**Bushfire Preparedness Relocation and Closure Procedures**

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1. Introduction

These procedures outline what government schools listed on the Bushfire At-Risk Register (BARR) need to do when an elevated Fire Danger Rating (FDR) day is forecast.

Victoria’s Fire Danger Rating has six categories – Low to Moderate, High, Very High, Severe, Extreme and Code Red.

There are **different procedures** for schools on the Bushfire At-Risk Register (BARR schools) to follow for a Code Red and for a forecast elevated Fire Danger Rating (FDR) day.

One key difference between a Code Red FDR and an elevated FDR is that Victoria’s Emergency Management Commissioner determines a Code Red FDR, which triggers the process for schools on the BARR in the fire district rated Code Red to close.

These procedures, however, are dedicated to what BARR schools need to do on a forecast **elevated Fire Danger Rating** (FDR) day.

These procedures outline what the three categories of BARR schools need to do on a forecast elevated FDR in their area, as well as the roles and responsibilities of central Security and Emergency Management Division (SEMD) and DET regions in this process.

To keep children and staff safe it is essential the different safety procedures for each situation are understood.

If a school is on the BARR it is vital the school’s staff and community are familiar with these procedures.

Bushfire safety is a shared responsibility between the fires services, emergency management agencies, state and local government, communities, households and individuals.

DET’s procedures for pre-emptive school relocation or closure on forecast elevated FDR days for BARR schools and the procedures for Code Red days have been developed after extensive advice and consultation with experts from the Emergency Management sector and in collaboration with school communities.

Forecast elevated Fire Danger Rating (FDR) days

A Fire Danger Rating (FDR) tells you how dangerous a fire would be if one started.

These ratings are forecast using Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) data for up to four days in advance, based on weather and other environmental conditions such as fuel load.

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Figure 1 - Fire Danger Ratings

DET works with the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO), Emergency Management Victoria (EMV), Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) and the Country Fire Authority (CFA) to develop a localised fire danger advice for the highest risk bushfire schools. This file will be published against the rolling four-day forecast during the summer season. The file will be uploaded to the Emergency Management – Common Operating Platform (EM-COP) daily and will be accessible to regions and schools (should they wish to register for access).

Using localised fire danger rating information to inform pre-emptive relocation or closure has strong support from Emergency Management Victoria and school communities.

Bushfire risk and school categorisation

* The CSIRO has a bushfire risk assessment methodology and system that categorises schools and co-located early childhood services - Outside School Hours Care (OSHC) according to risk. The result is a triaged BARR that: determines actions for individual facilities on days of heightened fire danger; and
* allows the prioritisation of investment to reduce bushfire risk.

Entry criteria for the Bushfire at Risk Register considers:

* + Bushfire Prone Area designations
	+ Bushfire Management Overlay
	+ Victorian Fire Risk Register
	+ Terrain
	+ Fuel type exposure

Further, the BARR comprises three categories with all schools and early childhood services listed on the BARR assigned to one of these categories.

1. Relocate/closure under localised severe fire danger conditions and above.
2. Relocate/closure under localised extreme fire danger conditions and above
3. Remain in situ and monitor conditions.

**All BARR schools will close on a Code Red Day. Schools identified for alternate arrangements on Severe or Extreme Days must prioritise relocation in preference to closure wherever practicable.**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Category | Severe | Extreme | Code Red |
| 1 | Alternate arrangements (Relocate/close) | Alternate arrangements (Relocate/close) | Close |
| 2 |  | Alternate arrangements (Relocate/close) | Close |
| 3 |  |  | Close |

The categorisation of schools and early childhood services is continually refined through the inclusion of vulnerability metrics resulting in a comprehensive point-in-time bushfire risk profile for each school that enables targeted treatments.

Procedures for pre-season planning for relocation are outlined in **Section 2**.

Procedures for BARR school relocation are outlined in **Section 3**.

Procedures for BARR school closure are outlined in **Section 4**.

