



## WODONGA AND UPPER MURRAY REGIONAL FAMILY DAY CARE

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### BUSHFIRE PROCEDURES

#### Purpose:

As a bushfire may present a threat to children, careprovider and coordination unit staff safety, clear and consistent procedures are required for general preparedness for the fire season (fire danger period 1 Nov to 30 April), different types of Fire Danger Ratings and unpredicted bushfire threats.

These procedures have been designed to ensure that preventative strategies are implemented and to ensure that staff and careproviders are prepared to respond in the event of a bushfire. This response may include pre-emptive planned closures of the service, evacuation or what to do in the event that evacuation is unsafe.

#### General Readiness Procedures

These procedures will be set in place or monitored and updated by the beginning of the fire season each year.

#### Coordination Unit will:

- Provide all careproviders in bushfire prone locations with an updated Fire Preparation Kit
- Remind all families of our Bushfire Policy and Procedures.
- Request all families update their contact details including their emergency support contacts.
- Request all families using FDC in bushfire prone locations to have alternate care arrangements in place for pre-emptive closure days.
- Identify any staff who may not be able to attend work on Code Red (Catastrophic) or Extreme days due to living in, near or having to travel through bushfire prone areas and arrange a contingency plan to maintain support to careproviders and families.

#### Careproviders in bushfire prone locations to:

- Create or review their Household Bushfire Site Assessment, their personal Careprovider Emergency Management Plan and personal Bushfire Survival Plan annually.
- If possible, identify an appropriate evacuation location, in consultation with FDC Coordination Unit and local fire authority.
- Informed parents of a prearranged evacuation location if one has been identified.
- Display a copy of Emergency Services Contacts and Resources List near their home phone (keep original attached to Careproviders Emergency Management Plan).
- Have local Emergency Service phone numbers in their mobile phone and ensure mobile phone charged at all times.
- Prepare their homes - clearing the outside of their homes of clutter, debris and plant litter; have hoses connected to outside water supply at all times; have mops and buckets strategically placed around the outside of the house and fill only if threatened by fire.
- Prepare or refresh their Evacuation/Relocation Kit in a portable carry bag eg backpack.
- Ensure car has woolen blankets, drinkable water and a first aid kit.

## **Procedures during the Fire Season**

### **Coordination Unit will:**

- Every day at 12 noon, Coordinator or Senior Fieldworker to check CFA Fire Danger Ratings and future forecast.
- Listen regularly to the ABC radio on days declared as Extreme or Code Red (Catastrophic) Fire Danger for the North East of Victoria.
- Take action as required according to procedures for different fire ratings and/or situations.
- Staff may not travel into bushfire prone areas on days declared as Extreme or Code Red (Catastrophic) for the North East of Victoria.

### **All Careproviders will:**

- Listen regularly to the radio for Fire threats on days rated Extreme and Code Red (Catastrophic) Fire Danger for the North East of Victoria
- Prior to trips in the car, if travelling outside Wodonga township, check CFA website for any current warnings or fire incidents, and tune into a local radio station to keep informed of any warnings that may be broadcast.
- Careproviders and children may not travel into bushfire prone areas on days declared as Extreme or Code Red (Catastrophic) for the North East of Victoria.

### **Careproviders in bushfire prone locations are:**

- Requested to limit all travel to essential only eg school pick ups, and restrict their activities to their homes on days declared Extreme Fire Danger for the North East of Victoria.

## **Planned Closure Procedures**

### **Pre-emptive Closure for Code Red (Catastrophic) Fire Danger Rated Days:**

- When a Code Red (Catastrophic) Fire Danger day has been declared for the North East of Victoria then our Family Day Care services located in Beechworth, Chiltern, Yackandandah and Tallangatta will close as a preventative measure.
- When a Code Red (Catastrophic) Fire Danger day has been declared specifically for the towns of Wodonga, Barnawartha, Rutherglen, Wahgunyah and Norong then our Family Day Care services provided in these locations will close as a preventative measure.
- Where possible up to 3 days notice of a pre-emptive closure will be given. Parents and careproviders should however expect that in some instances fewer than 3 days notice may be provided.
- If parents have received notice that your family day care service will potentially close pre-emptively, parents should start preparing for alternative care arrangements for their child/ren in the event that the planned closure proceeds.
- The final decision to close will be confirmed at 12 noon the day prior, and once this decision is made it will not change – regardless of any changes in the weather forecast. This is to help limit confusion and help families plan for how they will care for their children when our family day care service is closed.
- Advice of potential closure will be given to careproviders by FDC Coordination Unit and careproviders will inform parents.
- Advice of final decision to close will be given to FDC Coordination Unit by DEECD staff, and FDC Coordination unit staff will subsequently inform or confirm with careproviders and parents directly by phone or mobile, leaving messages if contact person unavailable.

## **Planned Closure Procedures Cont.**

### **Pre-emptive Closure for Code Red (Catastrophic) Fire Danger Rated Days Cont.:**

- When a family day care service is closed as a preventative measure a sign is to be attached to the front door indicating that the service is closed due to a Code Red (Catastrophic) Fire Danger Rating and identifying whether the careprovider has remained on site or not. (Note whilst it is highly recommended that no staff will remain on site, as the care facility is also the careproviders home then remaining or going is left to the discretion of the individual careprovider.)
- When a family day care service is closed due to a Code Red (Catastrophic) Fire Danger declared day then payment will still be required from the parent and the Australian Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) will continue to pay Child Care Benefit and the day will be listed as an absence.
- If parents experience financial hardship and are unable to pay the parent's portion of their child care fees due to a bushfire or local emergency please contact the FDC Coordination Unit as they may be able to have Special Child Care Benefit applied in exceptional circumstances.

### **Pre-emptive Closure for Extreme Fire Danger Rated Days:**

- In exceptional occasions when a fire has recently occurred in the near vicinity of a family day care service and an Extreme Fire Danger day has been declared for the North East of Victoria, then the FDC Coordination Unit in consultation with DEECD, may decide to close the service as a preventative measure.
- Advice of decision to close will be given to parents and careproviders by FDC Coordination unit staff directly by phone or mobile, leaving messages if contact person unavailable. All efforts will be made to advise parents and careproviders of a pre-emptive closure prior to care commencing.

## **Unplanned Closure of Service Procedure**

In the event that a Family Day Care service's town /area is being threatened by an unpredicted breakout of a fire:

- All efforts will be made to call parents or their emergency support contacts to advise them of an unplanned closure prior to care commencing.
- If fire breaks out locally whilst children are in care, careproviders will enact their personal Careprovider Emergency Management Plan and make the decision to evacuate/relocate if possible or follow the safety techniques for staying put if evacuation/relocation is no longer a safe option.
- All efforts will be made to call parents or their emergency support contacts to collect the children as soon as practicable and it is safe to do so.

## **Re-Open a Service after Unplanned Closure Procedure**

Where a service has experienced an unplanned closure due to a local emergency, families will be advised of the re-opening date via phone.

FDC Coordination Unit staff will inform careproviders and parents as soon as practicable after the emergency what the child care fee and Child Care Benefit arrangements will be as this will be determined by the DEEWR State Office.