

Fires generate more than just smoke. They generate embers, ash, burning debris and cinders that can be blown ahead of the fire front. Research shows that burning embers and sparks are the most frequent cause of buildings catching fire.

Unless you have undertaken preparations well ahead of the bushfire season, and have the right equipment, your ability to protect your property is greatly reduced.

But the good news is :

- 🍃 Homes where adequate preparations have been made can survive the initial passage of bushfire.
- 🍃 Homes have a greater chance of survival where people remain to extinguish small fires.
- 🍃 People who are well prepared can shelter in their homes and have an excellent chance of surviving.

Before the fire season

Don't let bushfires catch you and your community by surprise.

There are many things which can be done around the home to prepare for an advancing bushfire. The most important points to consider are -

- 🍃 Reduce the fuel around your home. (Fuel is dried out material that will burn - branches, sticks, twigs, leaves, bark, grass, furniture etc.)
- 🍃 Make your own plan for bushfire survival. The decision to stay and defend your home or evacuate depends on whether adequate preparations have been made.

Landscaping

Appropriate landscaping taken in the long term, can reduce the risk of fire damage. A well designed garden can provide a green safety zone around your home.

The use of trees and plants in landscaping the property can reduce fire risk by -

- 🍃 decreasing fire intensity,
- 🍃 reducing wind speeds and turbulence,
- 🍃 catching flying embers and sparks,
- 🍃 shielding from radiant heat .



Vegetation

Smooth-barked trees are less likely to catch. Avoid trees which shed bark in long strands.

Trees should be located at a sufficient distance away from the house to make sure that when fully mature, branches do not overhang the eaves of the house, dropping leaves into the gutters. Trees already growing close to the house should be pruned back from the roofline, and regularly checked for regrowth in this direction.

All trees and plants will burn if conditions are severe. Good design and maintenance of the property will reduce the risk of loss to fire.

More information on using fire resistant plants is available from your local nursery or Council.

Permits to Light Fire

In Queensland, the 'fire season' runs for many months spreading slowly south from the top of the State about mid-year to the southern border by late winter. Statewide fire bans are not common because there can be bushfire in one part of the state and flooding rains in another.

In Queensland a permit to light fire is required at all times for a fire that is going to be bigger than two metres in any direction. Permits are free and are available from your local Fire Warden or Fire Station.

Penalties apply to persons committing breaches of the Fire and Rescue Service Act.



Use this Checklist to rate the defendability of your property (tick appropriate boxes)

Have you taken the following precautions?

- Clear fuels around the house for at least 20 metres.
- Trim under fences and remove overgrown bushes and plants.
- Make sure surrounding grassed areas are trimmed and well-watered.
- Make sure all eaves, doors, windows, and roof vents should be boxed in or covered with fine wire mesh.
- Screens or shutters should be installed and under floor areas enclosed, if possible.
- Make sure that external house timbers have a sound coat of paint.
- Secure roof and clean gutters of dry leaf debris to eliminate an ignition source for embers.
- Store flammable items well away from the house (eg woodpiles, boxes, paper).
- Point LPG gas tank relief valves away from the house.
- Check that firefighting equipment is operational (garden hoses should reach all sides of the building).
- Clear overhanging trees and shrubs from close to the house.
- Make sure your house or property identification is clearly visible.
- Store flammable liquids in proper containers in safe, sensible places.
- In most bushfires, the mains water supply is likely to fail and electric power supplies will may be cut off. Is reserve water supply available? (eg tanks, dams or swimming pool).

Equipment - do you have?

- Sufficient number and length of hoses to reach the boundaries of the property.
- Ladders long enough to reach the roof and manholes.
- Buckets and alternate water supplies available.
- Shovels rakes and other garden tools for smothering low flames and making firebreaks.
- Fire extinguisher.
- Smoke alarms on every level of the house.
- Knapsack spray.
- First aid kit.
- Full length protective clothing (wool, cotton) including gloves, eye protection, work boots and a broad brimmed hat.
- Plugs for down pipes (these can be purchased from hardware stores, or alternatively use a supermarket bag filled with sand or soil.)
- Torch.
- Ample supplies of water as dehydration is a major cause of injury during bushfires.
- Battery powered radio to keep informed of the bushfire's location and advice from emergency service's.
- An evacuation box containing blankets, water and first aid kit and medications.

Rating

Count the ticks. If you have scored:

23 or above You are well equipped and have taken the precautions to give you an excellent chance of defending your property.

