



PERSONAL SAFETY EQUIPMENT DURING BUSHFIRES

At times of emergency, the essential services of electricity, telephone, gas and water could be disrupted or cut. While service providers will endeavour to restore supply as quickly as possible, when the problems are widespread this could take some time. In the meantime you might have to cope as best you can for lighting, information, communication, warmth, food, water, cooking and other necessary activities.

Lighting

Battery powered torches should always be ready for use. Spare batteries and bulbs need to be stored in the same place as the torches. Remember, you will need a torch to locate other items in the dark. A torch should be located where it can be found, even in the dark.

For general lighting purposes, LP gas, oil and kerosene lighting are all practical alternatives. Ensure that fuel is available and that your equipment is in good working order. Exercise caution when using such devices. Make sure they are on a level surface, away from other combustible materials, and that they are out of the reach of children.

Unless your lighting has an ignition system you will require matches to light the wicks or mantles. If you live in a flood prone area, waterproof matches will be required. Candles are also excellent alternative lighting source, but again care should be exercised with their use.

Information

Local radio stations will provide you with the best and latest information. Battery powered radios are the most effective means to access information.

The Emergency Services could be extremely busy at such times and many calls seeking information will only slow their response time.

Communications

Mobile phones are becoming increasingly prevalent in the community. These can provide you with a link to family and friends. Where these are unavailable try to keep in touch with your neighbours, if possible. They may have equipment and other facilities that you lack, or vice versa.

The Emergency Services will try to establish methods of communication with affected communities until normal services are restored.

For more information on bushfire safety, visit the Rural Fire Service website at www.rfs.nsw.gov.au or call the RFS Education Line on 1 800 654 443 (Monday to Friday, 9am-5pm).



Water

You should always store water in preparation for bushfires.

Drinking water, unless you have your own supply, could be affected by fire brigades using the water supply, or could become contaminated through flooding.

Water is also required during bush fires for dousing spot fires and smouldering embers. If water is in short supply this may also be accomplished by using sand or soil.

Suitable containers that are clean and uncontaminated should be clearly marked "Drinking Water Only". Other containers can be used for extinguishing spot fires.

Food cooking and other necessary activities

A quantity of tinned food should be on hand, especially if you live in an isolated situation. Alternative methods of cooking should be available, recognising the restrictions during the Bush Fire Danger Season and problems associated with flood and high winds.

During the Bush Fire Danger Season barbeques of all types may be used providing they are lit in a permanently constructed fireplace at least 2m from any combustible matter, or at a site which is cleared around of all combustible matter for at least 3m. The fire must be completely out before leaving the area.

At times of Total Fire Ban no fires using solid fuels are allowed. Gas or electric barbeques may be used, provided:

- they are on a residential property within 20m of the house or dwelling or in an area with council approval
- they are under the control of an adult
- the ground is cleared within 2m of all materials which will burn
- you have a continuous supply of water.

You may need to consider alternate washing, and personal hygiene arrangements in the short term.

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Personal clothing and safety

During bushfires, one of the main threats to personal safety is radiant heat. Bushfires are capable of generating a tremendous amount of heat and so all exposed areas of the body need protection.

Wool and pure cotton provide excellent insulation from radiant heat. Synthetics will melt before the fire front reaches you. Never wear synthetic material near any type of fire.

Heavy leather boots, or shoes are needed to protect the feet. Wear long sleeved shirts and long pants. Gloves, a felt hat, goggles, and a piece of material, nappy, sheeting or the like, can be used as a face mask when smoke is thick, or can be wetted and put around the neck to cool you.

If you are involved in firefighting you must drink water regularly. A water bottle on a belt is very useful, especially if you are some distance from your house.

During bushfires and storms, you should take shelter away from windows where flying shards of glass may be a problem.

Turn off electrical appliances, including the refrigerator, and do not use the telephone during electrical storms unless it is absolutely urgent.

It is always a good idea to keep your personal safety equipment and clothing together in a clean, dry place where it is easily accessible.