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| Preparing for emergencies |
| **A reference guide for the social services sector**  Version 6.0 |
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Authorised and published by the Victorian Government, 1 Treasury Place, Melbourne.

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ISBN 978-1-76130-886-4 (online/PDF/Word)

Available at [Emergency management - DFFH Service Providers](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management) https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management

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# Introduction

## About this guide

*Preparing for emergencies: a guide for the social services sector* (the guide) is written to help organisations get ready for emergencies and respond when they happen.

Social services help keep people and communities safe and healthy, especially those who may need extra support. Planning ahead and being prepared can make a significant difference during and after an emergency.

The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (the department) supports people in Victoria to live a life that is important and meaningful to them. The department also helps reduce the impact of emergencies on people and communities, especially those who are likely to be more affected. When emergencies happen, social service organisations may ask for help or advice from the department regardless of their relationship with the department.

The department encourages all organisations to follow the same approach to emergency planning. This helps services better protect people’s safety and wellbeing before, during and after emergencies.

This guide aims to help social service organisations to keep people safe and continue delivering support during and after emergencies.

There is a glossary of key terms and their meanings in [**Appendix 1**](#_Appendix_1_–).

The key roles and responsibilities in emergency management at national, state, regional and local levels can be found in [**Appendix 5**](#_Appendix_5_-).

### Who should use this guide?

This guide is for any organisation that provides social services. It can support emergency planning by all kinds of service providers, big or small, whether you work with individuals, families, or certain communities. You can use this guide to help your organisation get ready for emergencies and know what to do when they happen. It can help if you already have an emergency plan, or if you are just starting to make one.

## About emergencies in Victoria

An emergency is an event or situation that puts the health, safety or wellbeing of people at risk, including your service’s clients, staff or visitors. It can also stop a service from working properly – by damaging buildings, cutting off power or water, or making it hard for people to get help (blocked roads, no mobile phone connection).

Emergencies can happen anywhere in Victoria, at any time. They can include:

* floods, storms, bushfires, grassfires, and earthquakes
* fires in buildings or factories
* explosions and accidents
* hot weather and heatwaves
* disease outbreaks, [epidemics](#_Appendix_1_-) and [pandemics](#_Appendix_1_-) (e.g., COVID-19, thunderstorm asthma, influenza, emergency animal disease)
* unsafe food or water supply
* electricity, gas, water, or internet/phone outages
* cyber incident (for example when computers systems stop working or private information is stolen)
* acts of violence or terrorism that affect the community.

Social service providers may face challenges during emergencies, especially when helping people who are most at risk. Planning ahead means services can act quickly and keep supporting clients when it matters most.

An emergency does not have to impact a service directly to cause problems. For example:

* smoke from a fire can cause breathing problems, even if the fire is far away
* floods or storms can close roads and stop staff or clients from travelling or stop deliveries from getting through
* a pandemic can make people sick and reduce the number of workers available. It might also be harder to find trained staff to help from other areas.

Even though emergencies are different, their effects can often be managed in similar ways. If your service has a plan for one type of emergency, that plan might also help in other emergency situations. For example, a plan for a power outage during a storm can also help if the power goes out for another reason.

Every emergency is different, and so are the people affected by it. It is important that when you plan for an emergency, you plan with a person-centred focus. A one-size fits all plan does not work for everyone because everyone is different. Person-centred emergency planning is about making an emergency plan that is based on each person’s needs and abilities, because these may change depending on the situation.

# Planning for emergencies

## Overview

Emergency planning means getting ready for emergencies, knowing what to do during them, and helping people recover afterwards. It also includes finding ways to reduce risks before anything happens.

Planning ahead helps service providers respond better in emergencies and support their clients and staff safely. A good emergency plan helps services to keep running before, during and after an emergency.

When making plans, service providers should think about the needs and abilities of each client. Where possible, clients and their carers should be part of the planning process. They can share what kind of support they need and what has worked for them in the past.

Emergency planning is different from business continuity planning (which focuses on how to keep a business running), but both are important. Together, they help make sure clients can keep getting support even when things are difficult. A strong emergency plan gives staff and clients clear instructions on what to do.

**Good emergency management plans**:

* reflect the location and layout of the service
* include the needs of clients and staff
* explain what the service will do in different types of emergencies – like changing how services are delivered, closing a site, moving to another place, or staying safe where they are
* include clear steps for when to start or stop the plan, and when the team in charge of emergencies should act
* describe how to stay informed during an emergency and where to get trusted, up-to-date information
* are [culturally safe](#_Appendix_1_-) and suitable for different communities, including First Nations Peoples and people from multicultural and multifaith backgrounds
* include clear roles and responsibilities – who does what, who makes decisions, and how people share information
* involve clients and community members in planning, when possible.

