

Department of Human Services

Bushfire response
Clients and services policy 2009–10

October 2009

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Introduction

The Department of Human Services' *Bushfire response: Clients and services policy 2009–10* has been developed to assist the management and boards of sector agencies, and departmental managers and staff, to prepare our core services for the upcoming bushfire season. Its content is guided by the new national fire danger ratings and the latest advice from the Country Fire Authority (CFA). It recognises the interim report of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission and takes particular note of recommendation 7.1 about safeguarding children under 16 years of age and other vulnerable people in our community.

The policy encourages local planning in light of local conditions and resources. It takes into account the needs and risks for each client group or service type.

The department is asking all departmental managers and staff and all agencies that deliver services in partnership with the department to prepare their properties to be fire ready, and consider their response to forecast Code Red days and other fire threats in their local area. Clients and services in the 52 CFA-identified higher risk areas (see appendix), and any other locations deemed as high risk, will be treated as a priority.

About this document

This document *Bushfire response: Clients and services policy 2009–10* contains the overarching policy framework that applies to both the Department of Human Services and the Department of Health, followed by specific program guidelines for Department of Human Services programs.

It is part of a suite of bushfire preparedness publications the department is developing.

The department's role

The policy outlines three levels of involvement for the department in preparing clients and services for the summer season: directed action; advice and guidance; and awareness.

The policy outlines different levels of involvement for the department in preparing clients and services for the summer season. The department's role in this planning process will vary from directing that plans include relocation of some clients or ceasing some services early, to providing targeted advice and guidance, through to raising awareness regarding the need for planning and preparation.

Updated emergency management plans

Based on the outcomes of the planning and risk analysis for each service location, updated emergency management plans should be prepared for each service location where risks have been identified and new bushfire responses are planned. These revised emergency management plans need to link into local and regional emergency management planning, as well as CFA township protection plans (where these are being prepared).

Preparing and implementing revised emergency management plans is an essential part of our service delivery role and the role of our sector partners.

Now is the time to get ready for the 2009-10 fire season; the health and safety of clients and staff in health and community services depends on it.

It's up to all of us to ensure we are fire ready.

Policy framework

Purpose

This overarching policy framework guides the Department of Human Services, the Department of Health and our sector partners in planning, preparing and responding to bushfires. The policy framework is targeted to departmental clients and services only and is designed to enhance the safety of our clients and staff while maintaining the continuity of services during the 2009–2010 summer season and future Victorian bushfire seasons.

Policy context

February 2009 bushfires

This policy framework takes account of the recent 2008–09 Victorian bushfire season, particularly the 7 February 2009 fires with the tragic loss of 173 lives and the destruction of more than 2,000 homes.

2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission

The Victorian Government's response to the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission's recommendations underpins this policy framework. Recommendation 7.1 provides direction on safeguarding children aged under 16 years and other vulnerable people (including people with a disability or a mental illness) whose needs require additional consideration. This recommendation is a key driver of the departmental policy response for clients and services.

National fire danger rating and Country Fire Authority (CFA)

The new national fire danger rating and recently recommended CFA approaches provide planning and operational guidance to the departments' policy framework including: describing potential highest risk fires; identifying 52 higher risk towns; preparing township protection plans, providing household assessment tools and community information; and CFA wildfire management overlays.

Departmental emergency management planning

The Department of Human Services and the Department of Health have also considered the recovery management and service delivery experience during the 2008–2009 fire events, which provided valuable new insights regarding planning, preparedness and response for future bushfire seasons.

Emergency management plans are reviewed and updated each year in collaboration with local government and other response agencies. This is occurring again for the 2009–2010 summer season, in the context of the new factors outlined above.

Broader service delivery context

The Department of Human Services and the Department of Health deliver their core services to clients in a variety of partnership arrangements with internal and external providers, not-for-profit organisations and for-profit organisations.

These service delivery arrangements, along with the nature of the relationship with our clients and our legislative responsibilities and obligations, determine the form and level of our involvement in decision making and final emergency management plans and responses.

Therefore, the emergency management plans and response strategies for each service location across the departments' programs may differ in some respects but, most importantly, the planning process is consistent for all clients and services.

This more intensive planning approach is a new requirement for our staff and sector partners. It places additional demands on resources but is an essential part of our service delivery role, which includes minimising adverse effects from bushfires.

Principles

- The health and safety of clients and staff in health and community services is paramount.
- The health and human services planning approach is consistent and rigorous, guided by a common decision-making framework and overarching policy framework applied to all clients and services, in the context of program-specific documents and local emergency management planning.
- The departments' obligations and responsibilities for clients and services are acknowledged, considered and carefully addressed.

Scope

Clients and services

This policy framework applies to all clients and services of the Department of Human Services and the Department of Health.

Departmental services are defined as those that are:

- delivered from department-owned or managed facilities
- delivered by departmental staff
- provided with departmental funding
- regulated by the department/s.

Departmental clients are defined as those who receive departmental services.

