure on Catastrophic Rating DECD advice and;
2. Bushfire Action Plan when the centre is operational.

The following preparations have been put into place to ensure that the stakeholders and the building will survive a bushfire.

General housekeeping

The following are to be completed by the 30th September each year.

- Remove fallen and dead branches, weeds, other debris and undergrowth from around the building and premises
- Prune any trees limbs less than two metres from the ground and clear around trees
- Prune any limbs/branches that are overhanging or touching the building and adjoining fixtures
- Cut grass within and around the building and the Centre's premises, for example, outside the fence, and remove cut material unless it can rot down before summer
- Reduce amount of flammable material close to the building and adjoining fixtures
- Regularly clear gutters and roof gullies of buildings under or near to overhanging trees to ensure they are free of vegetation and leaves
- Ensure verandahs and other external structures are well maintained and kept free of dust and leaf matter
- Ensure that property access is clear for emergency vehicles if need be.
- Check tanks, pumps and fire hoses are in working condition.

The Centre will also undertake regular risk assessments of the building and site to ensure its preparedness in the event of a bushfire.

Staff training

- The Centre will rehearse the Centre's bushfire action plan with the children at least once in September, October and November.
- Annual training is to be held with staff by the 30th September with appropriate training authorities about bushfire awareness and best practice.
- All staff will be reminded of the Centre's bushfire policy, preparation and action plan at September's staff meeting and this will remain on the agenda until the end of the bushfire season.
- All staff will have been instructed in the operation of firefighting pumps and hoses.

Survival and emergency supplies

The Centre will prepare survival and emergency supplies which will be stored in the staffroom for ease of collection and transportation. The kits are to be checked every month during the bushfire season to ensure contents are fresh and operational, by the Director / Assistant Director.

They include the following:

- Kit One – four sets of protective clothing for the Bushfire response team
- Gloves x 4 – sturdy or rigger variety, not rubber or synthetic
- Sturdy shoes or work boots and socks x 4 – with thick rubber soles and socks made from natural fibres
- Hard hat or helmet x 4 with head torch attached
- Long sleeved shirt and trousers (overalls) – made from natural fibres to protect skin and body from radiant heat x 4
- Mask / bandana x 4 -that can be dampened for face protection and to filter smoke
- Goggles or glasses x 4 – to protect eyes from smoke and embers
- Hydrating backpacks – to be filled with drinking water

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Kit Two - Survival and Emergency supplies:

- Spare nappies, wipes, gloves, 2 potty's
- Small bag of assorted clothes
- Tissues
- First-aid kit and asthma bum bag
- Two lanterns – wind up
- 4 woollen blankets to be used as part of regular drills with the children
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Kit Three

- 10 towels
- 4 buckets

Fire fighting equipment

- Red fire hose connected to mains water located on outside eastern side of building
- Petrol Firefighting pump – connected to rain water supply and additional 5 Litres of petrol in a steel petrol can is kept in the service yard shed. (checked and serviced in September each year)
- 2 red hoses connected to rainwater tank, long enough to reach the building.
- Ladder – to access building and to help identify spot fires (ladder located outside ELC window under fire hose reel.

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Water supply

- An alternative water supply of at least 20,000 litres is available; this water supply is plumbed to the staff room in the event that mains water is disconnected. A petrol pump is connected to the rainwater tanks for firefighting purposes.

Documents and records management

- A copy of the Centre's bushfire policy and action plan will be forwarded to the Clare CFS annually by 30th September.
- A copy of the bushfire action plan is forwarded to all families of children at the Centre via email in October during Bushfire Action week.
- Bushfire season reminders and information are regularly included in weekly emails to families.
- Child attendance sheets and staff/visitor registers must be readily available and accurately record those present and those who have left the Centre (for example, absences are written in and arrival times are entered)
- Emergency kit contains updated emergency contacts and all necessary items for use
- Bushfire Action plan is displayed in all rooms at all times; on or as close to programming boards as possible. It is displayed in kitchen near the UV rating index and in the Office on the 'In case of Emergency Wall'.

Communication with parents

Parents are advised to familiarise themselves with CFS bushfire information and the CFS warning system. Information can be accessed at the CFS website (www.cfs.sa.gov.au).

A brief summary taken from the CFS website:

The CFS has developed an information and warning system to keep the community informed about bushfires. The system is based on three types of alert messages, distributed by multiple means of communication:

EMERGENCY WARNING: you are in danger and you need to take action immediately. You will be impacted by the fire. This message will usually be preceded by the Standard Emergency Warning Signal (SEWS)

WATCH & ACT: a fire is approaching you, conditions are changing. You need to take action now to protect your life and your family.

ADVICE: A fire has started. There is no immediate danger. General information to keep you up to date with developments.

