

Making sense of risk

Bushfire action plan

Asia Pacific



Organisations and individuals are likely to face natural and manmade catastrophe at some stage. It is therefore crucial to have a plan well in advance of emergencies, in order to protect you, your employees and your customers from personal injury and your business from damage and protracted downtime.



According to the US Department of the Interior National Park Service, as many as 90% of bushfires are caused by people; 10% are from natural causes.

In the Australian context, lightning strikes are the cause of some 26% of fires in Victoria, but nearly 70% of the remaining fires are believed to be caused directly or indirectly by people. With the expansion of businesses into the so-called wildland-urban interface, the threat of bushfire to businesses continues to grow.

Bushfires can be devastating, and may cause those affected to lose their home, property, pets, or even their lives. Bushfires can start abruptly and burn for days or weeks, spreading over vast expanses of land. Since bushfires are a reality of nature, advance preparation is a priority for responsible business managers and owners.

This action plan is intended as a guide to help business owners and managers prepare in advance their business, premises and employees for a bushfire, in order to minimise the risk of personal injury and damage to property, and to reduce business interruption.

An effective Bushfire action plan should include the following:

- Full support of senior management;
- A well-stocked Bushfire emergency kit (as discussed below);
- Readily available emergency contact numbers, both in the kit and backed up offsite;
- Copies of all employee, supplier and client contact information backed up offsite;
- Copies of vital records, including business and customer records, blueprints, structural records and utility service plans backed up offsite;
- Preparations to make and precautions to be taken before, during and after a bushfire (as discussed below);
- A designated onsite Emergency Action Team;
- The appointment of an Action Plan Leader for the Emergency Action Team responsible for ensuring the preparations are carried out and precautions are taken, and for maintaining the Bushfire emergency kit; and
- The appointment of a second person responsible for monitoring the situation (the Fire Monitor) and keeping the Action Plan Leader up to date before, during and after the fire.

Since bushfires are a reality of nature, advance preparation is a priority for responsible business managers and owners

Action Plan Leader

Appoint an Action Plan Leader with sufficient authority to lead the Emergency Action Team and take responsibility for implementing and overseeing the action plan. The Action Plan Leader should have a thorough understanding of the operations, critical processes, special hazards and protection systems of the business.

The Action Plan Leader should have access to and be responsible for maintaining the Bushfire emergency kit.

Pre-bushfire procedure

Secure supplies and information

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- Appoint an Action Plan Leader and Fire Monitor.

 - Establish and maintain a well-stocked Bushfire emergency kit (using the Liberty kit checklist as a guide).

 - Review your business continuity plan and update it as necessary, to include current employee contact details. If you do not have a current Business Continuity Plan, consider using the Liberty Disaster recovery and business continuity plan guide to help you develop one.

 - Remind personnel of the key elements of the business continuity plan, including post-fire communications procedures and work/payroll procedures, and ensure that all employees have a hard copy of the plan.

 - Identify priority and backup personnel or rotation personnel for critical operations and/or processes. Be aware that employees may also have personal emergencies and may not be able to return to work promptly.

 - Determine which company records are vital and make plans to protect or relocate them to an offsite location.

 - Maintain an offsite inventory of all equipment and assets in case of structural damage.

 - Identify vulnerable and/or critical equipment and processes. Provide instructions for the safe shut down of these processes and data processing equipment, and ensure the instructions are in the Bushfire emergency kit.

 - Identify a hot site (an offsite data processing location for immediate business resumption) or a cold site (an offsite location ready for setup of your own data processing equipment). Also, consider an offsite business recovery facility where general business operations can be resumed.

 - Evaluate the interdependency of your facilities and develop a contingency plan.

 - Maintain ongoing agreements with contractors for supplies and repairs that will be needed after the fire. If possible, use contractors who are based outside the area, since local contractors may be hampered by the fire or local authorities' needs may be of higher priority.

 - Decide on the need for portable generators or other emergency equipment.

 - Evaluate approaches to your facility for low bridges or other potential impediments to emergency access, identify alternative access routes in case fire prevents normal access, and determine safe routes for employees returning to work.

 - Arrange for post-fire site security.

 - Prepare messages for the website, telephone recording and employee intranet ready to be customised when the need arises.



