

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT & EDUCATION > BUSHFIRE-READY NEIGHBOURHOODS NEWSLETTER



Issue 17 • Bushfire Season is Here • December 2019

Helping Tasmanian communities work together to prevent, prepare for and respond to bushfires.

This edition features:

- Important conversations to have with your community about preparedness
- Zeehan – a connected community is a bushfire-ready community
- How to make a local bushfire emergency phone tree
- Tourism Visitor Information Network partnership.

The bushfire season is here, with bushfires threatening communities in October and November across northern, central and southern Tasmania. Tasmania saw four days of Total Fire Ban in October and November. Conditions are

dry in the eastern half of Tasmania and, with the climate outlook, the potential for bushfires this summer is high. We only need to look to our mainland states of NSW, Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia to see the unprecedented impacts that bushfires are having in some areas.

November 21 saw Tasmania record some of the highest Fire Danger Ratings (FDR) since the devastating 2013 fires in Dunalley and other parts of Tasmania. Campania reached a Catastrophic 117, Hobart Airport – an Extreme 90 and Bushy Park a Severe 72.

This is a warning to all Tasmanians to be prepared. Know your bushfire risk. Make a plan.

Peter Middleton, Coordinator Community Development

Important conversations to have with your community about preparedness

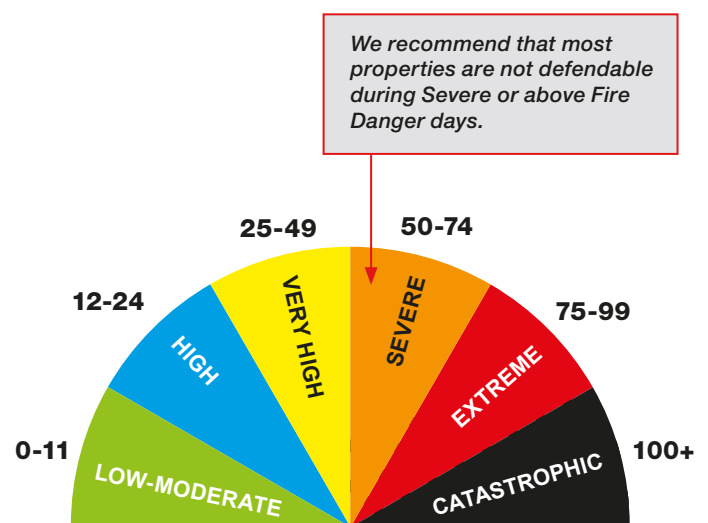
Now is the time for our communities to finalise their preparedness plans. It is important you have conversations with your communities about bushfire planning and its importance from a community safety perspective.

Over the last few weeks, I have presented to communities and groups around northern Tasmania about bushfire preparedness. The priorities are *ember-proofing homes, building a defensible space and preparing a bushfire plan* that takes Fire Danger Ratings into consideration. We recommend that staying and defending in SEVERE ratings and above is NOT a viable option.

Take the opportunity to talk to people about these important preparedness measures. Consider people's ability to stay and defend, giving primary consideration to:

- Physical and emotional capacity
- Availability of sufficient firefighting equipment
- Available water supplies

- Ask, what are residents' triggers to leave?
- If they intend to leave early, what is their plan if they are unable to leave early because of the fire situation?



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Tasmania Fire Service

fire.tas.gov.au/brn

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Important conversations to have with your community about preparedness

Ember-proofing has been discussed in previous editions of this newsletter and should remain an essential element of preparing a property to be defensible. Areas such as timber decks and elevated floors where embers can be blown always present considerable risk during ember attack.



Embers are blown around in all directions and can start new fires well ahead of a fire front.

Other things to consider with timber decks and verandas are combustible material such as firewood, shoe bins, outdoor furniture, gas cylinders and pet beds. These should be removed on bad fire weather days. These rules should apply whether people intend to stay and defend or leave early.



Flammable items left on decks during ember attack can quickly become fuel for a fire.

Pine bark on garden beds next to homes is another risk area. Embers may ignite garden mulch easily along with any plants in those beds. These could expose windows to excessive heat, causing cracking of the glass and allowing embers to enter a home.



