

Students with Disabilities Transport Program

Emergency Management Operational Guidelines

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1 Introduction

This document details the operational practice of the Department of Education (DE) in relation to the emergency management procedures for the Students with Disabilities Transport Program (SDTP). This document also references State Government policy and DE's *Students with Disabilities Transport Program policy and procedures*.

This document supersedes all previous SDTP emergency management guidelines and is subject to ongoing review and revision. It documents the roles and responsibilities for government agencies, schools and bus operators.

General Points

These operational guidelines provide guidance for the SDTP for forecast and rapid onset emergencies only.

These guidelines do not provide guidance for student transport provided through:

- The School Bus Program (SBP), which supports students accessing bus services provided by Public Transport Victoria (PTV) to attend mainstream schools in rural and regional Victoria. Emergency management guidance for transport services under this program can be found at www.education.vic.gov.au/studenttransport
- Bus services chartered by schools for excursions and other activities
- Bus services provided directly to schools where buses are owned (including self-managed buses), chartered or leased by the school.

Refer to the glossary in Appendix B of this document for an explanation of acronyms and terminology.

Emergency Management Plans

Each specialist school must have an Emergency Management Plan (EMP) that details the emergency procedures in the event of a breakdown, accident, bushfire, or other emergency. All EMPs must be consistent with the plans of bus operators' services to the school.

Emergency procedures must be established in consultation with bus operators. If required, the Country Fire Authority (CFA), Victoria Police, VicRoads and other emergency services may also be involved in establishing and endorsing emergency procedures.

All specialist schools' services by SDTP bus services must ensure their EMP addresses transport issues such as local risk to transport routes, alternative drop-off points, the out-of-hours contact details of the principal or their delegate and student bus rolls. The emergency contact details of the bus operator and driver must also be recorded in the EMP.

It is important that all groups involved in the administration of the SDTP familiarise themselves with these procedures and follow them in the event of an emergency.

Specialist schools need to ensure parents/guardians are aware of the school bus EMP and adhere to good safety practices will waiting at their child's bus stop.

DE Regional Director

The DE regional director is ultimately responsible for all emergency management decisions relating to all schools with their regions. The regional director has the authority to make school closure and bus route cancellation decisions based on their own discretion, advice from the emergency services and local knowledge.

Forecast Emergency – Bushfires

Pre-emptive arrangements will come into force for some schools and bus routes when a trigger based on the Fire Danger Rating (FDR) level – Catastrophic FDR is reached. The potential for school closures and the cancellation of SDTP-provided bus services as a result of a Catastrophic FDR day will be flagged up to three days in advance and confirmed eighteen hours before closure.

The DE Bushfire At-Risk Register indicates schools that will automatically be closed on a Catastrophic FDR Day. These are also referred to as mandatory pre-emptive closures.

No SDTP bus service will operate to or from a specialist school that has been closed as a result of a declared Catastrophic FDR Day. All buses which travel through a Catastrophic FDR area will be cancelled. Additionally, buses will not operate in or near an area determined by the regional director as high risk.

The Emergency Management Coordinator (EMC), who is regionally based, will take the lead on emergency management arrangements. Upon notification of a declared Catastrophic FDR Day, the EMC will confirm school closures and bus route cancellations with the DE regional director. The STU will inform bus operators of SDTP services of school closures and service cancellations.

Further details on the procedures for Forecast Emergencies can be found on Page 6 of these guidelines.

Rapid Onset Emergency

In a rapid onset emergency the principal will initially take the leadership role and be supported by the EMC.

SDTP-provided bus services will be cancelled where a rapid onset emergency affects or has the potential to affect services. No bus routes will be modified unless directed by emergency services in consultation with the regional director and the EMC, where required.

General points

- Safety of human life always takes priority when determining transport arrangements.
- In an emergency a DE region may determine the need to form an Incident Management Team (IMT)
- The EMC will communicate with schools in their region,
- The EMC will communicate with the Student Transport Unit (STU) and Emergency Management Division (EMD) as soon as possible in relation to incidents that may affect specialist schools and SDTP transport services.
- DETs Security Services Unit (SSU) provides a 24-hour phone number to report all emergency situations (03 9589 6266). SSU will forward a notification report to relevant contacts within DE.

