SERVICE CLOSURE: BUSHFIRE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

QUALITY AREA 2 – CHILDREN'S HEALTH AND SAFETY

PURPOSE

This policy will:

- Provide guidelines for services as part of an Emergency Management Plan for the closure of service should a bushfire risk be imminent
- Outline a communication plan to disseminate information for parents and staff when the Centre will close due to imminent bushfire risk

Ensure compliance with:

- DE Kindergarten Guide
- Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010
- Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011

POLICY STATEMENT

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Sparkways is committed to:

- Providing a safe environment for all children, staff and persons participating in the program
- Ensuring that an appropriate response is provided, which meets the needs of children, their families and other users of the service during emergency incidents
- Providing effective procedures and communication to manage a service closure

SCOPE

This policy applies to the approved provider, persons with management or control, nominated supervisor, persons in day-to-day charge, early childhood teachers, educators, staff, students, volunteers, parents/guardians, children, and others attending the programs and activities of Sparkways.

BACKGROUND AND LEGISLATION

BACKGROUND

The Approved Provider and staff have a duty of care to ensure that emergency procedures are developed, prominently displayed at the main entrance to the premises, regularly practiced with staff members and volunteers of the service and children being cared for or educated by the service. (*Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011,* Regulation 97).

Coordinated emergency management plans should be designed to:

- Reduce the likelihood of emergencies and critical incidents
- Minimise the impact of these events on children, staff, volunteers and visitors
- Facilitate the return to the workplace to normal operations as soon as possible

LEGISLATION AND STANDARDS

Relevant legislation and standards include but are not limited to:

Education and Care Services National Law Act 2010
Education and Care Services National Regulations 2011
Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (Vic), as amended June 2016

The most current amendments to listed legislation can be found at:

Victorian Legislation – Victorian Law Today: www.legislation.vic.gov.au
Commonwealth Legislation – Federal Register of Legislation: www.legislation.gov.au

PROCEDURES

Sparkways is responsible for:

- Ensuring the safety of all children, staff, parents and volunteers at the centre
- Providing support and advice to staff in order to determine the need for a closure

Staff are responsible for:

- Ensuring the safety of all children, staff, parents and volunteers at the centre

Listed below are steps services must take prior to implementing an individualised, pre-emptive and /or voluntary closure:

Bushfire – Criteria for Pre-Emptive Closure:

(in accordance with the DE Bushfire Preparedness Relocation and Closure Procedures)

Fire Danger Rating	Action for services
CODE RED (CATASTROPHIC)	**All services on the bushfire at risk register* (BARR) will close (pre-emptive closure).** DE will provide up to 3 days warning of a pre-emptive closure. All other services who identify they are in a high-risk area will make a determination in consultation with Sparkways management. All Children's Services to take advice of fire authorities. Normal emergency management plan procedures apply
EXTREME	All Category 1 and 2 services on the bushfire at risk register (BARR) will close (pre-emptive closure). All other services who identify they are in a high-risk area will make a determination in consultation with Sparkways management. All Children's Services to take advice of fire authorities. Normal emergency management plan procedures apply
SEVERE	All Category 1 services on the bushfire at risk register (BARR) will close (pre-emptive closure) Category 2 services will make a determination in consultation with Sparkways management. All other services who identify they are in a high-risk area will make a determination in consultation with Sparkways management. All Children's Services to take advice of fire authorities. Normal emergency management plan procedures apply
VERY HIGH	OPEN: normal emergency management plan procedures apply
HIGH	OPEN: normal emergency management plan procedures apply
LOW-MODERATE	OPEN: normal emergency management plan procedures apply
* Services on the BARR and their categories are: Deanside – Category 4 Rockbank – Category 4 At time of publishing Sparkways has no Category 1, Category 2 or Category 3 services	

Bushfire - Criteria for Voluntary Closure:

Consultation must occur with the Executive Operations Manager, who will discuss closure with the DE Regional Office before a service closes voluntarily. Factors to consider in making the decision include:

1. The Service has undertaken a Bushfire and Emergency Management Self-Assessment (https://www.education.vic.gov.au/childhood/providers/regulation/Pages/emergencymanagement requirements.aspx) as part of the development of their Emergency Management Plan and identified at least two areas of risk are present.

   These may include:

- Local geography - CFA publication "Preparing your property" provides an overview for understanding vegetation and terrain https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/plan-prepare/how-to-prepare-your-property
- Access routes
- Location of emergency services
- Inadequate - Designed Neighbourhood Safe Place
- Needs and abilities of children

2. The Bureau of Meteorology has determined Total Fire Ban anywhere within a 30km radius. The link below details CFA Total Districts

   https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/warnings-restrictions/total-fire-bans-and-ratings

3. Staff live in area that has been determined CODE RED- CATASTROPHIC and relief staff are unavailable

4. A communication strategy for voluntary closure has been developed and distributed to all families (where possible families will be given up to 3 days' notice of a voluntary closure).