Embers can land in pine bark on garden beds and ignite the walls of your home. Embers can be blown under elevated floors and decks and ignite any fuel or building material.

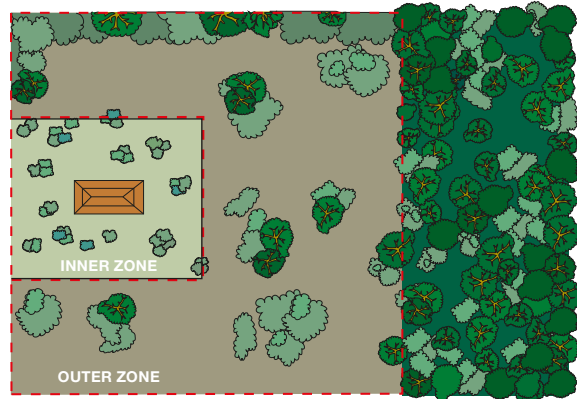
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Important conversations to have with your community about preparedness

Defendable space is an equally important issue to discuss with residents. Defendable space provides a safer area for residents and firefighters to work from, keeping them safe from radiant heat. Defendable space should be at least 10 metres (grass land) and will need to be greater on sloping ground or under heavily vegetated areas. Defendable space should be clear from all heavy vegetation, but can have smaller plants and shrubs. This area is called the inner zone and is complemented by an outer zone which consists of a modified fuel area. Larger trees and shrubs remain in this area, but ground fuel is removed to reduce the rapid expansion of a ground fire.



Examples of defendable space, showing the inner zone where large trees and shrubs are limited or removed.



Outer zone. In this area, large trees and shrubs may remain but ground fuel is removed leaving only small amounts of flammable fuel which can be easily controlled.

These preparations should be combined with the development of a Bushfire Survival Plan, which we recommend should be written and rehearsed. Copies of the survival plan template are available online at fire.tas.gov.au or bushfirereadyneighbourhoods.tas.gov.au/create-your-bushfire-survival-plans

Another issue of discussion in recent presentations has been to educate community members about the safe use of fire outdoors, as many people are being caught unaware by dry conditions and have lost control of their burn. Things to remember about burning outdoors are:

- Never leave your fire unattended
- Always have a method of extinguishment in case your fire escapes
- Always register your burn by free call **1800 000 699** and consider if you really need to burn the vegetation now or can it wait to a more suitable time
- Fire Permits are required statewide until further notice.

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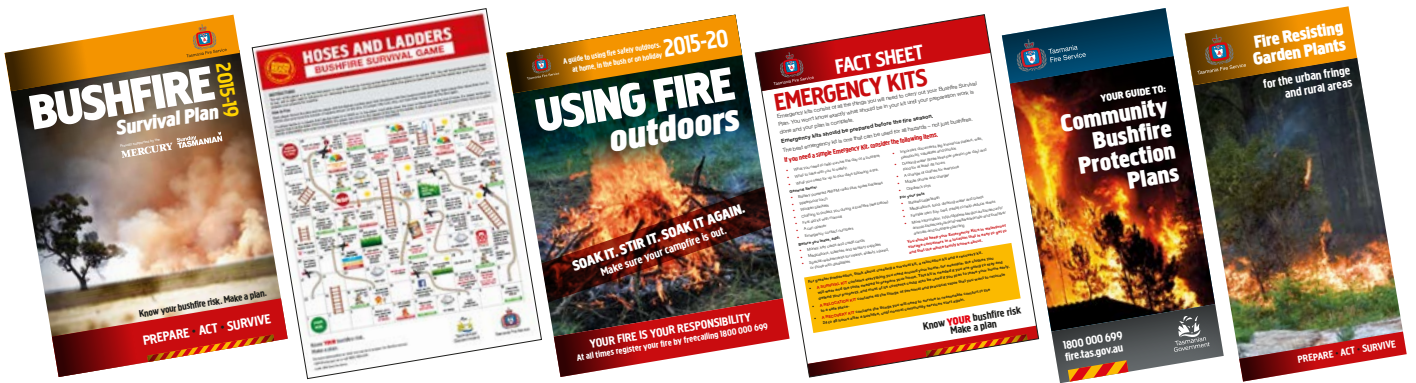
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Important conversations to have with your community about preparedness



Landowners must be in attendance and have sufficient equipment to control your burn.