**Emergency plans need to be reviewed, tested and updated annually.**

Services should maintain a digital copy and a hard copy of their emergency management plan in case of a power or system outage.

Recent emergencies have shown that services need to be ready for all types of emergencies – not just bushfires. This is called an “all-hazards” approach and helps keep everyone safe and well.

Things that help with emergency preparedness:

* talking with staff, carers, family members, and others about the emergency plan
* running practice emergency drills every year.
* undertaking facility site assessments
* check your emergency features (e.g. fire alarms, exit signs, emergency equipment) regularly
* identifying and reducing risks with risk mitigation strategies
* check your insurance policies to understand what will and won’t be covered for clients, staff, and property.

Services are also encouraged to plan together. Working with similar providers helps everyone respond better and share resources if needed. This builds stronger services and helps clients get the support they need during an emergency.

It is also a good idea to talk to your local council and emergency services while planning. This helps make sure your plan fits well with their emergency plans for your area.

## Understand emergency management responsibilities

In an emergency, everyone has a part to play. This includes service providers, businesses, support organisations, community members and individuals. Everyone should understand the risks and know how to stay safe. This is called shared responsibility.

Most service providers already have responsibilities to plan for emergencies. These responsibilities often come from:

* funding and tenancy agreements
* legislations
* program management arrangements
* quality and safeguarding frameworks
* building regulations.

Leaders – like Chief Executive Officers, board members, directors, and managers – must consider how their service will respond to different emergencies. Their plans must focus on keeping both clients and staff safe.

Emergency planning will look different depending on the type of service and where it is delivered. For example, services provided in someone’s home will have different needs than those run in a residential facility.

### What type of emergency team should your service have?

Different services have different needs. The type of team you set up to respond to emergencies will depend on:

* how big your service is
* the types of risks you face
* how many staff you have
* the needs of you clients.

You might use one or more of the following:

1. Emergency Control Organisation (ECO): a group of people on a workplace or building who are trained to help keep everyone safe during an emergency, like a fire, gas leak or lockdown. This is the group that helps manage emergencies inside the building. The ECO gives clear instructions. They lead the response and are first to act when an emergency starts. The ECO usually includes a Chief Warden, Area Wardens, Communication Officer and First Aid Officers.
2. Emergency Response Team (ERT): a group of trained staff who respond to emergencies at the service. They help keep everyone safe until emergency services arrive e.g. provide first aid and support people with disability or injuries. They are active while the emergency is happening and support the ECO. An ERT can include Chief and Deputy Wardens, first aid officers, and other trained staff.
3. Critical response team (CRT): a group of trained staff who respond to serious or high-risk situations. These might include things like major injury, serious incident involving a client or a crisis that affects many people. They help reduce harm, support staff and clients and work with leadership to manage the situation. They are used after a major incident or crisis. CRTs usually include Critical Incident Coordinator (Team Lead), Communications Lead, Client Support Lead, Staff Support Lead, etc.
4. Incident Management Team (IMT): a group of trained people who help manage a serious emergency like a big fire, flood, or storm. They do not work on the ground, but they make big decisions, organise help, share important information, and work with emergency services. They make sure the right people, equipment and support are sent to where they are needed. An IMT usually includes a Commander (for the organisation), Operations Officer, Logistics Officer, Communications Officer, Safety or WHS Officer, etc. IMTs can be large or small. In a small service, one person might need to do more than one role because there are fewer staff available.

In many smaller services, the same people may do both roles. For example, a Commander might also be trained in First Aid or being the Communications Officer.

Emergency management responsibilities for organisations funded and regulated by the department are listed in the *Social services sector emergency management policy,* available on the [**Service Providers’ Emergency Management webpage**](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management) https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management

## Who makes decisions during an emergency?

Every service must decide how it will respond to an emergency and who is responsible for making those decisions. It is important that these people make clear and informed decisions that are based on what’s happening and what clients need. The VicEmergency App is a useful tool to stay informed about emergency warnings, incidents, and updates in your area.

Your plan should name the people in your organisation who are responsible for making decisions during an emergency. The plan should also explain who can take over if the main decision-maker is not available.

The decision-maker needs to decide:

* what roles are needed
* what the organisation needs to do to ensure the safety of their client and staff
* what needs to be done to continue the service.

If an emergency directly impacts the building, the Chief Warden will take charge.