1. Steps for Pre-Season planning to relocate students and staff

School

Notify stakeholders of approval

Region

Notify EMD of schools approved to relocate

Region

Confirm that relocation plan is included in EMP

School

Include relocation plan in EMP

Region

Notify relocating and host school of approval

School

Seek approval from Regional Director

Regional Director

Approve relocation

SEMD

Notify stakeholders of schools approved to relocate

School

Consider transport arrangements

School

Obtain support of stakeholders

School

Assess logistics, risks, benefits of relocation

Region

Assist school to identify host school

School

Liaise with region and identify host school

**Legend**

School

Region

School

Security Unit (SU)

Security and Emergency Management Division (SEMD)

Document relocation plan including transport arrangements

School

**Schools in category 1 or 2 of the BARR** who are required to relocate during the bushfire season must undertake the following activities prior to the commencement of the season in October:

* Develop a [Bushfire Preparedness School Relocation Plan](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/PAL/bushfire-preparedness-school-relocation-plan-template.docx) and attach a copy of the approved Relocation Plan to your school’s Emergency Management Plan, including in the online portal. This plan requires the following:
* Liaison with the region to identify a host school in a lower bushfire risk area, ensuring the host school has the capacity to accommodate relocated students and staff and meet their educational needs
* Obtaining the support of stakeholders, such as School Council, staff and parents/carers
* Establishing appropriate student transport arrangements
* Obtaining the approval of the Regional Director
* Notifying all stakeholders of the Regional Director’s decision regarding the approval, including:
	+ School Council
	+ Parents/carers, staff and contractors
	+ Staff of any co-located Early Childhood Services
	+ Other users of the school site
	+ The host school

(Refer to the section on **Resources** for template letters)

To support BARR schools to complete **pre-season** relocation planning, the **region** will:

* Assist BARR schools needing to relocate to identify an appropriate host school
* Assist host schools to reflect hosting arrangements in their EMPs
* Notify relocating and host principals of the Regional Director’s decision to approve relocation
* Confirm that the relocating BARR school has incorporated the *Relocation Plan* in its EMP.

At the **commencement** of the bushfire season in October, **SEMD** will:

* Notify the following stakeholders about which BARR schools have had their *Relocation Plan* approved by their Regional Director:
	+ Deputy Secretary, Schools and Regional Services (SRS)
	+ Director, Student Transport Unit
	+ Executive Director, Quality Assessment and Regulation Division (QARD)
	+ State Control Centre (SCC)
	+ Emergency Management Officer, Catholic Education Commission Victoria (CECV)
	+ Director, School Services, Independent Schools Victoria (ISV)
1. Procedures for relocation

Regional Director

Notify school of approval to relocate

School

Activate Relocation procedure

Regional Director

Approve relocation

School

Complete Relocation Checklist and provide to region

Region

Provide advice to relocating and host schools

School

Consult with Region and host school

School

Receive advice of elevated FDR

SEMD

Provide weather information to regions

SU

Send IRIS alert advising of elevated FDR

Region

Notify schools of elevated FDR and weather forecast

SEMD

Obtain weather information from BoM/SCC

School

Notify school community and other stakeholders of relocation

SEMD

Publish relocations on DET website

Region

Check SAL

Region

Notify stakeholders of relocations

School

Display relocation signs

School

Region

Security and Emergency Management Division (SEMD)

Security Unit (SU)

**Legend**

SEMD

Notify stakeholders of relocations

Make alternate arrangements for camps and excursions arriving/ departing the school

**Please note:**

Relocation refers to the pre-emptive decision to relocate the students and staff from their school location to a host school in response to an elevated FDR forecast.

This differs to an evacuation, which occurs in response to an imminent threat, such as a fire in the landscape.

The Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) provides a weather forecast 4pm or later, up to four days in advance.

Once the BoM has forecast an elevated FDR day, DET’s **Security Unit** will send an IRIS alert advising of an elevated FDR day to:

* DET central and regional emergency management staff
* All government schools
* Independent Schools Victoria (ISV)
* Catholic Education Commission Victoria (CECV)

Once a Category 1 or 2 BARR school receives notification that the forecast relevant to the school is elevated, they will need to start their relocation process to ensure all arrangements are in place by **3.30pm** **the day** **before** the forecast elevated FDR day.