Planning

Preparedness and response planning for clients and services is occurring on the following basis:

- a statewide planning approach that applies to all departmental clients and services – priority is given to assessing client/service locations in the CFA identified 52 higher risk areas followed by assessing any other locations assessed as high risk across the state, based on CFA advice and departmental analysis
- new responses to 'Code Red' warnings and declarations, with the response triggered at the earliest warning, three days beforehand, one day beforehand and on the declared day
- modified responses (as necessary) compared with previous years for 'fire in the landscape' and unforeseen bushfire events.

Program areas

The policy framework applies to the following Department of Health and Department of Human Services program areas.

Department of Health

- Public sector health services (hospitals owned or funded by the department, including clinical mental health services within their organisation)
- Residential aged care owned or funded by the department
- Public sector mental health and alcohol and drug services funded by the department (including residential, community-based and non-residential services such as psychiatric disability rehabilitation and support (PDRS) and in-home support)
- Public sector, centre-based day programs and community rehabilitation programs funded by the department

- Home and Community Care (HACC) services
- Supported residential services (SRSs)
- Private health and residential aged care services

Department of Human Services

- Disability services
- Children, youth and family services
- Housing and homelessness crisis services
- Youth justice services

Special consideration

Clients

Special consideration has been given to client groups that include children, young people, people with a disability, frail aged persons, non-ambulant people, people who require support in daily living, women and families escaping family violence, and people with a mental illness who are vulnerable and may have status under the *Mental Health Act*.

Facilities and service types

Special consideration has also been given to people living in large residential services and smaller home-like residential settings. Consideration has also been given to people attending day/respite programs or outpatient support and treatment services, and people receiving services in their own homes.

Definitions

Code Red: the highest fire warning on the national fire danger rating scale that indicates a particular combination of a high temperature weather condition and a geographic area potentially susceptible to catastrophic outcomes in the event of a bushfire.

Relocation: the planned approach to leaving a usual residence prior to a declared Code Red day.

Evacuation: an unplanned response when a fire is imminent and it is considered by emergency authorities or the occupants that there is no other option available.

Early closure: the planned approach to closing a day service (non-residential) prior to a declared Code Red day.

52 higher risk areas: these have been identified by the CFA according to criteria that indicate their vulnerability above all other locations in the event of a Code Red fire event.

Program guidelines

Common approaches

- All program areas have reviewed and considered their emergency management approaches in light of the current context (see previous 'Policy context' section).
- Program guidelines have been developed based on similar-facility assessment tools and a common decision-making framework across all programs.
- GIS mapping of all service locations against the 52 higher risk areas and wildfire management overlays will be undertaken.
- All department-owned properties in the 52 higher risk areas will be inspected for bushfire preparedness; fire safety preparedness work at these sites will be prioritised. Some other properties in other locations assessed as high risk may also be inspected and work may be undertaken to improve fire safety preparedness.
- Updated emergency plans are to be communicated to:

- local authorities as part of the municipal emergency management planning process
- the CFA as part of township protection plans in the 52 higher risk areas.

Communication and accessible information

- As with all departmental information, a range of accessible formats based on universal access principles will be provided.
- Communication with service providers and clients will be through usual channels as much as possible.

Common decision-making principles

- Some actions may be directed centrally.
- Departmental approval may be required of certain other new actions in plans.
- In all other instances, guidance and/or general information will be provided to sector agencies and individual clients to support them in making their own decisions about bushfire preparedness.

Common operational principles

- Planned actions in relation to relocating or remaining on site will be advised to departmental regional offices and collated centrally, except for metropolitan health services where advice will be provided directly to the Department of Health's central office.
- The departments' central office will maintain an overview of all planned responses in relation to relocation or service cessation.
- Regions will advise and work with organisations if changes are recommended.
- Local circumstances and direction from local emergency response agencies will be a key factor in final decisions about relocation or evacuation at the time of a 'Code Red' warning or declaration, or during a fire event.

Key differences in program responses

Where differences exist in the bushfire planning approach or in the responses as an outcome of planning, this is the result of careful consideration of external and service-specific factors such as:

- service location
- the nature of the relationship between the department and the service provider
- the nature of the clients
- service type.

The level of departmental involvement in decision making will also vary, as explained below.

Three-tiered hierarchy of departmental involvement

1. Directed actions

The Department of Human Services will direct relocation and/or early cessation of service for some service types in the 52 higher risk areas and any other CFA-identified high-risk locations *unless* thorough planning and risk analysis for that specific service location indicates otherwise. For these service types, regional departmental staff or community service organisations will be responsible for completing updated emergency management plans, with close involvement from central office.

Children, youth and family services

Children and young people who are: (1) subject to child protection orders residing in out-of-home care (OOHC) services where the Department of Human Services has custodial responsibilities; or (2) placed in OOHC services subject to child care agreements negotiated

between their legal guardians and the service provider *and* are located in any of the 52 higher risk areas will have their risk assessed as a priority. Unless otherwise indicated, clients will be directed to have an agreed client relocation plan in place. Other locations will be considered subsequently and, if required, client relocation plans prepared using a similar or modified process.