The Chief Warden should be able to explain to emergency services:

* what is happening right now
* what actions have been taken
* if anyone is injured
* what risks still need attention
* what the service plans to do next.

An example of an IMT structure for a small/medium organisation is available in the Emergency Management Plan Template, on [Service Providers’ Emergency Management](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management) <https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management>

## Identify hazards and assess risks

Social service providers may face different types of emergencies depending on:

* what services they offer
* where they are located
* the people they support.

A good emergency plan starts with understanding which hazards are most likely to happen and how serious their impact could be. This section explains how to:

* identify the hazard that could affect your service
* assess the level of risks
* choose which risks need a plan
* reduce the impact of emergencies through planning.

It also includes examples and tools to support your emergency planning. Refer to [Appendix 3](#_Appendix_3_–_1).

### What is a hazard?

A hazard is something that could cause harm to people, services, buildings, or the environment. Examples may include fires, floods, disease outbreaks and power failures.

Different services will face different hazards. For example:

* Services near bushland may face higher bushfire risk
* Services in flood-prone areas may need to prepare for flooding
* Residential care services may need to plan for extended heatwaves
* Some city-based services may be more at risk from civil disturbances.

#### Step 1: Identify the hazard

Start by thinking about:

* where your service is located
* what kind of support you provide
* who your clients are and what their needs are

Make a list of hazards that could affect your service. These may include:

* natural hazards like bushfires, landslides, extreme heat, floods, storms, earthquakes
* biological hazards like disease outbreaks (e.g., COVID-19, influenza, thunderstorm asthma, animal, and plant epidemics)
* technological hazards like chemical and radiological spills, explosions, infrastructure failures, cyber incidents
* societal hazards like acts of terrorism, violence, or large-scale emergencies affecting communities.

#### Step 2: Do a risk assessment

Once you have identified the hazards, assess each one to understand:

* how likely it is to happen
* how serious the impact would be on you service and the people you support.

This is called a risk assessment. It helps you decide which risks need a plan, and where to put your time and resources.

#### Step 3: Plan to reduce the risk (mitigation strategies)

Mitigation strategies are actions that can help prevent emergencies, reduce their impact if they happen, and support a faster recovery.

Below are examples of strategies that can help reduce the risks from different types of hazards. These are just examples. They may not work for every service. Each organisation should create strategies appropriate for your service, based on your location, clients’ needs, and setup.

Examples of mitigation strategies:

##### Natural hazards

* Bushfires:
* clear dry plants around your site
* use fire-resistant building materials
* make and practise bushfire evacuation plans
* stay updated on [fire danger ratings](#_Appendix_1_-).
* Floods:
* raise important equipment above flood levels
* use flood barriers if needed
* make a flood evacuation plan
* keep drains clear.
* Extreme heat:
* install and maintain air conditioning
* make a heatwave action plan with cool-down areas and water
* avoid outdoor activities during the hottest times
* train staff and inform clients to spot heat-related illnesses.
* Biological hazards
* Disease outbreaks (e.g., COVID-19, Influenza):
* use good hygiene practices (like regular handwashing and cleaning)
* use masks, social distancing, and personal protective equipment (PPE) when needed
* train staff on infection control.

##### Technological hazards

* Cybersecurity threats:
* use firewalls and anti-virus software
* keep systems updated
* train staff to spot and avoid scams and phishing
* back up important files and store it securely
* make a cyber emergency plan.

##### Societal hazards

* Acts of violence or terrorism:
* do regular security checks and emergency drills
* set up cameras or physical barriers where needed
* have a plan to communicate with staff and clients during an emergency
* work with local police to stay informed about potential threats.
* Humanitarian emergencies:
* have emergency supply kits ready with food, water, and medical items
* train staff in emergency response and first aid
* plan for an increase in people needing shelter or support.

#### Step 4: Review and update risk assessments annually

Risks can change over time. Review your hazard list and risk assessments at least once a year and whenever something changes, like:

* a new building
* a new group of clients
* after an emergency has happened.

### Know your local risks

While emergencies can happen at any time of year, summer in Victoria brings higher risk of bushfires, grassfires, heatwaves, and big storms. To learn about local risks, you can:

* contact your local Victoria State Emergency Service (VicSES) or fire service (Country Fire Authority (CFA) and/or Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV))
* speak with local council or department staff
* attend an emergency preparedness forum run by the department.

It is important to consider hazards and potential risk. Further information and relevant links to hazard-specific resources is available in [**Appendix 2**](#_Appendix_2_–).

