



**Scout Association of Australia
WA Branch**

**Catastrophic Fire Danger Rating
Information Statement**

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1. BACKGROUND

The Fire Danger Rating system comprises six 'Fire Danger Ratings', ranging from 'Low-Moderate' (with a *fire danger index* of 0 to 11), through to 'Catastrophic' (with a *fire danger index* of 100+). The rating is forecast by the Bureau of Meteorology (**BOM**) each day and is an early indicator of the potential danger should a bushfire start on that day. A Fire Weather Warning is issued by BOM for Ratings of *Severe*, *Extreme* or *Catastrophic*.

The *fire danger index* is not tied solely to temperature. The index represents a combination of temperature, relative humidity, wind speed, vegetation and drought factors.

Importantly, a new a new top-level rating, that of 'Catastrophic' has been introduced, which is detailed as follows:

ACTION: For your survival, leaving is the best option.

- Fires will be uncontrollable, unpredictable and fast moving. Flames will be higher than roof tops.
- Thousands of embers will be blown around. Spot fires will move quickly and come from many directions, up to 20 km ahead of the fire.
- There is a very high likelihood that people in the path of the fire will die or be injured. Thousands of homes and businesses will be destroyed.
- House construction standards do not go beyond a Fire Danger Index of 100.
- Well prepared, constructed and actively defended homes may not be safe during a fire.

Source: SA Country Fire Service

The warning may be escalated or decreased at any time as the situation and/or conditions worsen or ease. The bureau's advisory will attempt to provide time to react to the conditions considered to be most likely the next day (the advisory can be located at <http://www.bom.gov.au/wa/> then follow the link to "Warnings Summary").

Given the above ramifications of a fire occurring during a period designated as a 'Catastrophic' Fire Danger Rating, the Leader-in-charge must ensure that no youth members, leaders or helpers are in the path of such an event in any 'Scouting' capacity.

2. INFORMATION STATEMENT

For the periods and geographic areas where a Fire Danger Rating of 'Catastrophic' has been announced, all 'Scouting' activities, including business operations, will effectively close.

This means that:

- (a) on an advisory of 'Catastrophic' being issued for an area, no individual or collective Scouting activity is to be undertaken from that time in the area concerned, until the rating has eased. The Leader-in-charge of the activity is responsible for ensuring this. Obviously, there will be preceding conditions leading to an announcement of a 'Catastrophic' warning.
- (b) Fire Danger Ratings of 'Severe' and 'Extreme' are also situations where fires may ignite and grow quickly. All Scouts Australia (WA Branch) members - volunteers, youth and staff are to adhere to the restrictions and fire bans that accompany each fire rating at all times.
- (c) If an 'Extreme' warning is issued, Scouting activities should go on standby. This means that the bureau's warnings should be checked regularly and contingency evacuation plans confirmed. Leaders should consider whether some equipment should be packed up rather than leaving this until the last minute.
- (d) On the advisory reaching the level of 'Catastrophic', individual or collective Scouting activities are to cease in the area concerned until the rating has eased. This is also the 'prompt' for parents to collect

youth members (if travel is allowed) immediately (or as soon as possible) from Scouting premises or campsites. In a camping situation, Scout Leaders may evacuate youth members (dependent on pre-arranged contingency planning and the arrangements for the particular camp) from the danger area. In the case where an external client (eg, Education Department) is camped at one of our properties, their own 'Catastrophic' policy will usually dictate that they evacuate. Where this is not the case, the client will be asked to evacuate – call forward buses etc. Clients (incl Scouts) will be able to leave the site for the day (or for the period of warning) and return when the level has eased. Where clients are reliant on transport services for arrival, it is their responsibility to have an alternate contingency for their departure (this is to be discussed during the taking of bookings during the fire season).

NOTE: A last minute evacuation is extremely perilous. Fire and Emergency Services Authority (FESA) experience has shown that last minute evacuations can result in vehicles crashing in thick smoke and egress being blocked by falling trees or the fire itself. Vehicles may be impacted by smoke and extreme radiant heat, resulting in death and injury.

- (e) In the case of a major Scout event (Jamboree etc), event organisers and the State and Local Authorities will have conducted close liaison in the planning and conduct of the event. The 'Catastrophic' (and other) level of Fire Danger Rating is to be specifically considered and addressed in the risk management planning for all major Scout events (200 persons +). The contingency plans (including emergency evacuation where applicable) for major events as developed in conjunction with the State and Local authorities are to apply over and above this information statement.
- (f) Staff and volunteer managers of Scout campsites and businesses in areas where a level of 'Catastrophic' fire danger is advised are to remain in place to manage the situation and provide advice and assistance to Scouts and other clients to evacuate. This is the first priority for management. Once this has been achieved, staff and managers are subject to the further advisories from State and Local authorities at the time. That is, if and when local residents are advised to evacuate, staff and managers are also to evacuate.

3. CONCLUSION

The above information statement may not take into account every scenario imaginable. The overlying principle to be followed where any doubt exists, is to ensure that youth members, adults and all clients leave the area as soon as safely as possible. It must be noted that FESA experience has shown that leaving late is a major contributor to the very worst of outcomes.

The general philosophy for preparing for "Catastrophic" periods is to leave early – the evening or morning before the "Catastrophic" weather starts.

The operational 'direction' of State and Local fire agencies (FESA, Police, Department of Environment and Conservation, and Local Government) overrides all other considerations, including this information statement where any conflict exists. The flexibility referred to, in allowing buses to come forward and placing them on standby for activity centre bookings (effectively enabling a level of 'risk management') is to be exercised by the Manager of the property (volunteer or paid manager) in close conjunction with FESA guidance at the time.

4. RESPONSIBILITIES

The Deputy Chief Commissioner (Strategic Services) is responsible for reviewing this Information Statement every 3 years.

5. APPROVALS

Number	Document Process	Person Responsible	Date Approved	Signature
1	Draft Preparation	Clinton Smith – DC Strategic Services	19/08/10	C. Smith
2	Review	PJ Axford - BC Policy, Planning and Review	31/08/10	PJ Axford
4	Approval	Chief Commissioner's Council	26/10/10	L. Lucas