Youth justice custodial services – Malmsbury (all clients aged 18–21 years)

A detailed emergency management plan is in place for Malmsbury, which has an extensive preparation program for the precinct. The CFA has advised that this preparation will ensure the precinct is safe and the facility is defensible even under adverse conditions. There is also an intensive monitoring and assessment schedule for Code Red warnings and declarations, and directed relocation and evacuation plans are in place and can be activated if necessary. Furthermore, selected clients may be paroled or put on intensively monitored temporary leave if they are assessed as suitable. The clients' medical status will form part of this assessment.

Disability residential services

All group homes managed by the Department of Human Services or sector agencies in locations that are assessed as high risk will be directed to develop relocation plans.

All larger residential services in high-risk areas and the two large residential institutions (Sandhurst in Bendigo and Colanda in Colac) will undergo an on-site assessment to determine whether the facility will relocate early in response to a predicted Code Red day and what preparations are required to maximise fire safety.

A relocation plan will be directed if the site assessment indicates the facility may be at high risk on a Code Red day.

Families where children with a disability aged under 18 years are in a long-term, family-based placement (family options placements) in a location/address assessed as high risk, will be directed to develop individual client relocation plans consistent with the approach taken by Children, Youth and Families to children in OOHC placements.

Disability day programs (including facility respite and family-based respite)

Organisations assessed at high risk on a Code Red day, will be directed to make a final decision about ceasing services early by 12 noon on the day prior. A comprehensive communication strategy for clients, staff and the community is also required.

2. Advice and guidance

Housing – homelessness crisis accommodation services

All community housing agencies that operate crisis supported accommodation are to develop a bushfire emergency management plan to ensure the safety and care of residents/clients and staff. This should include collaborative planning with clients as part of their individual service planning and risk management planning.

Agencies will be advised to have relocation plans in place if their organisation assesses that their facilities are at high risk in a Code Red or 'fire in the landscape' event. Agencies will be provided with the CFA and/or departmental assessment tools to assess their properties.

Public sector health services and residential aged care (bed-based services)

All organisations are required to identify their risk and prepare and plan for what they will do in a potential emergency situation, including Code Red warnings and declarations, or in an actual bushfire emergency.

Planning and response is the responsibility of the boards and senior management of the health service. If requested, both departments will assist where possible with coordination and relocation of residents/patients in conjunction with the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing and Ambulance Victoria. For metropolitan health services, any assistance with coordination and relocation will be provided by the Department of Health's central office. The

Department of Health and Ageing may assist in identifying alternative accommodation rather than by providing assistance with relocation.

The Department of Health will not mandate relocation.

Public sector mental health, alcohol and drug residential services

Most clients of these services are voluntary and the department cannot direct the organisations or clients to relocate; however, emergency plans will be developed in collaboration with departmental mental health, alcohol and drug services that takes into account the status of clients and levels of vulnerability.

All organisations are required to identify their risk and prepare and plan for what they will do in a potential emergency situation, including Code Red warnings and declarations, or in an actual bushfire emergency. Departmental assessment tools and guidance will be provided. Planning and response is the responsibility of boards and senior management of the health service or community service organisation.

The Department of Health will not mandate relocation.

Health, mental health and aged centre-based day programs and community rehabilitation programs

Organisations need to assess the risk to their clients and facilities and plan accordingly. It is strongly recommended that organisations that have assessed their facilities as high risk on a Code Red day or in a fire event make a final decision to cease services by 12 noon on the day prior to the Code Red day. A comprehensive communication strategy for clients, staff and the community is recommended.

3. Awareness

Public and community housing

The Department of Human Services will ensure all tenants of public and community housing have access to CFA information and tools so they can make their own decision about if and when to relocate. This is on the basis that tenants of public and community housing are members of the general community.

Clients of departmental HACC and in-home support or treatment services living in public and community housing will receive assistance as described in the respective program areas in this section of the policy.

Note: Department-owned properties in the 52 higher risk towns will be inspected for bushfire preparedness and fire safety works will be prioritised. Properties in any other locations assessed as high risk with CFA input will then be prioritised for fire safety work.

Children, youth and families services

At the same time as the process for assessing risk and developing relocation plans for the 52 higher risk areas, all home-based carers of Child Protection clients in OOHC across the state will receive a letter from the Department of Human Services. This letter will enclose CFA information and assessment tools and the details of a regional contact officer if they wish to discuss their situation. The letter will strongly encourage families to prepare for the summer fire season with reference to CFA assessment tools and their local community approaches.

Community-based youth justice services

The Department of Human Services will ensure client carers and clients aged 10–18 on community-based orders (with a place-of-abode condition associated with the order) who are residing in an area assessed as high risk by the CFA, will be provided with the general community information and advised to prepare a safety plan.

Disability services

Clients and families living in their own homes will be provided with the CFA literature and tools to assist with individual planning and strongly encouraged to prepare for the summer fire season, with reference to CFA assessment tools and their local community approaches.

Support workers will assist with bushfire preparedness as with other activities of daily living and ensure clients' additional needs are considered in the local planning context.