Please use the below link for DE information relating to:

[Responding to emergencies and natural disasters in schools and early childhood services | Victorian Government \(www.vic.gov.au\)](http://www.vic.gov.au)

School bus cancellations and school closures can be found via:

[Closures, remote learning and relocations \(education.vic.gov.au\)](http://education.vic.gov.au)

2 Forecast Emergencies

In forecast emergency situations DETs EMC will take a lead role in planning and preparedness on behalf of the region. The EMC will provide advice and recommendations to the regional director. The regional director is ultimately responsible for all emergency management decisions relating to schools within their region.

Regional offices will confirm a Catastrophic FDR Day and the applicable school and bus closures with schools.

Schools must confirm school and bus route closures with their families.

Listed below are the roles and responsibilities of each group in the lead up to the day of a forecast emergency.

EMC (or delegate) will:

- Convene an IMT to assist in the planning and preparation and ensure the region is adequately resourced to respond to the event if required
- Represent DE as a member of the Regional Emergency Management Team (REMT) and actively participate in REMT planning meetings as required
- Receive notification from emergency services agencies or EMD of forecast weather events (for example forecast Catastrophic FDR Day or flood warning) that may lead to pre-emptive school closures and/or associated school bus cancellations
- Seek advice from emergency services, REMT, EMD, PTV and principals on local conditions and the possible effect on school bus routes
- Utilise all information sources to consider any discretionary cancellations of routes travelling through high-risk areas
- Consider whether collaboration with neighbouring regions or states is necessary where bus routes cross regional boundaries or state borders
- Seek approval from the regional director for school closures and/or school bus service cancellations
- Seek notification from Department of Transport (DoT) of any changes to public transport services specifically relating to the carriage of specialist school students
- Email DoT's senior strategic officer to confirm cancellations of school bus services and school closures
- Email emergency services (REMT) to confirm cancellations of school bus services (including SDTP-provided services) and school closures
- Email specialist school principals to confirm cancellations of SDTP-provided bus services and school closures
- Email STU to confirm cancellations of school bus services and school closures
- Receive notifications from specialist school principals of actions taken
- Using the DE situation report template, confirm cancellations of all SDTP services and school closures.

STU will:

- Provide support/advice to IMT as required
- Receive notification from EMV of the forecast event and pre-emptive school closures and cancellation of school bus services
- Notify SDTP bus operators of a forecast event, the pre-emptive closure of schools and the cancellation of SDTP bus services.

Specialist school principals will:

- Receive information of forecast school and facility closures from the regional director, DE Mail and or notifications
- Provide any requested advice/assistance to EMC
- Receive email confirmation of predicted cancellations of SDTP school bus services from EMC
- Notify parents/guardians and students of any SDTP service cancellations
- Notify bus drivers of expected and confirmed cancellations of SDTP bus services
- Notify EMC of actions taken.

EMD will:

- Provide regions/SSU/STU with updated warnings from the State Control Centre (SCC)
- Receive notifications of changes to all school transport arrangements from EMC via DE situation report distribution list '*DL Situation Report*'
- Update DE websites with changes to all school transport arrangements and school closures
- Provide DE Media Unit with information on school closures and school bus service cancellations
- Update DE Closure page

SSU will:

- Distribute notifications to EMC, STU, EMD and regional directors of active warnings received from emergency service agencies.

NOTE: Although DoT is not directly linked to the SDTP, the agency is responsible for bus networks during a forecast or rapid onset emergency and works closely with DE EMC. For detailed information on DoTs role, please see the *School Bus Program Emergency Management Operational Guidelines*, which can be found via: [School Bus Program: Resources | education.vic.gov.au](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school-bus-program-resources)

3 Rapid Onset Emergencies

A rapid onset emergency may affect the safety of a school and/or bus service and will require the principal to take immediate action. Where possible, direction should be sought from the EMC.

Explained below are the actions that should be taken during a rapid onset emergency that affect school bus services:

- When students are at school
- When students are en route
- The night before or before school starts.

3.1 When students are at school

During a rapid onset emergency, the principal will take responsibility for decisions affecting SDTP services while students are at school. The principal should seek guidance from their regional EMC where possible.