Category 1 and 2 BARR schools will have completed their Relocation Plan BEFORE the summer season, including obtaining Regional Director approval. Notwithstanding this, the school **must** still consult with their Regional Director as soon as possible following a forecast of an elevated FDR day to confirm:

1. The FDR forecast for the school
2. The region is aware of the school’s intention to enact its relocation plans
3. The region is satisfied the school has completed the [*School Relocation on a Forecast Elevated Fire Danger Rating Day – Principal Checklist*](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/PAL/bushfire-preparedness-school-relocation-principal-checklist.docx) and the school’s arrangements are satisfactory.

On receipt of the *School Relocation on a Forecast Elevated Fire Danger Rating Day – Principal Checklist*, the Regional Director (if satisfied) will co-sign the checklist, indicating a final, formal, written approval to relocate.

To support BARR schools relocating students and staff on a forecast elevated FDR day **SEMD** will:

* Obtain the forecast from EM-COP
* Email Regional Directors confirming the elevated FDR forecast for schools in their region (see template letters under **Resources**)
* Notify key Departmental and Ministerial staff (Education, Families and Children and Training and Skills) which schools are relocating their students and staff, and the host schools
* Phone and email advice to the Ministers’ chiefs-of-staff, and relevant DET staff, including:
	+ Deputy Secretary, Schools and Regional Services (SRS)
	+ All Regional Directors
	+ Managers of Operations and Emergency Management
	+ Executive Director, Communications
	+ Director, Public Affairs
	+ Director, Student Transport Unit
	+ Manager, Security Services Unit
	+ Executive Director, QARD
* Phone and email advice to:
	+ Emergency Management Officer, CECV
	+ Director, School Services, ISV
* Email advice to:
	+ Public Transport Victoria (PTV)
	+ Director, Student Transport Unit (STU)
	+ Duty Officer, State Control Centre (SCC) with a list of all schools and early childhood services relocating students and staff
* Publish a list of schools that will be relocating their students and staff on DET’s website at [www.education.vic.gov.au](http://www.education.vic.gov.au)

To support BARR schools relocating students and staff on a forecast elevated FDR day the **region** will:

* Notify principals of BARR schools of the forecast elevated FDR day for their school
* Ensure that schools relocating students and staff confirm to the Regional Director by email that they have completed all necessary arrangements for the relocation and have completed and sent the *School Relocation on a Forecast Extreme Fire Danger Rating Day Principal Checklist* for final approval by 2**.00pm** the day prior to relocation
* Communicate with relevant schools regarding any transport issues which may impact students
* Check the Student Activity Locator (SAL) for school camps or excursions in the affected Fire District, or due to arrive or depart from the school which is relocating, and ask the relocating school to make alternate arrangements
* Upon receipt of the checklist, the region will acknowledge the school’s relocation of students and staff, by way of co-signing the *Principal Checklist*
* Advise nearby facilities that schools are intending to relocate their students and staff
* Advise the Regional Emergency Management Team (REMT)
* Consider the movements and safety of their own staff, contractors and visitors and make appropriate preparations

(See **Resources** – [*Elevated FDR Day School Relocation – Checklist for regional Manager*](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/PAL/bushfire-preparedness-school-relocation-regional-managers-checklist.docx))

WHEN relocating their students and staff to a pre-determined host school on a forecast elevated FDR day, **BARR schools** must:

* Ensure all parents/carers, staff, visitors, contractors and co-located early childhood services are contacted regarding the relocation of students and staff (using communications channels such as SMS, phone trees, Facebook, template letters) as soon as possible but no later than **3.30pm the day before** (refer to the section on resources for communication materials to support this process)
* Complete the [*School Relocation on a Forecast Elevated Fire Danger Rating Day Principal Checklist*](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/PAL/bushfire-preparedness-school-relocation-principal-checklist.docx)  and send it to the Regional Director no later than 2.00pm the day prior to relocation
* Make alternate arrangements for camps and excursions that are due to depart or arrive at the school premises on the day of the relocation
* Ensure that support services, contractors, visitors and any community groups using the school’s facilities during or outside normal school hours (such as sporting groups, Outside School Hours Care) will not be entering or attending the school on the day the students and staff are relocated
* Ensure [Relocation signs](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/PAL/bushfire-preparedness-posters-school-relocation-and-closure.docx) have been displayed prominently in multiple locations around the school
* Advise parents/carers to:
* explain to their child/children and other family members that the school is relocating for safety reasons and no one will be allowed to enter the school during that period
* phone the VicEmergency Hotline number of 1800 226 226 if necessary

Refer to the **section on Resources for a range of templates, checklists, posters and other resources for schools** – including templates for letters and relocation and closure signs.

1. Procedures for closure

School

Display closure signs

School

Make alternate arrangements for camps and excursions arriving/ departing the school

SEMD

Publish closures on DET website

Region

Check SAL

Region

Notify stakeholders of relocations

Region

Confirm transport arrangements

SEMD

Obtain weather information from BoM

Region

Notify schools of elevated FDR and ICC footprint forecast

SU

Send IRIS alert advising of elevated FDR

SEMD

Provide weather information to regions

School

Receive advice of elevated FDR

School

Consult with region to confirm plans

Region

Provide advice

School

Complete Closure Checklist and provide to region

Regional Director

Approve closure

SEMD

Notify stakeholders of relocations

Regional Director

Notify school of approval to close

School

Notify school community and other stakeholders of relocation

School

Activate Closure procedure

School

Region

Security Services Unit (SU)

Security and Emergency Management Division (SEMD)

**Legend**

Schools in Category 1 or 2 of the BARR will only be approved to close if relocation is not assessed as a viable option.

The Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) provides a weather forecast 4pm or later, up to four days in advance.

Once the BoM has forecast an elevated FDR day, DET’s **Security Unit** will send an IRIS alert advising of an elevated FDR day to:

* DET central and regional emergency management staff
* All government schools
* Independent Schools Victoria (ISV)
* Catholic Education Commission Victoria (CECV)

If intending to apply to close, arrangements will need to be in place by **3.30pm the day before** the forecast elevated FDR day and the intended school closure.

To support relevant BARR schools to close, **SEMD** will:

* Obtain the forecast from EM-COP
* Email Regional Directors confirming the elevated FDR forecast for schools in their region (see template email in **Resources**)
* Notify key Departmental and Ministerial staff (Education, Families and Children and Training and Skills) of the BARR schools closing
* Phone and email advice to the Ministers’ chiefs-of-staff, and relevant DET staff, including:
	+ Deputy Secretary, Schools and Regional Services (SRS)
	+ All Regional Directors
	+ Managers of Operations and Emergency Management
	+ Executive Director, Communications
	+ Director, Public Affairs
	+ Director, Student Transport Unit
	+ Manager, Security Services Unit
	+ Executive Director, QARD
* Phone and email advice to:
	+ Emergency Management Officer, CECV
	+ Director, School Services, ISV
* Email advice to:
	+ Public Transport Victoria (PTV)
	+ Director, Student Transport Unit (STU)
	+ Duty Officer, SCC with a list of all schools and early childhood closing
* Publish a list of schools that will be closing on DET’s website at [www.education.vic.gov.au](http://www.education.vic.gov.au)

To support BARR schools closing on a forecast elevated FDR day the **region** will:

* Notify principals of BARR schools of the forecast elevated FDR day for their school
* Ensure that schools confirm to the Regional Director by email that they have completed all necessary arrangements for the closure and have completed and sent the [*School Closure on a Forecast Elevated Fire Danger Rating Day Principal Checklist*](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/PAL/bushfire-preparedness-school-closure-principal-checklist.docx) for final approval by 2**.00pm** the day prior to closure
* Upon receipt of the checklist, the region will acknowledge the school’s closure by way of co-signing the *Principal Checklist*
* Communicate with relevant schools regarding any transport issues which may impact students. Buses will operate as normal, however, bus routes that only service the closed BARR school will NOT operate
* Confirm with principals that arrangements have been made to accommodate altered transport arrangements
* Check the Student Activity Locator (SAL) for school camps or excursions in the affected Fire District, or due to arrive or depart from the school which is closing, and ask the closing school to make alternate arrangements
* Advise nearby facilities that schools are intending to close
* Advise the REMT
* Consider the movements and safety of their own staff, contractors and visitors and make appropriate preparations

