



WEM 09/96

Considering Bushfire Risk before an Overnight Walk – A Leader's Guide

*This guideline is in addition to the club's downloadable guides "Fire Season, Total Fire Ban & Extreme Heat Policies" and "Guideline for considering the impacts of Extreme Weather on Outdoor Activities", and the excellent Bushfire section of the **Bushwalking Manual** (for Australia) published by Bushwalking Victoria*

Before heading off on an overnight walk and given the increasing danger from bushfires, we must consider 3 important factors:

1. Fire Danger Rating & other warnings
2. The weather forecast for every day of the walk
3. The vulnerability of the areas you're going into

1. Fire Danger Rating

Get this from the Vic Emergency App. You can set up watch zones, e.g. Falls Creek, Mt Buller etc. The app gives you the fire danger rating, weather and other warnings e.g. flooding and any incidents within a 20km radius along with your location coordinates

2. Weather Forecast

From the BOM and other apps including the Vic Emergency app. How hot, forecast wind speed and direction. Check this regularly if on the walk too of course if you have phone coverage. If you have voice or text but not data coverage, ring or text a club emergency contact or a friend to get the latest information.

3. Vulnerability

Will you be in closed forest, enclosed valleys, on open high plains or at commercial accommodation: Are you near lakes or rivers where you could shelter? What are your escape routes in terms of roads, getting back to cars and getting to safety e.g. a town, fire shelter/bunker, or evacuation/assembly area?

Then use caution and common sense. If the fire rating is bad, the forecast is bad and you will be in a vulnerable area with poor escape routes, then common sense says don't go. Cancel the trip or at least postpone till conditions are much safer. If on a walk, be prepared to abort on the basis of updated information. Remember to take a mobile, FM radio and a PLB (or sat phone) in fire season from October to April.

RESOURCES

- **Vic Emergency App** - a must have for all bushwalkers
- **Parks Victoria.** Covers National Parks e.g. the Alpine National Park.
Tel: 131963 (8.30am-5.30pm M-F, 9-5 Sat & Sun)

They should be able to put you in contact with the local on-the-ground rangers. Some local offices where they are based and phones as at December 2020 are:

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| Bright | 8427 2029 |
| Mt Beauty | 8427 2079 |
| Mansfield | 8427 2076 |
| Heyfield | 8427 2061 |
| Buchan | 8427 2031 |
| Omeo | 8427 2091 |

The website <https://www.parks.vic.gov.au> has lots of useful downloadable visitor guides

- **Bushfire Section of the Bushwalking Manual** (for Australia) published by Bushwalking Victoria.

Read it online at <https://www.bushwalkingmanual.org.au/emergencies/bushfires/>

This is an excellent, concise and easy to read summary covering bushfire planning for the walk, what to do and look out for during the walk and finally how to survive a bushfire if you find yourself in one. **It is essential reading for all leaders and highly recommended for all walkers.**

- **DELPW** (Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning)
They cover state forests and other non-Parks Victoria lands. For local office phone numbers if you want to speak to a Ranger, Google "*DELPW Public Office Locations*" or ring head office at 136186.

Some useful ones are:

Powelltown, Mansfield, Heyfield, Toolangi, Marysville, Alexandra, Bacchus Marsh, Wodonga, Erica, Bairnsdale and more.

- **CFA** (Country Fire Authority: <https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au>) to contact any of the 25 districts offices around the state