Home and Community Care (HACC) services

HACC clients are frail older people and younger people with moderate, severe or profound disabilities residing in the community.

The Department of Health has asked local governments, district nursing services and planned activity groups to prompt their clients and to provide the resources to develop emergency plans. HACC assessment services (local councils and district nursing services) and aged care assessment services are developing agreed indicators of vulnerability. Clients who meet these indicators will need more assistance in developing emergency management plans and the HACC assessment services have agreed to provide that assistance.

At the local level, the department is working with the Municipal Association of Victoria to identify the key worker for vulnerable clients who use multiple services. Local councils will use local networks of service providers to identify the most appropriate worker and then work with them to develop an emergency management plan for the individuals in their care. The department is encouraging the Commonwealth departments of Health and Ageing and Veterans' Affairs to take similar action with respect to their contracted service providers who have contact with vulnerable people in the community.

It is expected that the majority of clients will simply need to be prompted with information about how to care for themselves in heatwave conditions and be provided with the resources to develop an emergency management plan. It is expected they will take action on their own behalf, or with the assistance of relatives, to develop an emergency management plan and to care for themselves appropriately in a heatwave.

Other in-home services (mental health and alcohol and drug treatment/support)

Clients and families living in their own homes will be provided with the CFA literature and tools to assist with individual planning and strongly encouraged to prepare for the summer fire season, with reference to CFA assessment tools and their local community approaches.

Support workers will assist with bushfire preparedness and ensure clients' additional needs are considered in the local planning context.

In a small number of cases, this individual planning may identify the need for further assistance. If requested, the departments will assist where possible with coordination and relocation of these individuals in conjunction with local councils.

Supported residential services (SRSs)

All proprietors of these regulated services are required to identify their risk and prepare and plan for what they will do in a potential emergency situation, including Code Red warnings and declarations, or in an actual bushfire emergency.

SRSs will be provided with the department's assessment tools and CFA information to assist with their planning and will be strongly encouraged to prepare for the summer fire season, with reference to local emergency management planning processes.

Planning and response is the responsibility of the proprietors and managers of the service.

Other private health and residential aged care services

Private health and residential aged care services will be provided with information regarding the CFA material (in collaboration with local governments) and offered the department's self-assessment tools.

Summary

- Emergency management plans for all health and human services are being reviewed and updated as necessary, based on the outcomes of thorough planning and risk analysis.
- Consistent and rigorous local bushfire preparedness and response planning is being undertaken in a statewide context.
- Targeted and consistent direction, guidance, advice or information is being provided to departmental service delivery staff and external service provider partners.
- Departmental responses and the level of involvement in decision making will vary across and within program areas dependent on factors related to statutory responsibilities, legislative responsibilities, the responsibilities and roles of other levels of government and the nature of the relationship with external partners.
- The planning process for preparedness and response for clients and services will occur in the context of broader departmental, regional and local emergency management planning.

Disability services

Program guideline

Context

The Department of Human Services is preparing for potential emergency situations in the next summer season. These may occur as a result of bushfires and/or extreme weather events. This program guideline provides a broad framework for disability services to help them plan, prepare for and respond to an actual or potential bushfire.

Recent 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission recommendations have placed increased emphasis on the need for all people in bushfire-risk areas to consider leaving early on days of high fire danger. Fire agencies are recommending that vulnerable people, in particular, should leave early.

In light of this, the Department of Human Services has developed this policy on relocation and early cessation of services in relation to:

- group homes
- larger residential services and residential institutions
- family options placements
- day services
- facility-based respite
- family-based respite.

Fire preparedness

Irrespective of whether a facility plans to relocate or cease services early, every facility should ensure fire preparedness activities are undertaken. This will increase the safety of staff and clients in the event of an unexpected fire that, by its nature, does not allow time for planned relocation. It also maximises the chances of the facility surviving a fire if staff and residents have relocated or evacuated.

Evacuation

Even if plans for early relocation or early cessation of services are in place, conditions may change, and facilities might need to evacuate when, for example:

- directed by local fire and emergency authorities or departmental emergency management staff
- there is an active fire in the environment and evacuation is considered safer than remaining on site
- poor air quality or problems with water supplies are a threat to the wellbeing of residents or staff.

Services in scope

Group homes

Group homes, also known as community residential units (CRUs), are small residential facilities located in communities across Victoria. Most group homes have five or six residents. The Department of Human Services manages roughly half of Victoria's 1,100 group homes with the other half managed by community service organisations (CSOs).

Larger residential services and residential institutions

Larger residential services are residential facilities where nine or more people with a disability live. The majority of Victoria's 23 larger residential services are operated by CSOs.

There are two residential institutions in Victoria. Colanda in Colac is home to approximately 120 people and Sandhurst in Bendigo is home to about 40 people.

Family options placements

Family options provides long-term, family-based placements for children or young people with a disability with families in the community. Approximately 100 people are in family placements and about half of these are aged under 18 years.

Day services

Day services provide adults with a disability the opportunity to enhance their independence, skills, community participation and general quality of life. Day services are provided in a range of locations including community centres and facilities that solely provide day programs.