Inspection and fortification of the facility

- Inspect all fire protection and safety equipment.
- Identify key equipment and stock that needs to be protected from fire damage (e.g. computers, telecommunications and manufacturing equipment).
- Maintain and test all necessary backup equipment such as emergency generators and communication systems or devices.
- Cover vulnerable exterior walls with fire-resistant materials such as stone, brick or cement render.
- Install double-glazing or tempered glass in all exterior windows.
- Identify spaces and openings where smoke could enter and seal with fire-resistant caulking and insulation.
- Use fire-resistant or non-combustible materials on the roof and exterior structures, or treat wood or combustible material used in roofs, decking or trim with fire-retardant chemicals.
- Repair walls and roofs to prevent draughts. Inspect and clean roof drains and gutters.
- Inspect chimneys at least twice a year and clean them at least once a year. Keep dampers in good working order and equip chimneys and flues with spark arrestors.
- Create and maintain a Bushfire-ready zone around your premises as follows:
 - Plant only fire-resistant shrubs and trees. Hardwood trees are less combustible than evergreens such as eucalyptus, pine, and fir trees.
 - Clear and trim tree crowns and limbs in accordance with local council allowances. Where these do not apply, trim a 5-metre space between tree crowns, and remove limbs within 5 metres of the ground.
 - Prune branches that overhang the roof.
 - Prune tree branches and shrubs within 5 metres of a flue or chimney outlet.
 - Ask the electricity company to clear branches away from power lines.
 - Mow grass and trim combustible undergrowth regularly.
 - Keep gutters free of combustible leaves and debris.
 - Do not connect wooden fencing directly to the building.
 - Store fuel supplies, oily rags and other flammables in approved, labelled drums in a well-protected, fully enclosed and labelled shed or well away from occupied buildings or hay/fodder/machinery sheds, with a 3-metre fuel break all around.
 - Store labelled chemicals in a separate shed from flammables, at least 30 metres from occupied buildings and with a 4-metre fuel break all around.
 - Clear combustible material (e.g. debris, leaves, branches, rubbish) in a 10-metre radius around buildings.
 - Test your bushfire readiness using this online Bushfire ready assessment tool.



Impending bushfire procedure

Secure supplies and information

- Tune to your local radio/TV station to monitor the fire situation and warnings. (Refer to the Liberty Bushfire – Background information document.) Ensure that you know the location of your designated refuge in case you need to evacuate.
- Access the Bushfire emergency kit and, using the Liberty kit checklist as a guide, ensure it is well stocked and available for the onsite Emergency Action Team.
- Obtain cash for post-fire needs, such as buying food and supplies or paying employees and contractors. Credit cards may not work during a power failure.
- Protect and/or relocate or backup offsite vital records, including business and customer records, blueprints, structural records and utility service plans.
- Customise previously prepared messages for the website, telephone recording and employee intranet to notify customers, suppliers and partners of office/facility closure and contingency plans during closure. Consider redirecting phone calls to a mobile phone or answering service if evacuation is necessary.

Inspection and fortification of the facility

- Shut down all noncritical and nonessential electrical equipment and operations that depend on outside power sources in an orderly manner following established procedures.
- Close the main gas valve to prevent gas leakage, shut off gas at meters and extinguish pilot lights.
- Close valves in piping carrying flammable or hazardous materials and close valves on liquefied petroleum gas (LPG)/propane tanks.
- Verify that all fire protection equipment is in service.
- Maintain automatic sprinkler protection in idle buildings; promptly restore impaired protection systems and notify the fire and emergency services if there are any issues.
- Provide an emergency generator (diesel or petrol) on site. (In a crisis, high demand may make it difficult to obtain a generator.)
- Inspect and test all necessary backup equipment, such as emergency generators and communication systems.
- Drain all idle pumps and compressors, ensuring jackets are vented.
- Confirm alternative approaches to your facility are still viable for emergency access, and that they still provide alternative access routes.
- Fill the fuel tanks of generators, fire pumps, and all company-owned vehicles.
- Evacuate if necessary and if advised to do so by the local authorities, allowing sufficient time for employees to prepare their families and homes.

Procedures during a bushfire

Immediate actions

- Ensure that the Bushfire emergency kit is close at hand.
- Comply with the instructions provided by local authorities. Evacuate the premises immediately if advised to do so by the authorities. Refer to the section Evacuation procedures.
- If ordered not to evacuate:
 - Ensure all personnel and onsite customers are accounted for.
 - Monitor continuously any critical equipment such as boilers or air-conditioning equipment that must remain online.
 - The Action Plan Leader and Fire Monitor should together make regular exterior visual inspections of the property for embers, fire, pipe breakage, or structural damage.
 - Extinguish embers or small fires where possible and safe to do so, or call for assistance from fire and emergency services.
 - Wear appropriate protective clothing while outside: sturdy shoes, cotton or woollen clothing, long trousers, long-sleeved shirt, gloves, head protection, and a handkerchief or smoke mask for face protection.
 - Turn on outside lights and leave interior lights on to make the building visible in heavy smoke.
 - Disconnect any automatic door openers, ensuring that doors can still be opened.
- Turn off electrical switches during power failure, to prevent any equipment powering up before the necessary safety checks have been completed.