(**Refer to:** [*Elevated FDR Day School Closure – Checklist for regional Manager*](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/PAL/bushfire-preparedness-school-closure-regional-checklist.docx))

When closing their school on a forecast elevated FDR day, **BARR schools** must:

* Ensure all parents/carers, staff, visitors, contractors and co-located early childhood services are contacted regarding the closure of the school (using communications channels such as Compass, SMS, phone trees, Facebook, template letters via email) as soon as possible but no later than **3.30pm** the day prior to closure
* Complete the [*School Closure on a Forecast Elevated Fire Danger Rating Day Principal Checklist*](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/PAL/bushfire-preparedness-school-closure-principal-checklist.docx)  and send it to the regional director no later than 2**.00pm** the day prior to closure
* Make alternate arrangements for camps and excursions that are due to depart or arrive at the school premises on the day of closure
* Ensure that support services, contractors, visitors and any community groups using the school’s facilities during or outside normal school hours (such as sporting groups, after-school programs) will not be entering or attending the school on the day the school is closed
* Ensure Closure signs have been displayed prominently in multiple locations around the school ( refer to [Posters – school relocation and closure](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/PAL/bushfire-preparedness-posters-school-relocation-and-closure.docx))
* Advise parents/carers to :
	+ ensure they have made safe alternative care arrangements for their children
	+ enact their family fire safety plan
	+ know that children should not be left alone or in the care of older children
	+ phone the VicEmergency Hotline on 1800 226 226 if necessary

Refer to [Template letters for principals to use on FDR days](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/PAL/bushfire-preparedness-template-letters-for-principals-to-use-for-FDR-days.docx).

1. late change to a fdr forecast

In circumstances where there is:

* a late downgrade **from** an elevated FDR day (4pm or later on the day prior or on a weekend), or
* a late upgrade **to** an elevated FDR day (4pm or later on the day prior or on a weekend)

decisions regarding closure will be confirmed or altered by the Regional Director following consultation with schools on a case-by-case basis. Consideration of the decision to close or otherwise will have regard to:

* Emergency services advice
* Management of transport issues
* Capacity to communicate with all affected families, staff, contractors, and other stakeholders
* Other factors relevant to the decision

Any changes will be communicated to all stakeholders **in writing** (refer to Appendix B).

These arrangements will apply on weekdays, weekends, and public holidays.

1. Resources

Resources for schools and regional officers to support school relocation and closure procedures

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Planning** | * [Bushfire Preparedness School Relocation Plan](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/PAL/bushfire-preparedness-school-relocation-plan-template.docx)
 |
| **Communication material** | * [Letter templates to assist school principals in communicating how their school is responding to elevated Fire Danger Rating (FDR) days](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/PAL/bushfire-preparedness-template-letters-for-principals-to-use-for-FDR-days.docx)
* [Posters for school Closure and relocation of students and staff](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/PAL/bushfire-preparedness-posters-school-relocation-and-closure.docx)
* [Suggested article for school newsletter or website](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/PAL/bushfire-preparedness-template-newsletter-content-for-school-relocation-and-school-closure.docx) to:
	+ Communicate that your school is listed on the Bushfire At-Risk Register and prepared should a forecast Extreme Fire Danger Rating day be made by the Bureau of Meteorology
	+ Communicate your school has been endorsed to relocate on a forecast Extreme Fire Danger Rating (FDR) day
* [Telephone Script for school closure and relocation](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/PAL/bushfire-preparedness-telephone-scripts-for-school-relocation-and-school-closure.docx)
* For Security and Emergency Management Division (SEMD) - [email template to regional directors – notification of an elevated FDR day](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/PAL/bushfire-preparedness-email-template-to-regional-directors-forecast-elevated-FDR-day.docx)
 |
| **School relocation and closure checklists** | * [School **Relocation** on a Forecast Elevated Fire Danger Rating Day (FDR) **principal checklist**](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/PAL/bushfire-preparedness-school-relocation-principal-checklist.docx)
* [School **Relocation** on a Forecast Elevated Fire Danger Rating Day (FDR) **region checklist**](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/PAL/bushfire-preparedness-school-relocation-regional-managers-checklist.docx)
* [School **Closure** on a Forecast Elevated Fire Danger Rating (FDR) **principal checklist**](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/PAL/bushfire-preparedness-school-closure-principal-checklist.docx)
* [School **Closure** on a Forecast Elevated Fire Danger Rating (FDR) **region checklist**](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/PAL/bushfire-preparedness-school-closure-regional-checklist.docx)
 |