Sample risk assessment tools and templates are available in [**Appendix 3**](#_Appendix_3_–).

## Planning for emergencies by knowing your clients’ risks

To plan properly for emergencies, it is important to understand your clients and the type of care they need. This is especially important when deciding whether to move people out of a residential service or to keep supporting them in their homes.

When planning and preparing for emergencies, think about each client’s needs and strengths. Involve the client – and their carer if needed – so they can help make a plan that works for them. It helps make sure the plan is based on the client and what they can do, not just what they need.

Some clients may face more risks during emergencies because of their situation. For example, they may:

* have ongoing needs (like limited mobility or memory challenges)
* live in higher risk areas, like bushfire-prone areas
* have health conditions that get worse in some emergencies (like asthma during smoke events).

The Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP) toolkit, developed by the University of Sydney, is a useful tool for helping clients and services plan together. It helps build shared understanding, stronger communication, and better connections in the community.

The P-CEP toolkit was made for people with disability, but it can also be used or adapted for other clients. You can learn more about in section[2.12 Resources to assist planning for emergencies](#_Resources_to_assist).

### Keeping personal risk information private

If a client has extra support needs, your service should include actions to help reduce the impact. You could create a Personal Emergency Management Plan with the client and list of which clients require supports and add actions to reduce the impact.

These plans explain what support the person needs in an emergency. They are used to guide decisions like evacuation or sheltering and should be developed with the client and reviewed regularly.

As this is private and sensitive information**,** consider whether you would like to keep this information in your emergency management plan or whether you would like to keep this information in a separate document.

## Plan for continuity of care

It is important to plan how your service will keep supporting clients your services, especially in-home and community care, are affected by an emergency. Services may need to change, stop for a brief time, or be delivered in a different way. Having a plan helps protect clients’ wellbeing and reduce stress or confusion.

Emergency plans should meet the needs of clients and be flexible enough to work in different types of emergencies.

Key things to plan for include:

* making sure clients can still access medication, prescriptions, or medical equipment (especially during power outage)
* transport options if clients or staff need to go somewhere
* how the location may be affected by fire, flooding, or service outages
* ensuring emergency information is easy for clients and carers to find and understand.

### If services need to change or stop

Sometimes residential, in-home and community-based services may need to temporarily stop (cease) or change (alter) how it operates if an emergency happens. The emergency plan should include:

* the likelihood that staff or services will be reduced during an emergency
* options for changing services – like changing times, locations or working with other service providers
* how you will tell clients, their families, staff, and the community about any changes
* when and how you will inform the government or other official bodies (especially if clients attend cancelled programs)
* who decides when to stop or change services, and how that decision is made
* how to notify the department if your service changes or stops during an emergency
* how and when services will start again, including the steps needed to support recovery.

## Planning emergency response options

Service providers should discuss with their clients (and carers and families, where relevant) about how the service plans to respond to emergencies. This includes what will happen when there is a fire, flood, or other emergency situation.

For clients who receive in-home support, emergency planning should begin when they start using the service. Their plans should also be checked and updated regularly.

Deciding whether to relocate, shelter or evacuate is complex and should be based on:

* the current client profile and care needs – mobility, health status and medical needs
* whether some clients can go home or stay with family during high-risk times
* staff availability – staff and resources may be unavailable due to the emergency
* outcomes of risk assessments undertaken earlier or during the emergencies
* how prepared the facility is and what resources are available
* level of support available from emergency services
* availability of supplies, including essential services such as electricity, clean water, phone/internet
* safe transport options and clear road access
* access to safe alternative accommodation.

### Relocation

Relocation means moving clients and staff early – before an emergency – to a safe place that can still provide the care they need. This is done when there is a warning or forecast of danger, such as a forecast Catastrophic fire danger day.

The decision to relocate is usually made by the service provider before an emergency causes harm or becomes a serious risk. Sometimes, you must relocate under the *Social services sector emergency management policy* to meet compliance obligations such as a Bushfire Survival Plan.

Relocation planning should happen ahead of time. It should identify and outline:

* clear triggers for relocation, like
* forecast Catastrophic Fire Danger Day
* severe weather warnings
* advice from emergency services
* planned power outages
* the specific needs of each client
* how many staff are needed to support the move
* transport and accommodations options
* how long it will take to relocate everyone, including preparing clients for travel
* what information needs to be shared, and with whom.

Plans should also include how and when to return to the original service location once it is safe.

### Evacuation

Evacuation is the urgent relocation of clients and staff from a facility or home to a safer place in response to a threat or imminent impact of an emergency. It usually happens with little or no warning.