All services on affected and potentially affected bus routes will be cancelled in full. Buses with students on board must not leave the school without the approval of the principal, or their delegate.

All students on affected services will be held at the school until the all-clear is given.

The school's EMP along with these guidelines should assist a principal in their decision making.

Specialist School principals will:

- Receive notification of a rapid onset emergency – this could be from a range of sources including emergency services, members of the public, bus drivers or regions
- Cal 000 for assistance if required
- Enact own school's EMP
- Seek further advice and information from emergency services, and the EMC and EMD if required, to determine bus route closures and the cancellation of services
- Instruct all affected students to remain at the school until the all-clear is given
- Notify parents/guardians of affected students of the situation and if possible, advise when and where it is safe for their child to be picked up
- Liaise with bus operators and drivers regarding school bus service cancellations and instruct drivers not to leave the school until the all-clear is given
- Notify the regional EMC of the actions taken
- Notify SSU of the emergency
- Keep an accurate log of all communication in relation to the event.

STU will:

- Receive notification of emergency and any relevant updates from EMC or EMD
- Provide support and assistance to EMC and EMD as required
- Contact SDTP bus operators
- Keep an accurate log of all communication in relation to the event.

EMC will:

- Receive notification of emergency status – this could be from a range of sourcing including EMD, notifications, DE mail, principal, emergency services, members of the public or central office
- Convene the IMT if required
- Liaise with the specialist school principal and update EMD, STU, DoT, SSU and appropriate bodies on status of the emergency
- Seek information from DoT of any changes to public transport services specifically relating to the carriage of specialist school students
- Confirm media messaging with the regional director
- Inform DE Media Unit and EMD of service cancellations, future transport arrangements and place information on the DE website
- Keep an accurate log of all communication in relation to the event.

EMD will:

- Confer with regions at the onset of the emergency event
- Communicate with EMC around decisions and provide and receive updates and situation reports
- In the case of a prolonged rapid onset emergency, update DE website with changes to school transport arrangements and, if necessary, liaise with DE Media Unit
- Keep an accurate log of all communication in relation to the event.

Responsibilities of bus operators and drivers

Bus operators and drivers should be aware that if any emergency occurs while students are at school, the principal will ensure all students on affected SDTP bus services will be held at their school until the all-clear is given.

In the event of an emergency, buses with students on-board must not leave the school without the approval of the principal or his or her delegate.

Bus drivers should carry appropriate communication device to contact emergency services, schools and bus operators in the event of an emergency, Bus operators and drivers should have emergency contact information prominently displayed on buses at all times.

Bus operators and drivers should make themselves aware of possible hazards on their routes and determine areas of temporary refuge (this information must be identified in the school's EMP).

Bus operators and/or bus drivers will:

- Receive service cancellation instructions from the principal
- If required, receive contact from the principal or the STU to discuss the availability of other buses or services
- If required, instruct drivers to attend schools, liaise with principals to confirm location and arrival at destination and notify principle of arrival at destination
- If in doubt, request information from the principal.

3.2 When students are en route

The bus driver assumes responsibility should an emergency arise while a bus service is en route to or from school. The bus driver is responsible for passenger safety and where practicable makes decisions with guidance from the principal.

The bus driver will:

- Operate in a manner that always ensures the safety of passengers
- If necessary, call 000
- Notify the principal of any emergency encountered en-route and any anticipated delay
- Receive instructions, where possible, from emergency services and/or the principal about the bus service's destination (i.e., return to school or be directed to a safe area)
- Notify the bus operator of the emergency incident
- Not allow students to alight from the bus unless parent/guardian/carer are waiting for them at a designated bus stop. If no one is waiting and is it practical and safe to do so, students will be taken back to school or to the nearest safe area. Safe areas are to be agreed to in advance by emergency services and the coordinating principal and identified in the school's EMP
- Continue on the journey or if the road is blocked return to the school if safe to do so or travel to an area deemed safe by emergency services. If emergency services are not at the scene and the driver is in doubt, they should call 000 for assistance
- Confirm arrival at destination with the principal as soon as possible
- As soon as possible after the event, record the details of actions taken.