Bushfire Watch & Act Messages will be issued when there is a potential threat to public safety in the immediate area of a bushfire. Bushfire Emergency Warning Messages will be issued when a bushfire burning out of control under very high to catastrophic weather conditions requires an immediate response from the public to ensure their safety and survival. Bushfire Emergency Warning messages will be preceded by a distinctive siren like sound of SEWS.

Bushfire Watch & Act and Bushfire Emergency Warning Messages will be issued via multiple media communication channels including local ABC AM and FIVEaa radio stations. Emergency Warning and Watch & Act Messages are likely to include the following information:

- The location of the fire
- Where it is expected to move next
- The risks faced by people in the area
- What the public is advised to do about those risks
- Where the public can find additional information

Staff at the Centre are fully aware of the CFS rating information and warning system. The Director and Assistant Director have subscribed to the CFS app on their mobile phones and will monitor ABC Local radio 639 during a day of extreme bushfire weather.

If a fire does threaten the Centre parents will not receive **individual** notification by phone or email. If possible, a group email will be sent out. Parents should note that it is extremely dangerous to travel into an area with an active bushfire. At all levels of alert the Centre Director or most senior staff member is responsible for decision making regarding the safety and movement of children, staff and visitors, unless police and emergency services intervene directly or through an authorized officer whose authority to act has been established beyond reasonable doubt.

If fire prevents anyone leaving the site, all persons will remain on site. Staff will stay with children remaining on site. No person is to leave the safe refuge until the situation outside is assessed to be safe or as advised by emergency services, for example, by police or CFS. In this event the safe refuge site will be determined by authorities depending on the direction and location of the fire. Parents may not be able to collect children unless it is deemed safe.

Staff will make provision to care for children for an extended period of time in the event that the area is locked down and collection authorities are unable to access the safe refuge of the kitchen. Children can be collected from the safe refuge point once it is safe to do so and staff must be informed when a parent/guardian has arrived to collect their child/children, in order to be marked off the roll.

Excursions

All excursions including local excursions (this includes bush block visits) will be cancelled on days of 'Extreme Fire Danger,' as forecast by the CFS.

Procedures – Catastrophic Rating Days or advised closure day from the CFS

The following procedures are to be carried out.

- A red warning sign 'Catastrophic Fire Risk Day – Centre Closed with the day and date' will be displayed on the front entrance door and a corflute sign will be zip tied to the black emergency access gate closest to the road. (Both signs are kept on the In Case of Emergency Wall in the office)
- Staff will follow the Divert Phone instructions located in the Baby Room, near the phone or in the office, near the phone to ensure that the centre phones are diverted to either Alex or Jackie's mobile phones.
- Staff will carry out the required preparation duties for a Catastrophic Fire Day closure, the day prior to a forecast Catastrophic Rating Day, they are:
 1. Ensure all doors and windows are locked,
 2. Remove all toys and equipment from the outside verandas
 3. Remove all washing from the line
 4. Ensure animals are sent home with a family or staff member
 5. Office staff to cancel all orders and deliveries for the following day
 6. Ensure sign is on the front door
- Full fees will apply as per the Centres Fee Policy
- Staff will be paid according to their rostered shift
- Staff are prohibited from entering the centre, until advised by the Director / Assistant Director

Procedures – Extreme Fire Risk Days

- A red warning sign 'Extreme Fire Risk Today' will be displayed on the front door from 7am. (This sign is kept on the In Case of Emergency Wall in the office)

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- The office staff will monitor fire warning messages via ABC local 639 and via CFS mobile app and will carry out the bush fire action plan in the event of a fire
- Correct staff/child ratios will be maintained at all times
- All excursions including local excursions (this includes Bush Block visits) away from the Centre will be cancelled
- Any off site meetings will be cancelled.

Staff are to refer to the Centre's Bushfire Action Plan - for more information.

Evacuation or lockdown

In the event that a fire is burning near homes of staff members outside the Clare area, staff will be permitted to leave on the condition that correct staff/child ratios can be maintained at the Centre and that it is safe for them to do so. This matter will be arranged between the Centre Director / Assistant Director and staff member. In the event that the staff member is able to leave and return to their home they do so at their own risk.

CLOSURE DAYS

DECD has released a 'School Closures' policy for kindergartens, preschools and schools in high fire risk areas. The Gums is in an extreme fire risk area. In alignment with DECD policy and in the interests of the safety of our children and staff, the Centre will close on days forecast as Catastrophic (Code Red) fire danger weather and take advice regarding closure on extreme fire danger days.