Working with community in fire safety and prevention is always rewarding. Ensure you have the appropriate TFS publications to provide to community members when engaging with them. Below are some of the useful publications that are available from TFS.



David Cleaver, Community Development Officer North



Check out the new Disaster Resilience Education Tasmania online resources for teachers now.



Zeehan – a connected community is a bushfire-ready community

I first met several dedicated members of the BRN group – Vicki McKenzie, Lyn O’Grady, Lindsay Newman and Shane Dunstan – in September to find out where things were up to and to get their ideas for how we could kickstart bushfire preparedness activities, especially in Granville Harbour, which is one of the BRN target communities for Round 3.

We talked about running a community information session to remind the Zeehan community to prepare for the bushfire season, and to kickstart BRN in Granville Harbour.

The group was very clear that building the communities’ bushfire-readiness couldn’t be done in isolation. It was only one of many important issues that the groups in the community were working on. The group was worried that working separately on issues could divide the effort of community groups and committees. They wanted to make sure the work of the BRN group was not happening in isolation, and was part of a broader effort to improve the community.

To bring both of these ideas together, the group decided to hold a public meeting to make sure preparing for bushfire season was on the radar in Zeehan and Granville Harbour; but more importantly, with the theme ‘Plugging into 7469’, the group wanted to collect ‘ideas to set our community alight with pride, vision and purpose’ and to lay the groundwork for setting up a ‘7469 Development Association’ which would pool the efforts of dedicated

individuals and groups working to make Zeehan, Granville Harbour and Trial Harbour a better place to live.

The public meeting was held in October, and kicked off with a BBQ provided by the Zeehan Lions Club. Due to the hard work of the BRN group and the Zeehan Brigade, as well as the support of West Coast Council and many local organisations and businesses to promote the event, over 30 people turned up. A big thank you to Cat Lello, Third Officer, Zeehan Brigade for helping to run the session and for sharing her insights on the January 2019 bushfires around Zeehan.

Some of the ideas that came out of the meeting included a 7469 Development Association setting up historical walks to provide tourism opportunities and maintain fire breaks at the same time; advocating for more services in the community; building connections across the community; running working bees to beautify the town; and to helping prepare properties for bushfire, to name just a few.

The public meeting was the first step towards setting up a Development Association, and generating interest for more BRN activities. I look forward to working with the group and the rest of the community as they work towards building a connected, resilient and bushfire-ready community.

*Brett Patterson
Community Development Officer, North West*



How to make a local bushfire emergency phone tree - A Coningham resident's journey to a safer community.

Local conditions

Coningham and Lower Snug has a population of 695 people in 314 dwellings. The community of Coningham and Lower Snug is situated on the south-east coast of Tasmania. Distances are 8 km from Margate by road and 16 km from Kingston by road. The predominant landscape is houses scattered within bushland. The community classification is semi-rural. The predominant vegetation types are dry eucalypt forest and woodland on gentle (5° – 10°) sloping terrain. The land tenure in the area is a mixture of private dwellings, state reserves and Kingborough Council land. The dominant feature in the area is the Coningham Nature Recreation Area, which is managed by Parks and Wildlife Service.

Snug Volunteer Fire Brigade is the primary response unit for the area and it is supported by Margate and Channel Volunteer Fire Brigades. The history of bushfires includes a fire in January 2008 in which the majority of the Coningham area was burnt, from Coningham Road to Benbows Road to the Channel Highway. Some fuel breaks are maintained by Parks and Wildlife Service along the northern and north-eastern perimeters of the Coningham Nature Recreation Area. There are fire trails that provide good access to the recreation area and are maintained by Parks and Wildlife Service. The area was heavily impacted by the 1967 bushfires.