Useful websites, social media, media and contacts

* [Bushfire and Grassfire Preparedness](https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/bushfire-and-grassfire-preparedness/policy) Policy and Resources (DET)
* [Bushfire At-Risk Register (BARR)](https://edugate.eduweb.vic.gov.au/edrms/collaboration/EM/Bushfire%20Risk%20and%20Preparedness/BUSHFIRE%20AT%20RISK%20REGISTER%20-%20COMPOSITE%20MASTER%20v25-%20WORKING%20FINAL%20VERSION.xlsx)
* [www.education.vic.gov.au](http://www.education.vic.gov.au)
* [www.cfa.vic.gov.au/warnings-restrictions/about-fire-danger-ratings](http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/warnings-restrictions/about-fire-danger-ratings)
* [www.cfa.vic.gov.au/warnings-restrictions/find-your-fire-district](http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/warnings-restrictions/find-your-fire-district)
* [www.bom.gov.au](http://www.bom.gov.au)
* [www.cfa.vic.gov.au/warnings/restrictions/total-fire-bans-and-ratings](http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/warnings/restrictions/total-fire-bans-and-ratings)
* [www.emergency.vic.gov.au](http://www.emergency.vic.gov.au)
* Facebook (facebook.com/cfavic)
* Twitter (twitter.com/CFA\_Updates)
* ABC local radio, Sky News and other Emergency broadcasters
* VicEmergency Hotline – 1800 226 226

A list of the schools that will be closed or relocating will be published on DET’s website, go to:

[www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/health/pages/closures.aspx](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/health/pages/closures.aspx)

For information on staff attendance on days of Extreme FDR closure, go to:

<https://www2.education.vic.gov.au/pal/leave-bushfire-flood-or-other-severe-weather-event/overview>

The DET Bushfire At-Risk Register is available at:

[www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/health/pages/bushfirerisk.aspx](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/health/pages/bushfirerisk.aspx)

1. Acronyms

| Acronyms | Definitions / Descriptions |
| --- | --- |
| **BARR** | Bushfire At-Risk Register |
| **BoM** | Bureau of Meteorology |
| **CECV** | Catholic Education Commission Victoria |
| **CFA** | Country Fire Authority |
| **DET** | Department of Education and Training |
| **EMD** | Emergency Management Division |
| **EMLO** | Emergency Management Liaison Officer |
| **EMP** | Emergency Management Plan |
| **FDR** | Fire Danger Rating |
| **IMT** | Incident Management Team |
| **ICC** | Incident Control Centre |
| **ISV** | Independent Schools Victoria |
| **IRIS** | Incident Reporting and Information System |
| **OSHC** | Outside School Hours Care |
| **PTV** | Public Transport Victoria |
| **QARD** | Quality Assessment and Regulation Division |
| **REMT** | Regional Emergency Management Team |
| **RSG** | Regional Services Group |
| **SAL** | Student Activity Locator |
| **SCC** | The Victorian Government State Control Centre  |
| **SEMT** | State Emergency Management Team |
| **SSU** | Security Services Unit  |
| **STU** | Student Transport Unit |