5. A copy of this policy has been provided to all families enrolled at the service.

6. The Parental notification template and Children's Services telephone tree is up to date and available at all times

7. Where possible families will be provided with make-up sessions

Parents are responsible for:

- The payment of fees (where applicable) including during periods of pre-emptive and voluntary closure
- Ensuring contact details including emergency contacts are up to date at all times

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DEFINITIONS

The terms defined in this section relate specifically to this policy. For regularly used terms e.g. Approved provider, Nominated supervisor, Notifiable complaints, Serious incidents, Duty of care, etc. refer to the Definitions file of the Sparkways policy catalogue.

Bushfire at-risk Register: Schools, kindergartens and child care facilities determined by the Department of Education and Training to be at high-risk of fire danger have been placed on a Bushfire At-Risk Register.
Inclusion on this register is a trigger for the schools, kindergartens and child care facilities to close on days declared by fire authorities as being Code Red (Catastrophic). See http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/ bushfires/register.htm

Emergency management plan (EMP): A written set of instructions to assist the staff and Approved Provider deal with incidents or situations that could pose a threat to life, health or property.

Fire Danger Ratings: A Fire Danger Rating is a prediction of fire behaviours, including how hard it would be to put out a fire once it starts. It provides information on:

- the type of threat bushfires may pose to life and property on any day given the forecast weather conditions
- the sort of bushfire Behaviour that could be experienced on that day (Country Fire Authority, 2009 Essential Information for the fire season, no matter where you live)

Fire Danger Rating	Fire Behaviour	Fire Danger Index
CODE RED (CATASTROPHIC)	Fires may be uncontrollable, unpredictable and fast moving – flames will be higher than roof tops. Thousands of embers will be blown around. Spot fires will start, move and come from many directions, 20km or more ahead of the fire.	100+
EXTREME	Fires may be uncontrollable, unpredictable and fast moving – flames will be higher than roof tops. Thousands of embers will be blown around. Spot fires will start, will move quickly and come from many directions up to 6km ahead of the fire.	75-99
SEVERE	Fires may be uncontrollable and move quickly – flames may be higher than roof tops. Expect embers to be blown around Spot fires may occur up to 4km ahead of the fire.	50-74
VERY HIGH	Fires can be difficult to control – flames may burn into the tree tops. Embers may be blown ahead of the fire. Spot fires may occur up to 2 km ahead of the fire.	25-49
HIGH	Fires can be controlled. Embers may be blown ahead of the fire. Spot fires can occur close to the main fire.	12-24
LOW-MODERATE	Fires can be easily controlled	0-11

Pre-emptive closure:

Closures which are pre-determined based on high risk register and the trigger of "Code- Red". The Department of Education and Training will provide children's services up to three days warning; however, implementation of the services EMP may be based on less warning.

Voluntary Closures: The service decides to close voluntarily without receiving advice from the Department of Education and Training. A voluntary closure must consider their EMP and consider all criteria set out in this policy.

SOURCES AND RELATED POLICIES

SOURCES

- DE, Children's Services Guide: A Guide to Managing and Operating Licensed Children's Services in Victoria
- DE, Emergency Management Manual (Licensed Children's Services)
- DE Bushfire Preparedness Relocation and Closure Procedures
- DE, Bushfire and Emergency Management Self-Assessment
- DE, The Kindergarten Guide

- Australian Standards: Emergency control organisation for buildings, structures and workplaces (AS 3745–2002)
- Metropolitan Fire Brigade, Community Education Department
- Country Fire Authority, Community Infrastructure Section
- State Emergency Services, Emergency Management Consultancy Section
- WorkSafe Victoria

RELATED POLICES

- Child Safe Environment and Wellbeing
- Emergency and Evacuation

EVALUATION

In order to assess whether the values and purposes of the policy have been achieved, the approved provider will:

- seek feedback from people affected by the policy regarding its effectiveness
- monitor the implementation, compliance, complaints and incidents in relation to this policy
- keep the policy up to date with current legislation, research, policy and best practice
- revise the policy and procedures as part of the service's policy review cycle, or as required
- notifying all stakeholders affected by this policy at least 14 days before making any significant changes to this policy or its procedures, unless a lesser period is necessary due to risk *(Regulation 172 (2)*.

ATTACHMENTS

- Nil

AUTHORISATION

This policy was confirmed by Sparkways on 24/11/2025.

REVIEW DUE: November 2026