The area has a TFS Community Bushfire Protection Plan that specifies there is no identified suitable Nearby Safer Places (places of last resort) in the Coningham and Lower Snug area. TFS advises that Coningham Beach and Montgomery Park Camp are unsuitable due to the dense vegetation at these places. During the consultation phase with residents in the protection planning stage, many people indicated they would seek shelter at Coningham Beach. This site does not meet the TFS's minimum criteria for a Nearby Safer Place (place of last resort).

Lesley King, Community Development Officer South

Local bushfire emergency phone tree

“We live in the bushfire-prone area of Coningham and Lower Snug along with about 200 other families, and we are seeing more permanent residents including newcomers from the mainland. We heard that other places had set up bushfire emergency phone trees to help organise and alert locals in the face of a bushfire threat, so we thought we would give it a try too.

It turned out to be fairly easy to do, and over 70 people have joined since we started it in 2018, many of whom have other local connections!

Essentially, we letter-box-dropped the area using the handy TFS phone tree flyer the Bushfire-Ready Neighbourhoods program provided. We then grouped people who live near each other together into groups

of about a dozen homes. Each group has a coordinator whose job is to simply check that the contact details are correct each year. Otherwise, anyone can initiate the phone tree, whether to pass on a very high fire danger rating forecast for the next day or an alert about an actual fire.

We treat each group as a circle, so the message is passed all the way round and will loop back to the initiator. We have successfully tested and used these ‘circles’ a number of times now and they do work. You need to work out simple rules of use. We ask people to ring the next person in their circle and, if they can't talk to them, ring the person/s after them until you reach someone.

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To: **The Householder**



PHONE TREE NETWORK HAS BEEN SET UP IN YOUR AREA

Be informed during bushfire risk periods – A local resident initiated fire communication system

Purpose

This community managed initiative, when activated, is a succession of phone calls made from team leaders to other residents participating in your area. If you have been contacted your only responsibility is to be aware of the fire situation and follow advice.

The calls will relay set information which provides an additional alert to potential fire risk and advice from the Tasmania Fire Service (TFS).

Local bushfire emergency phone tree

Then, text the people you missed with a simple message to check the TFS website (fire.tas.gov.au). It is most important to pass on authoritative TFS information and not personal opinion.

We also have ways of including in the system vulnerable people and those without a mobile phone. We think the main benefits of the bushfire emergency phone tree are the increased connection and resilience between locals, improved information flows about preparation, and a reduction in anxiety during intense times by knowing

that other people in the neighbourhood are scanning for threats too.”

Richard Mount, Facilitator of the Coningham and Lower Snug emergency phone tree groups

If you would like more information and support with coordinating a phone tree in your neighbourhood, contact your regional Community Development Officer. <https://www.bushfirereadyneighbourhoods.tas.gov.au/community-development-and-education-team>

Australia leads the way in bushfire warnings – an insight from the Washington Post

Click on the article to read more.

Capital Weather Gang

As Australia bush fires rage, country offers lessons for the wildfire-prone western U.S.



A firefighter burns a containment line around a property near Sydney. (Des Hirnbrechts/AAP Image/Reuters)

By **Diana Leonard**
November 23

This year, California and Australia have simultaneously seen major wildfires that have been the result of similar conditions: extremely dry weather, unusually high temperatures and strong winds. But the two fire-prone regions have major disparities in how well they prepare their residents for threatening fire weather and active blazes.



Tourism Visitor Information Network partnership – five years on

The Tourism Visitor Information Network (TVIN) program is in place to provide effective communication with visitors. It is a collaboration between the TFS BRN program and the SES. Five years since its inception in 2014, Executive Officer of the TVIN, Judy Moore, says “Tasmanian Visitor Information Centres are better prepared and appropriately equipped to provide information to visitors on bushfire danger, warnings and other weather-related warnings.”

The program includes educating visitors when warnings are in place, providing information to visitors about bushfires and other emergencies, and rebooking and redirecting visitors to safe areas. Visitor Information Centres (VICs) are mindful that some of our visitors are of non-English speaking backgrounds and could possess little or no knowledge of Tasmanian conditions, place names, road networks, transport options, or what a bushfire or other emergency situation may entail.

