BUSHFIRE POLICY

POLICY STATEMENT
Bushfires threaten life and property throughout South Australia each summer. Making the right decision to stay or go is critical for the safety and survival of the children, staff and visitors at Stirling Community Children’s Centre Inc (SCCC). As a result of the Victorian bushfire disaster in 2009 the CFS has revised its bushfire emergency warning and rating system and the Department of Education and Children’s Services (DECS) has instigated specific school closure days for kindergartens and schools in the Adelaide Hills and other regions of our state.

This policy outlines the strategies and procedures that SCCC will follow, including information about the conditions under which the Centre will close. The Centre is considered to be a safe refuge area and well prepared to withstand a bushfire. However, advice from the CFS is that no building is safe on a catastrophic day and as such the Centre will close on these days as advised by DECS. Families need to consider our plan when developing their own home bushfire response plan.

RATIONALE
Research across Australia has revealed that most buildings are destroyed by sparks and embers blowing into them. Houses will generally survive the initial passage of a bushfire, providing preparations and fuel reduction have occurred around the building. Therefore, people who are well prepared can shelter in their buildings and have an excellent chance of surviving a bushfire.

Experience throughout Australia has shown that lives can be lost when people make a last minute panic-stricken attempt to flee a bushfire. CFS and other emergency services cannot guarantee the presence of a fire fighting vehicle and crew to protect every building in a major bushfire. Therefore it is extremely important that, in conjunction with a policy of closure on catastrophic bushfire risk days, SCCC plans for the safety and survival of children, staff and visitors.

STRATEGIES AND PRACTICES
SCCC has plans for two situations: Centre closure on DECS advice and plans to stay on non-closure days in the event of a real or threatened bushfire. The following preparations have been put into place to ensure that the stakeholders and the building will survive a bushfire.
NON-CLOSURE DAYS

**General housekeeping**
The following are to be completed throughout the year with a special focus leading up to the bushfire season in spring:

- Remove fallen and dead branches, leaves, weeds, other debris and undergrowth from around the building and premises
- Prune any tree limbs less than two metres from the ground and clear around trees
- Prune any limbs/branches that are overhanging or touching the building and adjoining fixtures
- Cut grass within and around the building and the Centre’s premises, for example, outside the fence, and remove cut material unless it can rot down before summer
- Remove bark, heavy mulch, wood piles and any other flammable material close to the building and adjoining fixtures
- Regularly clear gutters and roof gullies of buildings under or near to overhanging trees to ensure they are free of vegetation, for example, leaves
- Check the eaves, open air vents, cavities and other openings within the buildings and seal
- Check the roof space for loose tiles and gaps and repair as necessary
- Check open areas under raised timber decking around buildings, clear any flammable material or other debris and seal to prevent entry of sparks and embers
- Ensure timber and paintworks on all buildings and fixtures are well maintained
- Ensure that annexure and other structures attached or near to the building are well maintained and are kept clear of rubbish build-up
- Ensure that property access is clear for emergency vehicles if need be

The Centre will also undertake regular risk assessments of the building and site to ensure its preparedness in the event of a bushfire. Any advice provided will be acted on.

**Staff training**
- The Centre will rehearse the Centre’s bushfire action plan with the children on a regular basis
- Annual training is to be held with staff and appropriate training authorities about bushfire fighting
- All staff members will receive pre-fire season updates and ongoing instruction about the contents and requirements of the Centre’s bushfire policy, preparation and action plan
- Staff are to be allocated tasks as part of the preparation plan on total fire ban days
- All staff have been instructed in the operation of fire fighting pumps, sprinkler systems, hoses and backpacks
Survival and emergency supplies

The Centre will prepare survival and emergency supplies which will be assembled in the resource room for ease of collection and transportation. The kits are to be checked every three months to ensure contents are fresh and operational. They include the following.

Protective clothing for staff (six sets):

- Gloves – sturdy or rigger variety, not rubber or synthetic
- Sturdy shoes or work boots and socks – with thick leather soles and socks made from natural fibres
- Hat or hard helmet – with a broad rim for protection from sparks and embers
- Long sleeved shirt and trousers (overalls) – made from natural fibres to protect skin and body from radiant heat
- Mask – such as a handkerchief for teatowel that can be dampened for face protection and to filter smoke
- Goggles or glasses – to protect eyes from smoke and embers
- Hydrating backpacks – to be filled with drinking water

Emergency kit:

- Three portable, battery-operated radios
- Mobile phone
- Drinking water/food for the children
- Spare nappies, wipes, gloves, bottles etc
- First-aid kit and additional supplies
- Children’s emergency phone numbers
- Six torches

Fire fighting equipment

- Protective woollen fire blankets (three in total found in the resource room) and to be used as part of regular drills with the children
- Hoses – garden hoses connected to outside taps (four in total) and are long enough to reach the building, and specialised fire fighting hoses (two out the back)
- Two knapsacks and two garden sprayers to suppress small spot fires
- Fire fighting pump – is connected to rain water supply and additional petrol is on hand for its use
- Roof sprinkler system – is connected to rain water supply
- Metal buckets and mops – protecting building from ember attacks
- Towels – wet towels to be placed under doors and on window seals etc to prevent embers from entering the building
- Ladder – made of metal and long enough to enable roof cavities and eaves to be checked
Emergency lighting and torches
Radios and spare batteries
Sufficient petrol in the Centre’s van during the fire season
Check and service all mechanical equipment including fire pumps (September), roof sprinkler systems (monthly), knapsacks, smoke detectors and fire extinguishers (quarterly).