Facility-based respite

Facility-based respite provides short-term breaks for carers of people with a disability, while providing a positive experience for the person with a disability. Facility-based respite provides overnight breaks in home-like environments in the community that are similar to group homes.

Family-based respite

Family-based respite provides overnight or longer breaks for carers of children with a disability under the age of 18. Families provide respite voluntarily but they receive a caregiver reimbursement.

Relocation policy

Scope

The relocation policy applies to group homes, larger residential services, residential institutions and family options placements.

Group homes

All department and CSO-managed group homes assessed as being at high risk are required to develop a relocation plan that directs early relocation in response to a predicted Code Red day. Assessment of which facilities are considered to be at risk will be based on a clearly prescribed approach consistent with CFA advice.

Planned action in relation to relocating or remaining on site needs to be communicated to the department's regional offices, local government and the local CFA (as appropriate) as part of local emergency planning.

Relocation plans

All relocation plans will clearly indicate where residents will be relocated and arrangements for communicating plans to residents, families, regional management and staff. In addition, relocation plans will indicate whether the facility is to relocate on the morning of the Code Red day or on the day prior.

Three days prior

Three days prior to the predicted Code Red day facilities will activate their relocation plan, review preparations and communicate with residents, families, regional management and staff about likely relocation.

One day prior

If the prediction of a Code Red day remains unchanged, facilities will advise regional management of the final relocation decision and when the facility will relocate. Staff will confirm their relocation destination and safe arrival with management and families.

Larger residential services and residential institutions

All larger residential services in high-risk areas and the two large residential institutions will undergo on-site assessment to determine whether the facility will relocate early in response to a predicted Code Red day and what preparations are required to maximise fire safety. A relocation plan will be created if the site assessment indicates the facility may be at risk on a Code Red day.

Relocation plan requirements are the same as the requirements for group homes.

Family options placements

Families where children (aged under 18 years) with a disability are in a long-term, family-based placement will be required to develop bushfire and relocation plans consistent with the approach for all children in out-of-home placements in high-risk areas. (See Children, youth and family services section of this document.)

Early cessation of services policy

Scope

The early cessation policy applies to day services, facility-based respite and family-based respite.

Day services

All day services in high-risk areas must consult with local fire authorities to determine whether they would be at risk on a Code Red day. All facilities determined to be at risk must develop an early cessation of services plan and close down at the end of business on the day prior to the Code Red day.

The early cessation of services plan will clearly indicate arrangements for communicating planned early cessation to service recipients, families and staff. A final decision about early cessation is to be made by midday on the day prior to the Code Red day. To avoid confusion the early cessation decision must not be changed after this point even if the fire danger prediction is subsequently revised.

Early cessation of services process

Three days prior

The early cessation of services plan will be activated for a high-risk facility three days prior to a predicted Code Red day. Facilities will communicate to service recipients, families and staff about potential early cessation of services three days prior to the predicted Code Red day.

One day prior

A final decision is to be made by midday on the day preceding the Code Red day and will not be changed even if the weather prediction is subsequently revised. Facilities will communicate the final decision on early cessation to service recipients, families and staff.

Facility-based respite

All department and CSO-managed, facility-based respite locations assessed as being at high risk are required to develop a bushfire plan that directs early cessation of services in response to a predicted Code Red day. Assessment of which facilities are considered to be at risk will be based on a clearly prescribed approach consistent with CFA advice. The early cessation of services plan will include details of when an early cessation process will be activated with clear protocols for communicating with service recipients, families and regional management.

Family-based respite

Family-based respite will not be provided in bushfire-prone areas on Code Red days. Arrangements will be made to identify family-based respite providers in bushfire-prone areas to ensure planned respite in these locations is cancelled prior to Code Red days, or that

children in respite stays longer than overnight can be moved to safer areas in the event of a predicted Code Red day.

Children, youth and family services

Program guideline

Context

The Department of Human Services is preparing for potential emergency situations in the next summer season. These may occur as a result of bushfires and/or extreme weather events.

This program guideline provides a broad framework for children, youth and family services to help them plan, prepare for and respond to an actual or potential bushfire.

It relates to relocation plans for children and young people in an out-of-home care (OOHC) placement in bushfire-prone areas.

Clients in scope for relocation plans

The client relocation provisions of this policy apply to children and young people on the following Child Protection orders or child care agreements:

- guardianship to Secretary orders
- custody to Secretary orders
- supervised custody orders
- long and short-term child care agreements
- interim accommodation orders
- interim protection orders with reside-as-directed conditions.

Children and young people subject to the custody or guardianship to Secretary orders are in scope because of the responsibilities that the Secretary has for them as custodian or guardian. Children on supervised custody orders, interim accommodation orders or interim protection orders are in scope if they are placed in OOHC services or if their orders include a condition that they are to reside as directed by the Secretary.