Evacuations may be partial (some clients or parts of a service) or full (everyone at once).

Emergencies with no warning – like a sudden fire or explosion – can make evacuations harder. They can also put clients, staff, and emergency workers at risk. The top priority when evacuating is always to protect lives and keep people safe.

Evacuating a facility with no warning is the least-preferred option. There may not be enough emergency services available to help move all clients.

In some emergencies, the lead emergency agency (called the control agency) may tell a service to evacuate. The person with decision-making power in the service must choose whether to follow this advice. They should base their decision on:

* their emergency plan
* the risks to the people they support
* any legal or policy responsibilities.

The department strongly encourages services to evacuate when recommended. You might not be able to evacuate if it is not safe to do so within the time available.

Victoria Police is in charge of managing evacuations during emergencies. They choose an evacuation manager, who is responsible for planning and leading the evacuation before and during the event.

A relocation and evacuation kit will help your client or service to quickly prepare for relocation of evacuation. [**Appendix 4**](#_Appendix_4_–_1) provides a suggested list of items to include in a kit.

### Sheltering

There are times when staying and sheltering during an emergency is safer than relocating or evacuating. Emergency management plans should consider potential scenarios where it might be necessary to shelter in place when it is not possible to leave safely. Services should consider what resources might be required and what steps can be taken to make the facility as safe and resilient as possible.

A decision to stay and shelter will be influenced by factors such as the type of emergency, the timing of impact, property preparedness, capacity to actively defend the location and the safety of relocating or evacuating. Advice should be sought from emergency services and/or the department.

Service providers should consider the risks involved with sheltering compared with relocation or evacuation. Some facilities may have clients who are difficult to move. When deciding to relocate, evacuate or shelter, assess the risks and issues associated with moving clients compared to the risks of staying, especially for clients who may be very frail, or have a serious physical or mental health condition or disability.

There are two terms often used for sheltering:

* shelter in place
* shelter indoors.

#### Shelter in place

To shelter in place is to remain on site, within an existing facility or home, during an emergency.

The decision to shelter in place should be based on information from trusted sources, such as VicEmergency or the control agency. Seek advice to confirm that this option is safer or more appropriate than relocation or evacuation.

Moving clients from one building to a safer one within the same facility is also considered sheltering in place.

Key considerations for sheltering in place include:

* preparation of the property for the type of emergency
* emergency management capability and readiness of the service and staff on site to respond to an emergency threat if necessary
* resources needed to stay on site during an emergency or for the duration of potential isolation, such as staff, equipment, supplies and essential services, and
* potential impact on information and telecommunications infrastructure.

#### Shelter indoors

To shelter indoors is to remain inside a building and limit the exposure to unhealthy conditions in the air outside such as leaking gas, smoke and other air contaminants.

On receiving advice to shelter indoors, actions to take are:

* go indoors immediately
* close all doors and windows
* turn off heaters, air conditioners and exhaust fans
* listen to the radio or television or monitor VicEmergency for the all-clear advice.

## Planning for alternative accommodation and transport options

Service providers should plan ahead for safe and suitable places where clients can stay during an emergency. These places should not be in high-risk areas, like places known for bushfires, floods, or other hazards.

It is also a good idea to work with other local service providers to make sure everyone has a place to go. For example, if lots of services choose the same motel, there may not be space for your clients.

Service providers may need different vehicles to transport clients during an emergency. This could include ambulances or patient transport vehicles.

When planning transport:

* think about different ways to move clients and staff safely
* write down transport plans clearly in your emergency plan
* have back up options if ambulances are not available
* check for road risks like floods, fallen trees, or fire-prone areas – and update your plan as needed.

## Plan for power outages

Some emergencies may cause long power outages. This can affect systems and equipment that rely on electricity, such as:

* back-up generators
* electronic systems
* lifting equipment
* air conditioning or heating
* refrigeration and food storage
* life-support or medical equipment.

Services should think about how they will manage without power. If clients rely on powered equipment, they may need to evacuate – even if there is no direct danger – because their health could still be at risk.

## Prepare your property

Check that your buildings (offices, community centres, residential services) are prepared for emergencies.

Before high-risk seasons, services should:

* carry out a property risk assessment
* complete maintenance checks
* train staff on emergency procedures
* run emergency drills.

These actions help reduce risk and make sure your service can respond quickly and safely.

### Ongoing property safety

In addition to seasonal checks, you must inspect and test fire alarms, sprinklers, and emergency lighting regularly. Refer to the Australian Standard AS 1851 – Routing service of fire protection systems and equipment.

