

Department of Health and Department of Human Services

Bushfire response: Clients and services policy 2009–10

Overview

The *Bushfire response: Clients and services policy 2009–10* has been developed to assist management and boards of services, and departmental managers and staff, to prepare our core services for the upcoming bushfire season. This document provides a brief overview of the *Bushfire response: Clients and services policy 2009–10*.

This new policy to guide local service planning follows the principles that:

- the health and safety of clients and staff in health and community services is paramount
- a common planning approach is taken across all clients and services, but response strategies will differ according to the needs and risks for each client group or service type
- the departments will ensure information and/or assistance is provided to their clients and services to make sure they are prepared to deal with the bushfire season.

Why is there a new policy?

The *Bushfire response: Clients and services policy 2009–10* takes into account recommendation 7.1 of the *2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission Interim Report* that provides direction on safeguarding children aged under 16 and other vulnerable people (including people with a disability or a mental illness).

The new national fire danger ratings – in particular, Code Red – are another catalyst for the departments' new policy as well as recent information issued by the Country Fire Authority (CFA).

These new factors mean that, in addition to preparing properties to be fire ready, all services need to consider whether they would relocate or cancel services when there is a Code Red forecast, and determine what actions they will take if there is a fire in the area. This planning needs to be done now and documented in emergency management plans.

Who does the new policy affect?

The *Bushfire response: Clients and services policy 2009–10* applies to all Department of Human Services and Department of Health clients and services across Victoria, including health agencies and community service organisations (CSOs) that deliver services in partnership with the departments. Clients and services in the 52 higher risk towns identified by the CFA and any other location deemed a high risk will be treated as a priority and given immediate access to resources for assessing, planning and preparing their facilities and households.

The new policy applies to the following Department of Human Services and Department of Health programs.

Department of Human Services

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

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.

What is the new policy?

All departmental managers and staff and all agencies that deliver services in partnership with the department need 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, and any other locations deemed as high risk, must be treated as a priority.

Planned bushfire responses and updated emergency management plans for the 2009–10 summer season must take into account the new external factors such as the Code Red fire danger rating, as well as 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 *Bushfire response: Clients and services policy 2009–10* outlines three levels of departmental involvement in preparing clients and services for the summer season: directed action; advice and guidance; and awareness.

Awareness. The departments will ensure information is available to clients and services to review and update their fire preparedness and emergency management plans.

Advice and guidance. The departments will distribute information in line with awareness responsibilities but with more targeted resources and 'hands on' assistance from the relevant department and other agencies where required.

Directed action. In some instances, the Department of Human Services will require services to be relocated or shut down early in response to Code Red days where the risk to staff, clients and property identified in the planning and preparation phase is high.

An overview of departmental roles is provided in Table 1 below.

Action – what do I need to do now?

1. Read the relevant departmental policy and program guideline for your service type.
2. Assess the risk to your property and services in the event of a bushfire.
3. Revise your emergency management plan in accordance with your assessed level of risk and the departments' policy and program guidelines.
4. Tell the relevant departmental managers and local emergency services whether you plan to relocate or cease services early or remain in place.
5. Prepare the property for the bushfire season.

Table 1: Role of the departments across clients and services

Program areas	Awareness	Advice and guidance	Directed action
Department of Human Services			
Children, youth and family services	✓ Home-based carers outside the 52 higher risk areas.		✓ Clients in out-of-home care in the 52 higher risk areas.
Disability services	✓ Clients and families supported in the community.		✓ Clients living in residential services and children living in home-based care in areas assessed as high risk. Day programs and services in areas assessed as high risk.
Youth Justice services, including Malmsbury YJC and community-based services	✓ Clients aged under 18 years on community-based youth justice orders with abode conditions residing in high-risk areas and their carers.		✓ As per the detailed <i>Malmsbury emergency management plan</i> and local conditions.
Housing services	✓ All tenants in public housing and social/community housing.	✓ Crisis accommodation and homelessness services. All properties in the 52 higher risk areas to be inspected for bushfire preparedness and works will be prioritised.	
Department of Health			
Public sector health services/hospitals	✓ Information and assessment tools offered to private sector hospitals and health services.	✓ Planning and response is the responsibility of the service's board and senior management. Site inspections of all facilities in the 52 higher risk areas.	
Residential aged care (owned or managed by the department)	✓ Other private residential aged care services.	✓ Planning and response is the responsibility of the service's board and senior management. Site inspections of all facilities in the 52 higher risk areas.	
Mental health and alcohol and drug services (funded by the department)	✓ Clients supported in the community.	✓ Residential services and centre-based day programs and services. Planning and response is the responsibility of the service's board and senior management.	
Day programs and community rehabilitation programs (funded by the department)	✓ Clients and families living in the community.	✓ Planning and response is the responsibility of the service's board and senior management.	
Home and Community Care (HACC)	✓ Clients supported in the community.		
Supported residential services (SRSs)	✓ Planning and response is the responsibility of the proprietor. Self-assessment tools and resources will be provided.		

Further information

This document provides a brief overview of the *Bushfire response: Clients and services policy 2009-10*.

Copies of the full policy are available from departmental regional offices or via the departmental websites listed below.

Other useful information about preparing for the 2009-10 fire season is also available via these websites.

Department of Human Services and Department of Health

www.dhs.vic.gov.au/emergency/preparedness/bushfire

www.health.vic.gov.au/bushfire (includes information on emergency management planning and business continuity management)

Country Fire Authority (CFA)

www.cfa.vic.gov.au

Victorian Bushfire Information Line

Ph: 1800 240 667