The provisions of this policy also apply to:

- *Voluntary placement agreements* (Child Protection involvement).
Voluntary placement agreements are in scope due to the role that Child Protection plays in facilitating or supporting an agreement for placement of a child between the guardian and a funded OOHC provider or a kinship carer during a phase of protective intervention.
- *Long and short-term child care agreements* (no Child Protection involvement).
Long and short-term child care agreements arranged between a guardian and a funded OOHC provider for placing a child in a home-based care setting are in scope due to the role the department has in funding such services and undertaking periodic review of children in long-term child care agreements.

OOHC service responsibilities under the bushfire policy

- DHS Child Protection Clients residing in out of home care placements located in the 52 higher risk bushfire areas identified by the Country Fire Authority (CFA) to be the most vulnerable are required to have endorsed Client Relocation Plans throughout the 2009-10 fire risk season (November 2009 – April 2010).
- An endorsed *Client relocation plan* must be developed and maintained (using the prescribed template). The plans will inform actions to relocate the client to a safer area at least a day before a declared Code Red day in the 52 higher risk areas.
- Aboriginal children in placement in the 52 higher risk areas must have client relocation plans that are culturally appropriate and endorsed by an Aboriginal child specialist advice and support service (ACSASS).

- There are likely to be exceptions where relocation in the 52 higher risk areas is not required, such as the property's particular location or features (such as located in the centre of large town with no surrounding bush or grasslands). Exceptions will be determined on a case-by-case basis based on departmental analysis and approved by the regional community care manager using the individual client relocation plan template.
- An improved fire risk communication strategy between the department's central office, regional offices, OOHC agencies and their staff/approved carers will be implemented. This will include regional briefings on developing client relocation plans and identifying a regional contact officer during the fire season to provide advice and manage queries in relation to developing and implementing this guideline (particularly the client relocation plans).
- It will be a requirement that the Client Relocation Plans are activated – that clients are relocated to a safer location consistent with the plan – during the day *before* a declared Code Red fire danger rating day.
- All facilities and carer households across the state are required to have a greater level of bushfire preparedness. They will receive or be made aware of relevant CFA publications and work books that will include information about how to make a facility or home safer for the bushfire season if located in a bushfire-prone area.
- All out-of-home carers in Victoria will be sent information about the CFA *Fire survival kit*, which can be found on their website at <www.cfa.vic.gov.au>. A letter from the department urging them to prepare, act and survive will accompany this material.
- Carers in OOHC residing outside the 52 higher risk areas are expected to make safety plans using the available fire safety materials provided by the relevant fire authorities. The state government supports the Royal Commission's recommendation that children and other vulnerable people not remain during the defence of a property.

Public and community housing

Program guideline

Context

The Department of Human Services is preparing for potential emergency situations in the next summer season. These may occur as a result of bushfires and/or extreme weather events. This program guideline provides a broad framework for public and community housing agencies and tenants/residents to help them plan, prepare for and respond to an actual or potential bushfire.

Services in scope

Public and community housing in Victoria comprises the following.

- *Public housing*: some 65,000 properties, available for eligible Victorians, are owned by the Director of Housing and managed by the Department of Human Services.
- *Community housing*: some 40 community organisations, registered either as a housing association or as a registered housing provider, manage some 8,000 properties, targeted primarily at low-income Victorians. These include rooming houses. Some of these properties are owned by the community organisations and some are owned by the Director of Housing.
- *Transitional housing*: The department funds 20 community organisations to operate approximately 3,600 transitional properties. These properties are made available to homeless people/families while they are waiting for public housing allocation or are securing low-cost private rental.
- *Crisis supported accommodation*: The department funds 20 community organisations to operate crisis accommodation for homeless youth, singles and women escaping domestic violence, generally within facilities with shared living arrangements and 24-hour staffing.

All tenancies in public housing, community housing and transitional housing operate under a tenancy agreement that lists the rights and responsibilities of the tenant and the Director of Housing or community agency as landlord in accordance with the *Residential Tenancies Act 1977*. The department has limited responsibilities for and control over these tenants.

Residential Tenancies Act provisions, however, do not generally apply to crisis supported accommodation as it is designed to provide short-term residential support to stabilise people in immediate housing crisis. Service responses can generally range from several days up to 13 weeks and longer where required. Accordingly, managers of these services have different obligations to ensure the health and safety of client residents.

Legal advice on the Director of Housing's obligations to tenants in the event of a bushfire is as follows:

- The Residential Tenancies Act does not contain any provisions that would impose an obligation on a landlord to relocate the tenant.
- The Director of Housing does not have a duty to provide warnings to tenants in relation to bushfires.

Roles of the department and community housing agencies

The department is responsible for ensuring that Director of Housing owned properties are assessed for fire preparedness and defendability.

Community housing agencies are responsible for ensuring that properties they own are assessed for fire preparedness and defendability.

Throughout the bushfire season, community housing agencies must have procedures to ensure they receive or are aware of CFA or other alerts and be prepared to activate emergency plans earlier rather than later.

The department will take responsibility for ensuring all tenants of public and community housing have access to general community information such as relevant CFA publications so they can make their own decision about if and when to relocate.