## Cross-border relocation

Your emergency plan may include moving clients to another state (as part of a Bushfire Survival Plan or Bushfire Leave Early Plan). In this case, you need to check that the new location is not in a bushfire prone area.

Each state has its own bushfire map to help you check local bushfire risks:

* **Australian Capital Territory:**
* [ACTmapi Bushfire Map](https://apps.vertigisstudio.com/web/?app=27c9d1abb14f4dc0805dd3b36585096f) https://www.apps.vertigisstudio.com/web/?app=27c9d1abb14f4dc00805dd3b36585096f
* **New South Wales:**
* [NSW Rural Fire Service’s Bush Fire Prone Land Map](https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/plan-and-prepare/building-in-a-bush-fire-area/planning-for-bush-fire-protection/bush-fire-prone-land/check-bfpl) https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/plan-and-prepare/building-in-a-bush-fire-area/planning-for-bush-fire-protection/bush-fire-prone-land/check-bfpl
* **Northern Territory:**
* [Managing bushfire in the NT | NT.GOV.AU](https://nt.gov.au/emergency/bushfire/managing) https://www.nt.gov.au/emergency/bushfire/managing
* **Queensland:**
* [Postcode Checker | Queensland Fire Department](https://www.fire.qld.gov.au/postcode-checker) https://www.fire.qld.gov.au/prepare/bushfire/postcode-checker
* **South Australia:**
* [Know your risk - CFS](https://dhhsvicgovau.sharepoint.com/sites/PolicyPrograms-EmergencyManagementBranch/Shared%20Documents/EM%20policy%20and%20reporting/7.%202025%20policy%20and%20reporting%20cycle/2025%20Policy%20Documents%20for%20distribution%20in%20mid-September/Policy%20supporting%20documents%202025%20for%20approval/Know%20your%20risk%20-%20CFS) https://www.cfs.sa.gov.au/plan-prepare/before-a-fire-be-prepared/know-your-risk/
* **Tasmania:**
* [Tasmania Fire Service](https://www.fire.tas.gov.au/Show?pageId=colBushfireProneAreas) https//www.fire.tas.gov.au/Show?upageld=colBushfireProneAreas
* **Victoria:**
* [Bushfire mapping and reviews](file:///C:\Users\vidc5td\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.Outlook\DLDSVZN1\Bushfire%20mapping%20and%20reviews) https://www.planning.vic.gov.au/guides-and-resources/guides/all-guides/bushfire-map-reviews
* **Western Australia:**
* [Bushfire prone areas - Department of Fire and Emergency Services](https://www.dfes.wa.gov.au/hazard-information/bushfire/bushfire-prone-areas) https://www.dfes.wa.gov.au/hazard-information/bushfire/bushfire-prone-areas

If a child is moved to another state, check the local bushfire risk in that area and include it in their plan.

## Resources to help plan for emergencies

There are extra tools and resources available to help services and clients get ready for emergencies:

* **[VicEmergency](http://emergency.vic.gov.au/)** http://emergency.vic.gov.au
* a website for Victorians where you can find emergency information and warnings. It also provides information on how to prepare for and recover from emergencies.
* [**Victorian State Emergency Service**](https://www.ses.vic.gov.au/)https://www.ses.vic.gov.au
* has information on how to plan for storm and flood emergencies. This includes a section on how to understand emergency warnings and know when to act.
* [**Australian Red Cross**](https://www.redcross.org.au/prepare)https://www.redcross.org.au/prepare
* has a template emergency management plan, a survival kit checklist, and a mobile app available on their website. These step-by-step guides will help you create a personal emergency management plan.
* [**Local Councils**](https://knowyourcouncil.vic.gov.au/councils) https://knowyourcouncil.vic.gov.au/councils
* has local information on emergencies including Municipal Emergency Management Plans.
* **Australian standards:**
* AS 3745-2010: Planning for Emergencies in facilities
* AS 4083-2012: Planning for emergencies – health care facilities
* AS 1851-2012: Routine service of fire protection systems and equipment

### Additional resources to support property preparedness

* [**Country Fire Authority**](https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/plan-prepare/how-to-prepare-your-property) https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/plan-prepare/how-to-prepare-your-property
  + has information on property preparedness before the fire season.
* [**Victorian State Emergency Service**](https://www.ses.vic.gov.au/plan-and-stay-safe/flood-guides) https://www.ses.vic.gov.au/plan-and-stay-safe/flood-guides
  + provides a local flood guide and a guide on protecting your property with bags of sand.
* [**Vic Emergency**](https://www.emergency.vic.gov.au/prepare/#where-do-i-get-information-in-an-emergency) https://www.emergency.vic.gov.au/prepare/#where-do-i-get-information-in-an-emergency
  + provides information on how to prepare property for a range of emergencies.