Specialist school principals will:

- Contact emergency services to ascertain the status of any locally notified emergency
- The principal should advise emergency services of the status and location of bus services and seek assistance if required
- If possible, contact the EMC to inform them of the situation and receive the instruction
- Consider actions to be taken in line with the school's EMP
- Confirm or provide the bus driver with the destination
- Notify parent/guardian/carers of all affected students of actions taken and other relevant information (such as when and where to collect their children)
- Receive information from the driver of the bus's arrival at destination
- Notify the EMC of actions taken
- Keep an accurate log of all communication in relation to the event.

EMC will:

- Receive notification of situation from the principal
- Notify EMD and STU of the situation
- Liaise with the principal to confirm actions to be taken and request confirmation when these have been completed
- Notify DE Media Unit of cancellations or changes to services, inform local media of transport arrangements and update information on DE website
- Keep an accurate log of all communication in relation to the event.

STU will:

- Receive notification of the emergency and any relevant updates from the regional EMC
- Provide support and assistance to EMD and region as required
- Contact SDTP bus operators

- Keep an accurate log of all communication in relation to the event

3.3 Bus services affected overnight or before school

If the operation of a bus service is affected by an emergency occurring overnight or before school hours, the principal assumes responsibility for determining whether the bus service is cancelled or not. The decision is made based on, where possible, advice from the regional office, emergency services and local knowledge.

Schools should prioritise contacting the families of all affected students to avoid them waiting at stops where services have been cancelled.

The principal must contact the EMC as soon as possible to ensure they are aware of the situation and confirm bus route closures.

Requests for new services, service variations, safety-related issues and continuity of service matters should be forwarded to the STU for consideration.

Appendix A – Emergency Management contact details

	Phone	Email address
DE Incident Support Operations Centre (ISOC)	1800 126 126	ISOC.Coordination@education.vic.gov.au
DE Media Unit	8688 7776	
North West Victoria Regional Office	1300 338 691	
North East Victoria Regional Office	1300 333 231	
South West Victoria Regional Office	1300 333 232	
South East Victoria Regional Office	1300 338 738	
DOT Incident Response (24 hr)	9027 4241	
DE Student Transport Unit	7022 2247	student.transport@education.vic.gov.au
Peter Nelson - Director	0407 545 139	
DE Security and Emergency Management Division (Central Office)	7022 0269	emergency.management@education.vic.gov.au

Note: regional emergency management staff members contact details will be populated automatically into school emergency management plans.

Appendix B – Glossary

This glossary is intended to assist the users of this document in understanding the terms that have been used.

The emergency management roles and terminology referred to in this document are based on those under the Australian Inter-Service Incident Management System (AIIMS). AIIMS is nationally recognised by emergency service agencies as the system of incident management.

Term	Information
Catastrophic FDR Day	Catastrophic is the highest Fire Danger Rating (FDR) in Victoria. Catastrophic FDR Days are declared by the Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) and cover the entire BoM district
DE	Department of Education
DE Regions	DE has four regions in Victoria <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • South Eastern Victoria Region (SEVR) • North Eastern Victoria Region (NEVR) • South Western Victoria Region (SWVR) • North Western Victoria Region (NWVR)
EMC	DE Emergency Management Coordinator (regional)
SEMD	Security and Emergency Management Division (central)
EMP	Emergency Management Plan – a plan developed by schools to address risks identified at the school. All specialist schools that access SDTP-provided transport services must address the student transport risks to students in their EMP
Forecast emergency	Emergency events preceded by notifications from the State Control Centre or SES. These may include events such as Catastrophic FDR Days, flooding or severe weather events.
High Risk Area	An area deemed a high risk of bushfire
IMT	Incident Management Team (regional)
Rapid onset emergency	Emergency event that occurs with very little or no warning.
REMT	Regional Emergency Management Team – comprises of regional representatives from all agencies including DE that have been identified as having an emergency management response or recovery role.
Regional Director	Responsible for DE region and ultimately responsible for emergency management decisions affecting their region.
SCC	State control Centre – Victoria’s primary control centre for the management of emergencies.
SDTP	Students with Disabilities Transport Program
SSU	DE Security Services Unit
STU	DE Student Transport Unit