Water supply
An alternative water supply of at least 5,000 litres is available
A rain water tank is maintained to ensure sufficient supply of water – may need to truck water in the event of a drought
Check reserve water supplies and ensure that they are full for fire fighting purposes, for example, additional 2 litre bottles of water within the Centre

Documents and records management
A copy of the Centre’s bushfire policy and action plan will be forwarded to the local CFS brigades annually, that is Stirling and Aldgate
A copy of the bushfire action plan is forwarded to all families of children at the Centre on enrolment and annually
Bushfire season reminders and information are regularly included in Centre newsletters, publications and communication to families
Child attendance sheets and staff/visitor registers must be readily available and accurately record those present and those who have left the Centre (for example, absences are written in and arrival times are entered)
Daily backup all onsite computer records
Emergency kit contains updated emergency contacts and all necessary items for use
Updated preparation and action plans for ‘Extreme Fire Risk Day’ is displayed in the Fire Assembly Room (toddler room) and all relevant areas at all times

Communication with parents
Parents are advised to familiarise themselves with CFS bushfire information and the CFS warning system. Information can be accessed at the CFS website (www.cfs.sa.gov.au).

A brief summary taken from the CFS website:

The CFS has developed an information and warning system to keep the community informed about bushfires. The system is based on three types of alert messages, distributed by multiple means of communication:

EMERGENCY WARNING: you are in danger and you need to take action immediately. You will be impacted by the fire. This message will usually be preceded by the Standard
Emergency Warning Signal (SEWS)

WATCH & ACT: a fire is approaching you, conditions are changing. You need to take action now to protect your life and your family.

ADVICE: A fire has started. There is no immediate danger. General information to keep you up to date with developments.

Bushfire Watch & Act Messages will be issued when there is a potential threat to public safety in the immediate area of a bushfire. Bushfire Emergency Warning Messages will be issued when a bushfire burning out of control under very high to catastrophic weather conditions requires an immediate response from the public to ensure their safety and survival. Bushfire Emergency Warning messages will be preceded by a distinctive siren-like sound of SEWS.

Bushfire Watch & Act and Bushfire Emergency Warning Messages will be issued via multiple media communication channels including local ABC AM and FIVEaa radio stations.

Emergency Warning and Watch & Act Messages are likely to include the following information:

- The location of the fire
- Where it is expected to move next
- The risks faced by people in the area
- What the public is advised to do about those risks
- Where the public can find additional information

Staff at the Centre are fully aware of the new CFS information and warning system and will monitor designated channels during a day of extreme bushfire weather. If a fire does threaten the Centre parents will not receive individual notification by phone or email. Parents should note that it is extremely dangerous to travel into an area with an active bushfire. At all levels of alert the Centre Director or most senior staff member is responsible for decision-making regarding the safety and movement of children, staff and visitors, unless police and emergency services intervene directly or through an authorized officer whose authority to act has been established beyond reasonable doubt.

If fire prevents anyone leaving the site, all persons will remain on site. Staff will stay with children remaining on site. No person is to leave the safe refuge until the situation outside is assessed to be safe or as advised by emergency services, for example, by police or CFS. In this event the safe refuge site will be determined by authorities depending on the direction and location of the fire. Parents may not be able to collect children unless it is deemed safe.

Staff will make provision to care for children for an extended period of time in the event that the area is locked down and collection authorities are unable to access the safe refuge.
area. Children can be collected from the safe refuge point once it is safe to do so and staff must be informed when a parent/guardian has arrived to collect their child/children, in order to be marked off the roll.

**Kindergarten transfers**

In the event that a fire breaks out within the Stirling area or an area where kindergartens are located (for example, Aldgate and Bridgewater) children who are at kindergarten will need to be collected by their parents from the kindergarten. Arrangements are in place with local kindergartens.