Ongoing actions

- Monitor and continue to ensure employee and customer safety.
- Be aware of indoor safety. If backup power is needed, do not use an electric generator indoors, inside a garage or near building air intakes, because of the risk of carbon monoxide poisoning.
- Do not store petrol inside, where fumes could ignite.
- Use individual, heavy-duty outdoor-rated electrical cords to plug in other appliances.

Evacuation procedures

If instructed by the authorities to evacuate, take the Bushfire emergency kit, close and lock exterior doors and windows and follow this procedure.

- Assemble personnel and onsite customers in a designated assembly point and ensure everyone is accounted for.
- Establish the evacuation refuge as determined by your local authority:

Name of venue:

Address:

Nearest cross-street:

Map reference:

Phone number:

- Organise transport:

Number of vehicles required:

Contact phone number:

Name or transport company:

Estimated travelling time (mins):

Notice period required for transport (mins):

- Leave the property, choosing a route away from the fire hazard.
- Notify your local authority that you have evacuated, and be prepared to give them details of evacuees and the refuge.
- Once everyone has been evacuated to the refuge and accounted for, contact their families.
- Monitor the fire situation through local radio/TV stations.
- Consider redirecting phone calls to a mobile phone or answering service during evacuation.

Post-bushfire procedures

Immediate actions

The property damage left in the wake of a bushfire depends on its location and the local population density. In the immediate aftermath of the fire, it is important to make a quick and calm assessment of the situation.

- Contact emergency services if necessary, but avoid making unnecessary phone calls.
- If you evacuated earlier, do not return until advised to do so, and then use a recommended route and do not rush.
- Do not move seriously injured individuals.
- Determine how best to aid those with special needs, such as the disabled, the elderly or pregnant women.
- Beware of falling debris from high-rise buildings which may make open areas more dangerous than remaining indoors.
- Watch out for fallen power lines and broken gas lines.
- Once outside, stay away from power lines, buildings, and any object that may fall.
- Check for open busbars, conductors and exposed insulators before powering up electrical systems.
- Provide search and rescue services with the last known location of any missing people.
- Ensure heating systems are working and that there is a water supply.
- Secure the site and provide a security watch if necessary.


Recovery actions

- Survey the facility for damage. If damage has occurred, contact your insurance broker as soon as possible, and they will liaise with Liberty on your behalf. Take photographs of the damage.
- Look for safety hazards, such as live electrical wires, leaking gas, flammable liquids, corrosive or toxic materials, and damage to foundations or underground piping.
- Restore impaired automatic sprinkler protection and/or water supplies as soon as possible and conduct main drain and alarm tests to verify water supply. (Refer to the Liberty Fire protection impairment programme guide.)
- Contact your insurance broker, who will liaise with Liberty on your behalf, to keep them abreast of the fire protection impairment and repair status.
- Assess the damage and contact key personnel and contractors to notify them of the next steps.
- Maintain fire safe procedures at all times, control smoking and use hot work permits where applicable. (Refer to the Liberty Minimising hot work fire risks guide and Hot work permit.)
- Notify key customers, suppliers and partners of the office/facility reopening and any property or operational changes resulting from fire damage.



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- Begin salvage operations as soon as possible to prevent further damage as follows:
 - Cover broken windows and damaged roof coverings.
 - Separate damaged goods.
 - Clean gutters and remove debris from roofs.
 - Check refrigerators/refrigerated areas after a power failure and discard spoiled items.
 - Limit access to freezers and refrigerated areas during periods of interrupted power to maintain temperatures as long as possible.
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- Update the message on the website, telephone recording and employee intranet with the current status of the facility.
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- Debrief key personnel on the successes and shortcomings of the emergency action plan, compile a log of actions to be taken, and incorporate improvements for next time.
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Want more information?

<https://www.nps.gov/fire/wildland-fire/learning-center/fire-in-depth/wildfire-causes.cfm>

<https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/documents/20143/202133/Riparian-fire-risk-report-170302.pdf/b165acae-13c1-15dd-c68f-ae90a41aff53>

http://www.cfs.sa.gov.au/site/prepare_for_bushfire.jsp

http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0003/36597/GetReadyforaBushFire.pdf

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