Agencies that operate crisis supported accommodation will have comprehensive bushfire emergency management plans that take account of any vulnerabilities or special needs of staff and clients. Consideration is to be given to any risks associated with relocating clients and the appropriateness of alternative accommodation within community settings.

Agencies should consider involving management, staff and tenants/residents when developing emergency plans to ensure the wishes and needs of interested stakeholders are met.

Every community housing agency must plan for Code Red forecasts and be actively aware of localised CFA township protection plans in the 52 higher risk areas identified by the CFA, where relevant.

Being prepared

In preparing for 2009–10, the department is aware that the following numbers of properties are in the 52 higher risk areas identified by the CFA:

- public housing: 2,684
- community housing: 193
- transitional housing: 120
- crisis support accommodation: 7.

Further analysis is being carried out on properties in other areas assessed as high risk.

For 2009–10, the preparedness activities, covering both the department's central office and regional offices as well as community housing agencies, are as follows.

Property preparedness

- *Public housing, community housing, transitional housing and crisis accommodation owned by the Director of Housing:* The department will ensure all properties in the 52 higher risk areas are identified, have an updated bushfire preparedness inspection, and that fire safety preparedness works are prioritised and completed.
- *Community housing, transitional housing and crisis accommodation owned by a community agency:* The department will ensure agencies owning such properties in the 52 higher risk areas are provided with the self-assessment tool produced by the department and the CFA household assessment tools, and are encouraged to complete the assessments as part of their bushfire preparedness.

Tenant/resident support

- *Information for tenants:* The department will work with the department's communications unit to ensure that for all tenants and facilities managers in public and community housing, appropriate communication and information channels are in place to receive up-to-date community CFA bushfire preparedness advice.
- *Residents in crisis supported accommodation:* Departmental regions will contact all crisis accommodation services in the 52 higher risk areas to advise each agency to have a relocation plan in place.

Specific guidelines for crisis supported accommodation

The following guidelines relate specifically to community housing agencies that operate crisis supported accommodation.

Preparedness

All community housing agencies that operate crisis supported accommodation are to develop a bushfire emergency management (and relocation) plan if the location of the property is assessed as high risk. This should include collaborative planning with clients as part of their individual service planning and risk management planning.

Agencies are to ensure all steps are taken to minimise bushfire risk in and around services and facilities, including undertaking regular risk self-assessments.

The department will ensure all agencies have access to bushfire preparedness self-assessment tools and checklists to assist in gauging environmental and operational preparedness, maximising the use of CFA-prepared material.

Planned action in relation to relocating or remaining in place needs to be communicated to the department's regional offices, local government and the local CFA (as appropriate) as part of local emergency planning.

On days of identified high risk, agencies must decide early whether or not services are to operate and communicate this to residents/clients, staff, CFA, local authorities and other key stakeholders.

Relocation plans

All agency relocation plans must consider:

- the size and scale of the service/facility such as:
 - the number of staff and clients to be relocated and staffing levels required to implement the relocation plan
 - the agency's capacity to respond to a relocation in terms of time to implement the plan, cost, staffing and other assistance required
 - the time required to relocate all staff and clients
 - if adequate staffing will be available during high-risk periods (consider staff who are CFA volunteers or staff who will have to leave the workplace to prepare/defend their own property)
- the vulnerability and mobility of their staff and clients, which means:
 - taking account of any vulnerabilities or special needs of individual clients and staff
 - identifying staff with specialist training in emergency procedures
 - considering the mobility of clients and staff and any who might require specialist transport options
- the existence and currency of emergency management plans and that they:
 - comply with all CFA and departmental guidelines on bushfire preparedness and bushfire procedures
 - include a procedure for being aware of CFA and other emergency alerts
 - specify a senior staff member responsible for the overall plan and ensure there is a person responsible for activating plans available at all times
 - have systems to ensure the availability of resources required to implement plans, for example, ensuring vehicles and phones are available and in good working order
 - include a communication strategy
 - include procedures in the event of excessive heat, fire, smoke and loss of power

- identify trigger points (based on alerts and other information) that activate actions including giving consideration closing services on days of high risk
- are developed and reviewed in consultation with key stakeholders
- outline contingencies for:
 - identifying alternate arrangements (assembly points with adequate fire protection equipment etc) should plans not be able to be implemented
 - ensuring continuity of services
 - ensuring the availability of essentials such as water, food, clothing, bedding, personal care items and access to medication
- trigger contingencies in the event that the primary emergency plan become unsuitable
- the availability of suitable alternative transport that:
 - takes account of vulnerabilities and the mobility of staff and clients
 - staff are trained and licensed to operate
 - is well maintained, fuelled and in good working order
 - is appropriate for relocating staff and clients in a bushfire event
- the availability of suitable alternative accommodation that:
 - ensures a safe and secure environment such as adequate bathroom facilities, kitchen and other amenities, and confidentiality of address if required
 - provides essentials such as water, food, clothing, bedding, personal care items and access to medication
 - can identify clients capable of returning to family homes or staying with friends
 - allows ongoing access to client information
 - can accept the transfer of files.

Agencies must keep an accurate and current list of names and contact details of all those who need to be contacted during an emergency.

