

CFS FACT SHEET

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PLAN NOW TO STAY AND DEFEND OR LEAVE EARLY

Bushfires threaten life and property throughout South Australia each summer. Making the right decision to 'stay and defend' or 'leave early' for yourself and your family is critical for your safety and survival.

CFS protecting your home

It is impossible for the CFS to protect every individual home or property in a major bushfire.

It is therefore extremely important to plan for your family's safety and be self-reliant. If you have not prepared your home appropriately, ensured you have the necessary equipment or physical and mental ability to actively stay and defend your home then you should leave early well before a bushfire threatens.

Houses as shelters

Research across Australia has revealed that most homes are destroyed by sparks and embers blowing into them. Up to a Fire Danger Rating of *Severe*, well prepared and actively defended houses will generally survive the initial passage of a bushfire. Houses designed, constructed and prepared to the very highest bushfire protection level will generally survive under *Extreme* Fire Danger Rating. Therefore, people who are well prepared can shelter in their homes and have an excellent chance of surviving a bushfire.

However, there is no building standard to ensure the survival of a house when the Fire Danger Rating is predicted to be *Catastrophic*. The safest option is always to leave early.

Even if you plan to leave, a well-prepared house is more likely to be saved, and provides a back-up plan if you are caught during a bushfire.



The majority of lives lost during the 1983 Ash Wednesday Fires resulted from people attempting to flee either on foot or in vehicles.

Leaving early

If people don't feel they could cope or have family members who may not be able to fend for themselves in a bushfire, they may choose to leave early to go to a safer place.

"Leaving early" means leaving before your chosen escape route is blocked by fire and smoke, by strong winds that may bring down trees and power lines well before the fire arrives, or by others all trying to leave late.

If the decision is delayed the risk of being caught out in a bushfire increases dramatically and so, do the risks to life.

The danger of leaving late

Experience throughout Australia has shown lives are more likely to be lost when people make a last-minute panic-stricken attempt to flee a bushfire. Smoke, noise, heat, flames, fire-fighting vehicles and panic all make fleeing in a vehicle or on foot dangerous. Leaving at the last minute is a deadly option. The risk of being overrun by fire is very real and has resulted in many deaths. People caught in the open are likely to face severe and often fatal levels of radiant heat.

You should prepare and plan to leave early, well before a bushfire threatens your home. Tomorrow's Fire Danger Rating is available from 4pm and should be one of the main triggers to enact your plan to leave early—either that night, or early in the morning.

However, in the event that you are unable to leave your home well before a bushfire arrives, you should take immediate protection in a solid structure for your best chance of survival. Under these circumstances, people are safer in houses than in cars in a bushfire, and only just safer in cars than in the open.



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Making a decision to stay and defend or leave early

Life is more important than property. Whatever your decision, act to ensure that you and your family are safe. In making your decision, consider the following:

Can your home be defended?

- Is it constructed to meet the latest regulations for building in bushfire prone areas?
- Is it in a location that puts it at higher than normal risk or makes it difficult to defend - such as on a steep slope or in close proximity to bushland?
- Does it have a defensible space with at least 20 metres cleared of flammable materials and vegetation?
- Do you have the right equipment and resources to actively defend? e.g. sufficient water supply (minimum of 5,000 litres), petrol or diesel pump, generator, appropriate clothing)
- Is your property prepared and maintained for bushfires?

Are you able – physically and mentally – to defend it?

- Will there be enough people home to actively defend without the support of fire fighters?
- Are you all physically fit to fight spot fires in and around your home for up to 10 hours or more? Have you considered the debilitating effects of heat, dehydration and firefighting on stamina - even for physically fit people?
- Do you have the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively fight a fire?
- Are you mentally and emotionally able to cope with the ferocity, violence and traumatic effect of a bushfire, while remaining calm and implementing your plan?

You should plan to leave if:

- The questions above make you doubt your ability, the preparedness of your property, or if you are for any reason unsure.
- You are on your own: defending a house requires at least two able-bodied, fit and determined adults.
- You know you cannot defend your property. e.g. you do not have the right equipment or you are sick.
- There are children, older people or people with special needs or disability in the home.
- You are not physically or mentally prepared.
- The Fire Danger Rating is Severe and your property is not well prepared.
- The Fire Danger Rating is Extreme and your property is not constructed and prepared to the highest level.
- The Fire Danger Rating is Catastrophic, regardless of any preparations you have made.

<h3>Preparing to Stay and Defend</h3>	<h3>Preparing to Leave Early</h3>	<h3>Contingency Plan</h3>
<p>If you plan to stay and defend you must prepare yourself and your property to ensure your family, pets and home can survive.</p> <p>Refer to the CFS Fact Sheet - "Preparing to Stay and Defend" and "What to do in the event of a Bushfire" for further information on what you need to do.</p>	<p>If you decide to leave early then you must plan as carefully as you would to stay.</p> <p>Refer to the CFS Fact Sheet - "Preparing to Leave Early" and "What to do in the Event of a Bushfire" for further information on what you need to do.</p>	<p>For various reasons, you may not be able to enact your original plan to leave early or stay to defend. Make sure your plans include contingencies for if you are trapped at or away from home.</p>