The schools bushfire procedures are aligned with the State's Fire Danger Rating scale:

CATASTROPHIC (CODE RED) - CLOSED Schools and preschools in the affected Fire Ban District with an extreme, very high or high risk rating

EXTREME - DECD to take advice of fire authorities for Mid North and other high risk areas regarding school closures

SEVERE - OPEN Normal bushfire plan procedures apply

VERY HIGH - OPEN Normal bushfire plan procedures apply

HIGH - OPEN Normal bushfire plan procedures apply

LOW-MODERATE - OPEN Normal bushfire plan procedures apply

Communication with parents

The Gums will advise parents via group email and the centre Facebook pages and a notice on the front door that the centre is closed. A corflute sign will also be zip tied to the black emergency access gate closest to the road. On closure days parents will need to make alternative arrangements for their children.

Child Care Benefit and Child Care Rebate

Under the CCMS, all absences during the relevant period are recorded on the Attendance Record Report as a session type of 'Absence' (not an additional absence). Absences for which CCB is paid during a period of local emergency will not be added to a child's absence count.

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Bushfire Policy Measuring Tools

- All the children and staff feel safe at the Centre
- The staff Bushfire response team feels confident and understands their role.
- All families are clear about their requirements in relation to the CFS rating system and centre closure days
- Preparation and plans have been carried out with appropriate authorities and that these authorities are informed about our preparation and plans
- All firefighting equipment, emergency kits and survival kits are well maintained
- throughout the year

LINKS TO OTHER POLICIES

The Gums CCC Bushfire Action Plan

The Gums Fee & Bookings Policy

REVIEWS

Bushfire policies and procedures are reviewed annually after consultation with families and the local CFS brigade generally in September of each year or if any significant changes occur prior to this.

Resource/source: MFS - Metropolitan Fire Services, CFS – Country Fire Service, NQA– Quality Practices Guide, DECD

This policy links to the following National Quality Standards:

2.3.2 Every reasonable precaution is taken to protect children from harm and any hazard likely to cause injury.

2.3.3 Plans to effectively manage incidents and emergencies are developed in consultation with relevant authorities, practised and implemented.

The Gums Bushfire Action Plan

Conditions: “ADVICE”

1. Responsible person will alert all staff in person that we are under “ADVICE” (a fire has started, there is no immediate danger as advised by public broadcast).
2. Rooms to carry on as normal, outside staff report back to Responsible Person if signs of smoke. Responsible Person and kitchen staff to tune into ABC radio 639 and monitor conditions.
3. Responsible person to notify all staff who will form the Bushfire Response Team (BRT) on the day if needed.
4. Responsible Person on the day to:
 - Start up rainwater petrol pump, to ensure it is ready
 - Communicate (Facebook or SMS or email) to parents “we are aware of the current situation”

Conditions change to “WATCH & ACT”

1. Responsible person will alert all staff in person that we are under “WATCH & ACT” and that we are requesting families to collect children ASAP. All children and Staff to go inside. Close windows & doors. Collect animals and place in ELC bathroom in carry case.
2. Communicate (Facebook or SMS or email) to parents “please collect children ASAP”
3. Responsible person to:
 - Organise the clearing of loose parts from all verandahs
 - Organise a collection of resources/books to be collected and put in kitchen
 - Staff to fill all water bottles and store them in a container by the door.

Conditions change to “EMERGENCY WARNING”

1. Responsible person will alert all staff in person that condition is now “EMERGENCY WARNING” and that we need to take immediate action and invacuate to the kitchen.

2. Place invacuation sign on front door and lock front door. NO ENTRY OR EXIT TO CENTRE UNTIL THREAT HAS PASSED UNLESS ADVISED BY EMERGENCY SERVICES

3. Staff in each room will collect sign in-sheets, individual’s medication and action plans and emergency contact lists from rooms. ELC staff collect the staff sign in sheet from staffroom. Turn off lights and air conditioners as you leave room, close door.

4. Take rolls once in kitchen, accounting for all staff and children

5. All staff to collect mobile phones and return to kitchen

6. Bushfire response team (BRT) to go to staffroom

7. BRT will collect the Emergency box #2 (supplies) and take to the kitchen

8. BRT will dress in protective clothing from Emergency box #1

9. BRT place wet towels from Emergency box #3, place under all external doors and under both kitchen doors

10. BRT to go outside if deemed safe by all on Staff Bushfire Response Team.

11. Once outside staff to break into pairs and do the following:
 - a. One team to head into Maynard road garden area, collect ladder from under the fire hose reel. Roll out fire hose and fill buckets of water and put out spot fires, making sure to look up at the roof for signs of fire. Use ladder and buckets of water to put out spot fires on roof.
 - b. Second team to go to firefighting pump and hose down the back and sides of property and put out spot fires as they arise.
 - c. If at any time, any member of the Staff Bushfire Response Team feels unsafe they must notify all members of the BRT before going inside into the invacuation point - kitchen

12. Once the fire threat has passed, responsible person will advise all families by group email/ SMS/Facebook of the situation and advise families where to pick up their children from.