17 – 23 You may need further equipment and need to undertake additional preventative action before deciding to stay and defend your property. Consider evacuation.

Less than 17 You are not in a position to safely defend your property. You should begin an early evacuation if your property is threatened by bushfire.

Imminent danger

When a bushfire is in your locality



If a fire threatens, ring 000 (triple zero). Do not assume someone else has notified the fire services.



Fill knapsacks, all available buckets, hand basins and the bath with water.



Close all windows and doors.



Wet towels and block gaps between doors and floor.



Have buckets of water in the ceiling with a ladder at the manhole.



Block downpipes and fill gutters with water.



Park the car in a clear space, facing outwards with windows closed. Unlock all doors, but leave them closed.



Remain calm and co-operate with fire officers and Police.

Notification of bushfire threats



Emergency Services may issue community announcements to forewarn sections of the community of a potential bushfire threat. These announcements may be made through television and/or radio to draw your attention to an emergency situation and may be accompanied by the emergency warning tones similar to those used for cyclones.







Should I Stay or Should I Go?

Well before a bushfire, you will have to make a decision whether to evacuate or stay.

Go early if:

-  You or family members are not physically or mentally prepared to undertake firefighting activities.
-  You do not think you are capable of dealing with the trauma associated with a bushfire situation or just don't want to remain.









Stay only if:

-  You are physically and mentally prepared.
-  Your property is well prepared.
-  You have carried out a self-assessment to make sure you have the capability to defend your property.
-  You have a plan.

Unless you have undertaken preparations well ahead of the bushfire season, and have the right equipment, your chances of protecting your property are greatly reduced.

If I Stay

What to do when the fire arrives?

-  Listen to the radio for news rather than calling emergency services for information.
-  Put on your protective clothing and equipment.
-  Block down pipes and fill gutters with water.
-  Turn off gas at cylinder.
-  Turn on any sprinkler systems and wet down all the walls facing the fire.
-  Remove fibre doormats and outdoor furniture away from the house.
-  Close all windows and doors.
-  Take curtains down and push furniture away from windows.



Move all family members to a room furthest from the fire front.



Fill baths, sinks and other water containers and place them around the house.



Block spaces beneath doors with towels and blankets to keep the smoke out.



Once the fire front has passed, check the house thoroughly for small spot fires, smouldering material or glowing embers.



Be alert for spot fires particularly in the roof spaces.



Continue checking for spot fires inside the ceiling as well as the immediate surrounds of your house for at least 2 hours after the fire has passed.



Drink plenty of water to avoid dehydration.



Stay calm.

If I Go

What should I do if I decide to evacuate?

It is important that your decision to evacuate is made well in advance of the bushfire, and that you have an evacuation plan. Your plan should include the following:



Make the decision and take action to evacuate early to avoid being caught in traffic or the fire itself.



Load your evacuation box containing blankets, water, first aid kit and medications into the vehicle.



Pack photos, videos, insurance documents and other valuables and keepsakes.



Remove any flammable furniture or materials adjacent to the house or on decks, verandahs and pergola areas.



Remove and take provisions for the family pet/s.



Activate sprinklers on the roof or on the side of the house facing the oncoming fire.



Ensure all windows and doors are closed.



Be sure that everyone in the family knows the location of a pre-arranged meeting place, as well as evacuation routes.



Advise family and neighbours of your decision to evacuate and your intended location.



Take a battery powered radio to keep informed of the location of the bushfire and emergency advice.



Take your mobile phone .

The decision to stay and protect your home, or to evacuate, is up to you in most cases. It is important that you assess your resources, preventative actions, and capabilities, prior to making a decision. A decision to evacuate must be taken before the fire enters your area. Either way, you must plan ahead.

Dangerous Situations

To safeguard you against danger, Queensland Fire and Rescue Service may require you to leave a potentially dangerous area.

When deciding about the need for evacuation, fire officers may consider factors including, but not limited to:



The size of the approaching fire is too large



You have not undertaken adequate preparations



You may put other lives at risk by remaining

Police have powers under the Public Safety Preservation Act 1986 and the Disaster Management Act 2003 and may use those powers to enforce an evacuation if considered necessary.

If you are directed to evacuate, obey instructions. Remain calm and assemble everyone at an appropriate point. Do not overload any vehicle. Drive carefully, and never attempt to drive through thick smoke.

Once you have reached the assembly centre report to a senior person, and give the names of everyone in your party.