**Procedures**

The following procedures are to be carried out in conjunction with the Centre’s bushfire preparation plan and action plan:

- A red warning sign ‘Extreme Fire Risk Today’ will be displayed on the front entrance gate
- Staff will inform parents regarding ‘Extreme Fire Risk Day’ and encourage parents to return home with their child if they feel their child is at risk
- Parents can choose if their child will attend the Centre and are at liberty to inform staff ASAP on the day if there will be any changes to normal bookings on such days (that is, changes to emergency contact numbers, emergency collection people and absences)
- Staff will carry out the required preparation duties every ‘Extreme Fire Risk Day’
- Staff will monitor fire warning messages and will carry out the bushfire action plan in the event of a fire
- A reduced fee of 50% will apply on ‘Extreme Fire Risk Days’ only, and only when the Centre is notified
- Correct staff/child ratios will be maintained at all times
- Parents will need to pay particular attention to signing their child in and out
- All excursions away from the Centre will be cancelled
- Any off site meetings or programming time for staff will be cancelled

Staff are to refer to the Centre’s Bushfire Preparation Plan and Action Plan – Stay and Defend – for more information.

**Evacuation or lockdown**

At all levels of alert the Centre Director or most senior staff member is responsible for decision-making regarding the safety and movement of children, staff and visitors, unless police and emergency services intervene directly or through an authorised officer whose authority to act has been established beyond reasonable doubt.

If fire prevents anyone leaving the site all persons will remain on site and staff will stay with children remaining on site. No person is to leave the safe refuge until the situation outside is assessed to be safe or as advised by emergency services, for example, police or CFS. In this event the safe refuge site will be determined by authorities depending on the direction and location of the fire.
Staff will make provision to care for children for an extended period of time in the event that the area is locked down and collection authorities are unable to access the safe refuge area. Children can be collected from the safe refuge point once it is safe to do so and staff must be informed when a parent/guardian has arrived to collect their child/children, in order to be marked off the roll.

In the event that a fire is burning near homes of staff members outside the Stirling district area, staff will be permitted to leave on the condition that correct staff/child ratios can be maintained at the Centre and that it is safe for them to do so. This matter will be arranged between the Centre Director and staff member. In the event that the staff member is able to leave and return to their home they do so at their own risk.

**CLOSURE DAYS**

DECS has released a ‘School Closures’ policy for kindergartens, preschools and schools in high fire risk areas. SCCC is in an extreme fire risk area. In alignment with DECS policy and in the interests of the safety of our children and staff, the Centre will close on days forecast as Catastrophic (Code Red) fire danger weather and take advice regarding closure on extreme fire danger days.

The schools bushfire procedures are aligned with the State’s Fire Danger Rating scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fire Danger Rating</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CATASTROPHIC (CODE RED) 100+ CLOSED</td>
<td>Schools and preschools in the affected Fire Ban District with an extreme, very high or high risk rating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXTREME 75-99</td>
<td>DECS to take advice of fire authorities for Adelaide Hills and other high risk areas regarding school closures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SEVERE 50-74 OPEN</td>
<td>Normal bushfire plan procedures apply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VERY HIGH 25-49 OPEN</td>
<td>Normal bushfire plan procedures apply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HIGH 12-24 OPEN</td>
<td>Normal bushfire plan procedures apply</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOW-MODERATE 0-11 OPEN</td>
<td>Normal bushfire plan procedures apply</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Communication with parents**

DECS will inform parents of school closure days though the media and in direct communication with staff at schools before forecast catastrophic weather conditions in particular Fire Ban Districts. Our Centre will also be directly advised of a closure day. On closure days parents will need to make alternative arrangements for their children. DECS will also advise when schools and our Centre will open again.

**Fees and Child Care Benefit**

Parents will not be charged fees for the first three closure days, after which fees will be reduced to 50%.
Child Care Benefit (CCB) is payable for child care fees paid when a child does not attend a service, or a service is closed because of a period of local emergency. CCB is paid for that part of the period for which the child would normally be in care at the service.

A local emergency is an event that:
- Affects a widespread area and has a severe impact on the lives of a significant number of the inhabitants of the area (for example, major damage to homes and businesses, or personal injury to local residents), or
- Disrupts the normal operation of a substantial number of child care services in the area (for example, state health authorities order closure of all child care services because of disease outbreak)

Under the CCMS, all absences during the relevant period are recorded on the Attendance Record Report as a session type of ‘Absence’ (not an additional absence). Services should do this regardless of the child’s absence count. Absences for which CCB is paid during a period of local emergency will not be added to a child’s absence count.

**MEASURING TOOLS**
- All the children and staff feel safe at the Centre
- The Centre is well prepared and seen as a safe refuge in the event of a bushfire
- Staff feel confident in the use of fire fighting equipment
- All families are clear about their requirements in relation to ‘Extreme Fire Danger Days’
- Preparation and plans have been carried out with appropriate authorities and that these authorities are informed about our preparation and plans
- All fire fighting equipment, emergency kits and survival kits are well maintained throughout the year

**LINKS TO OTHER POLICIES**
SCCC Bushfire Preparation Plan
SCCC Bushfire Action Plan

**REVIEWS**
Bushfire policies and procedures are reviewed annually after consultation with families and the local CFS brigade generally in October of each year or if any significant changes occur prior to this.

Reviewed October 2011