### Additional resources to assist people with disability to plan for emergencies

* [**Collaborating 4 Inclusion**](https://collaborating4inclusion.org/) https://collaborating4inclusion.org
  + has a Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP) tool and workbook to help people with disability with emergency preparedness to their individual support needs.
* [**The Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience**](https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/media/1762/handbook-5-communicating-with-people-with-a-disability-kh-final.pdf) https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/media/1762/handbook-5-communicating-with-people-with-a-disability-kh-final.pdf
  + published Communicating with people with a Disability: National Guidelines for Emergency Managers
* [**I’m Okay**](https://imokay.org.au/) https://imokay.org.au
  + has emergency readiness resources for people with disability. Please note this resource has been developed in New South Wales.

### Resources for multicultural and multifaith communities

* [**Australian Red Cross**](https://www.redcross.org.au/prepare) https://www.redcross.org.au
  + has resources to assist multicultural and multifaith communities prepare for emergencies.
* [**Resources for agencies**](https://www.redcross.org.au/get-help/emergencies/resources-about-disasters/help-for-agencies) https://www.redcross.org.au/get-help/emergencies/resources-about-disasters/help-for-agencies
  + emergency preparedness information flyers in multiple languages
* [**Resources to help you**](https://www.redcross.org.au/emergencies/resources/) https://www.redcross.org.au/emergencies/resources/
  + includes the Rediplan, a free disaster preparedness guide, in easy read and language translation to download.

# Readiness for an imminent emergency

Sometimes there is a high chance that an emergency is about to happen – like a bushfire, flood, or storm. This is when it is important to act quickly and get ready.

## Stay informed

Knowing what is going on is one of the most important parts of being prepared. Services should stay informed using trusted sources of emergency information and updates.

VicEmergency is Victoria’s main website for emergency updates. It provides real-time alerts and maps for incidents like:

* bushfires
* floods and storms
* power outages
* traffic issues
* hazardous material events.

The site also shares updates from:

* the Environment Protection Authority (EPA) for air quality and pollution
* Chief Health Officer (CHO) in the form of health alerts.

You can also get updates though radio, television, online and social media. Agencies like the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM), Victoria State Emergency Services (VicSES) and Victoria Police help to inform you on risks, public advice, and warnings.

### Where to find emergency warnings and updates

| Current warnings and locations of emergencies |
| --- |
| * **[VicEmergency](http://emergency.vic.gov.au)** http://emergency.vic.gov.au   + VicEmergency hotline: 1800 226 226   + VicEmergency app lets you receive official warnings and information based on your location * [**Bureau of Meteorology**](http://www.bom.gov.au) http://www.bom.gov.au   + provides up-to-date local weather information, including fire weather warnings and fire danger rating tables that show the forecast fire danger ratings for the next four days * [**Australian Broadcasting Corporation**](https://www.abc.net.au/emergency/) (ABC) https://www.abc.net.au/emergency/   + and other local media are also important sources of information during emergencies * [**Official emergency broadcasters**](https://www.emv.vic.gov.au/responsibilities/victorias-warning-system/emergency-broadcasters/list) https://www.emv.vic.gov.au/responsibilities/victorias-warning-system/emergency-broadcasters/list   + share warnings and alerts for local areas across various radio frequencies and TV stations in Victoria * [**Country Fire Authority**](https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au) https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au   + provides up-to-date information on local fire danger ratings, warnings, total fire bans and Catastrophic fire danger days. |

| Information about public health risks, including epidemic thunderstorm asthma |
| --- |
| * [**Chief Health Officer’s webpage**](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/chief-health-officer) https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/chief-health-officer   + You can subscribe to the Chief Health Officer alerts on this page to stay informed about public health issues. * [**Environment Protection Agency**](https://www.epa.vic.gov.au/for-community/airwatch) <https://www.epa.vic.gov.au/for-community/airwatch>   + shows information about air quality in Victoria. * [**National Terrorism Threat Level**](https://www.nationalsecurity.gov.au/national-threat-level/current-national-terrorism-threat-level) https://ww.nationalsecurity.gov.au/national-threat-level/current-national-terrorism-threat-level   provides current information on Australia’s terrorism threat level. |

## Take action early

When there is a known or emerging threat, services should:

* review their emergency management plans to make sure they are up to date
* carry out any readiness actions included in the plan
* communicate clearly with emergency contacts such as
* emergency services
* clients
* carers
* partner organisations
* other emergency contacts.