Visitors may not be listening to the radio, watching TV, using mobile phones or buying newspapers, so normal communication channels may not capture them. The vulnerability of visitors to safety risks, particularly international visitors, has found to be due to a number of reasons including lack of local knowledge and access to information and the unpredictability of human behaviour.

The TVIN is the body that represents the 20 VICs in Tasmania, which are strategically located across the state. Approximately 1.2 million people visited centres in 2018. VICs have national tourism accreditation and operate under a Code of Practice which provides benchmarks for management, customer service and facilities. Importantly, these centres are managed by paid staff and are open seven days a week.

For the last five years, the program has focused on training and education for the prevention of, preparedness for and response to bushfires and other emergencies. It has built skills and understanding to promote and enhance disaster resilience, building on the existing strengths, capacity and capability within the Network.



Where to go on high fire danger days

Leaving a bushland area early, before a fire starts, is always the safest option for your survival.

Stay alert and informed

- Know when to get Total Fire Ban information (www.fire.tas.gov.au)
- Check the Fire Danger Ratings in the weather forecasts (www.tas.gov.au)
- Listen to local radio ABC to hear bushfire warnings
- Check the TFS website (www.fire.tas.gov.au), subscribe to the TFS letter and Facebook page.
- Check with an accredited visitor centre.
- Use your own senses: What is the weather like? Can you smell smoke? (You may not get an official warning)
- Do not rely on electronic mapping devices like GPS or mobile phones as they may be affected by smoke and local conditions, or reception gaps in remote areas. Keep a hard copy of the local map.

Bushfires are unpredictable and you need to be prepared for the unexpected. Do not rely solely on one source of information.



Traveling on the road

Driving through smoke, ash and glowing embers is stressful and dangerous. A drive that would normally take five minutes may take several hours through road closures, smoke, ash, fallen trees or power lines. If you are aware of bushfires before you leave, plan an alternative route and do not travel to the affected area.

PREPARE. Ensure you and your vehicle are ready

Find out whether you are in – or will be travelling through – a bushland area and what today's Fire Danger Rating is (www.fire.tas.gov.au).

ACT in the event of a bushfire

Remain vigilant of your surroundings, and follow any advice or directions provided by emergency services personnel or via an emergency broadcast on local radio. Let someone know your plans and how to contact you. As the fire front passes, properties will be subject to heat, flame contact, ember attack, smoke, loud noise, darkness, and power failure.

SURVIVE. Protect yourself from radiant heat

Radiant heat can hit. To protect yourself, you need to cover up, dress appropriately and take refuge. If you are unable to leave the area before a fire starts and are caught out, solid structures and appropriate clothing may provide protection from radiant heat. Cover all exposed skin in natural fibres (e.g. wool) cotton to protect yourself from radiant heat. Radiant heat cannot penetrate solid objects, which means your feet but not your legs are protected in a well-constructed house or structure.

For emergency warnings and alerts, tune into ABC local radio in your location.

ABC Local Radio	BEST COAST	NORTHWEST COAST
93.9 FM Hobart	693 AM Launceston	640 AM Devonport
93.9 FM Hobart	693 AM Launceston	640 AM Devonport
93.9 FM Hobart	693 AM Launceston	640 AM Devonport
93.9 FM Hobart	693 AM Launceston	640 AM Devonport



The program provides training through the Network for accredited members to enable them to provide a first point of contact for visitors during crisis events. This includes support materials, to ensure delivery of bushfire or other safety messages to visitors not only in times of an emergency but, in the case of bushfires, to hopefully prevent bushfires from starting in the first place. The program is multifaceted, including:

- Yearly training and education of visitor centre staff
- Provision of a communications manual, education of staff in the content of the manual, including bushfire and flood safety messaging through regional workshops
- Annual briefings before the bushfire season and debriefings following major fire events (2016 and 2019).
- Educational materials for visitors, including in print and online formats for distribution by VICs
- Clearly displayed information where visitors can access the latest emergency alerts for a bushfire, flood or other emergency.

The program is a truly collaborative approach between the TVIN, TFS and SES, an example of disaster resilience in action.

Peter Middleton, Coordinator Community Development

1800 000 699
fire.tas.gov.au/brn
communityed@fire.tas.gov.au