Youth Justice services including Malmsbury Youth Justice Centre

Program guideline

Context

This program guideline provides a broad framework for Youth Justice services (including Malmsbury Youth Justice Centre) to prepare for and respond to a bushfire or other extreme hot-weather event.

The department is working to prepare the Malmsbury Youth Justice Precinct (MYJP) and other youth justice services for the 2009–10 bushfire season.

Services in scope

The Youth Justice Custodial Services (YJCS) program has two precincts. The Parkville precinct is located only five kilometres of the Melbourne CBD and is regarded as at minimal risk from bushfires.

The MYJP, on the other hand, is located 90 kilometres north of Melbourne and is centrally located in high-risk bushfire areas, with a high proportion of staff also living within high-risk areas. The precinct itself is set centrally on 50 acres of cleared land, surrounded by closely cut lawn and isolated bushes and trees. All precinct units have sprinkler systems and fire equipment and comply with the Australian Standards AS1851.8, AS1851.1, AS1851.2, AS1851.4 and AS1851.3. The precinct has an emergency power generator and a mains booster fire pump. YJCS staff undertake basic fire safety training as part of their induction.

Some clients of community-based youth justice services are also in scope.

Planning for the 2009–10 bushfire season at the MYJP

The 90-bed-capacity MYJP and has approximately 80 clients on site at any one time.

The offending profile and security risk of the clients on the site must be given strong consideration in decision making and preparing for a planned relocation or evacuation of this precinct. Simply put, it will be difficult to move this number of young men in non-secure buses without a significant risk of escape or incident. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that both options for relocation – Parkville Youth Justice Precinct and Loddon Prison – are both operating at capacity, therefore, the relocation is likely to create significant occupational health and safety, security, logistical and industrial relations problems for both precincts.

The *Bushfire and emergency management plan for Malmsbury Youth Justice Centre* provides a coordinated series of actions to be completed in order to prepare the precinct for the upcoming bushfire season and a series of actions in the event of an increased fire risk rating and deteriorating precinct circumstances.

The plan should be read in conjunction with chapter 9A of the YJCS operations manual – sections 9A.5 (Fire procedures) and 9A.14 (Evacuation procedures).

There are three stages in the plan. Each stage is referenced according to the Country Fire Authority's position in relation to information and advice to the community for the 2009–10 bushfire season.

The first stage – *Preparation* – sets the scene for preparing the precinct and the staff and engaging with the key partners.

The second stage – *Act* – provides the plan for responding to warnings of high fire danger ratings, particularly Code Red. When the warnings are issued, the CEO needs to make a decision regarding relocation.

The third stage – *Survive* – details the actions for the precinct if there is a fire in the vicinity.

Continuity of operations

It is imperative that YJCS work closely with the department's central and regional offices, the Youth Parole Board (YPB) and courts to implement the plan and to continue to ensure MYJC operates according to its legislative requirements and operating procedures. To this end YJCS will:

- brief senior central office managers regularly
- present the plan to regional managers
- consult and brief the YPB about developing parole plans in a short timeframe.

Youth justice community-based services

Clients of community-based services reside in the general community and will have access to the general community information.

In relation to young people aged 10–18 years on youth justice community-based orders (with a place-of-abode condition associated with their order) who are in high-risk areas, the department will ensure they are provided with CFA bushfire preparedness and safety material and advised to prepare a safety plan.

Appendix: 52 higher risk areas by departmental region

Barwon-South Western

Aireys Inlet (Aireys Inlet/Mogg Creek/Fairhaven)
Angelsea
Barongarook
Barwon Downs
Bolwarra
Breamlea
Carlisle River
Deans Marsh
Dunkeld
Forrest
Jan Juc
Kawarren
Laver's Hill
Lorne
Marengo
Nelson
Peterborough
Wye River (Wye River/Kennett River/Separation Creek)

Eastern

Dandenong Ranges 3
Dandenong Ranges 4
Dandenong Ranges 5
Warrandyte/North Warrandyte*
Dandenong Ranges 1*
Dandenong Ranges 2*

Gippsland

Anderson Inlet (Inverloch, Venus Bay, Walkerville)
Bemm River
Cann River
Loch Sport
Mallacoota
Noojee
Sandy Point

Grampians

Blackwood
Creswick
Daylesford
Dereel
Greendale
Halls Gap
Hepburn
Mt Helen/Mt Clear
St Arnaud
Steiglitz
Trentham

Loddon Mallee

Bendigo
Castlemaine
Eaglehawk
Junortoun
Kangaroo Flat
Macedon
Maiden Gully
Mount Macedon
Woodend

Southern*

Blairgowrie
Cockatoo
Gembrook
Rye/St Andrews
Upper Beaconsfield

*Notes

- No higher risk areas identified by the CFA in Hume region.
- Dandenong Ranges 1 and 2 are part of both Eastern and Southern metropolitan regions.
- Warrandyte/North Warrandyte are part of both Eastern and North & West metropolitan regions. No other higher risk areas identified in North & West metropolitan region.