This helps make sure everyone understands the situation and their responsibilities.

# During an emergency

**Always call 000 (triple zero) if there is an immediate danger to life**

## Activating your emergency management plan

Emergencies can happen quickly and without much notice. Services must be ready to act straight away and put their emergency plans into action.

**Do not wait for directions from the department or emergency services to enact your emergency plan.**

The person in charge of making decisions must be clearly named in the plan and ready to act as soon as it is safe.

Services must be ready to relocate, shelter, or evacuate clients if needed. This includes forensic, disability or residential services.

In Bushfire Leave Early Plans or Bushfire Survival Plans, you must relocate or evacuate, especially in high-risk areas or on Catastrophic or Extreme fire danger days.

## Deciding to relocate, shelter or evacuate

You should stay alert and be able to receive warnings or updates from VicEmergency, ABC radio, or other trusted sources.

Each service provider must independently:

* monitor emergency information and updates
* stay aware of local conditions
* be ready to act quickly and activate and follow their emergency plan.

You must act to protect the safety of clients and staff when evacuating, sheltering-in-place or relocating.

### Who makes the decision?

The person in charge during an emergency should decide whether to move clients, find shelter or evacuate. This could be the Chief Warden or another leader present when the emergency happens. They must act early enough to keep everyone safe. For example, if a Catastrophic fire danger day is forecast, relocation should be completed the day before.

### When decisions might happen

The diagram in Figure 1 shows the timing and triggers that influence the decision to relocate, shelter, or evacuate.

Figure 1: Timing of decisions to relocate, shelter or evacuate



A decision to relocate, stay or evacuate may need to happen:

* **before an emergency** – for example, when you receive a forecast warning (Catastrophic fire danger day)
* **during an emergency** – when a threat is close or already impacting the area
* **after an emergency** – if the site is damaged or essential services (like power or water) are disrupted.

Use your emergency management plan to help guide your decisions at each stage of an emergency. Outlining triggers in the plan helps you know when to act and what to do in high-pressure situations.

#### Suggested steps for making decisions for relocation, evacuation or sheltering

* Activate your emergency management plan / bushfire plan.
* Make sure the person in charge has the right authority to make decisions.
* Find out what is happening – check official sources, preferably VicEmergency.
* Check your clients’ needs – including the number of clients, their mobility, medicines, any equipment they need, and the records you will need to take with them.
* Check which staff is available. Some staff may be directly impacted by the emergency and may not be able to support the emergency response.
* Get advice from key stakeholders to understand available resources.
* Plan for what to do if emergency services cannot reach your facility.
* Have flexible transport plans for client – do not rely on one source of transport. Do not use triple zero (000) to discuss transport assistance with Ambulance Victoria.
* Review your back up accommodation options.
* Keep monitoring the situation and update risk assessments as needed.
* Stay in touch with clients’ families and emergency contact to keep them informed.

### Making decisions during an emergency

The diagram in Figure 2 outlines what you should think about when deciding how to respond to an emergency.

There are two main types of decisions:

* **Before the emergency** – planned relocation or sheltering based on warnings or forecast (for example, a forecast Catastrophic fire danger day)
* **During the emergency** – emergency evacuation or shelter in place if there is an immediate threat.

Make safe and informed choices by considering internal and external factors.

**External factors** to consider include:

* type of emergency: bushfire, heatwave, flood, storm, etc.
* nature of the event: how much time there is to respond, how serious or widespread it is
* where the service is located: rural, regional, or metropolitan area.

**Internal factors** to consider include:

* client needs: health, mobility, medical support, etc.
* available accommodation: other safe places to stay
* transport: how clients and staff will get to safety
* supplies and services: electricity, water, medical equipment, food
* staffing: who is available to support clients
* the condition of the facility: is it safe to stay or use?

This helps you make the best possible decision in a stressful and fast-moving situation. Even if some of these points are covered earlier, repeating them here helps staff connect the key ideas during an emergency.

Figure 2: Decision making criteria for responding to external hazards

|  |
| --- |
| Diagram showing how external and internal factors influence decisions to relocate, shelter (stay) or evacuate in an emergency. |

## Notifying the department

Residential and home-based care services must follow their Bushfire Leave Early Plans or Bushfire Survival Plans when:

* a Catastrophic fire danger day is forecast, and
* The service is located in an area of [heightened bushfire risk](#_Appendix_1_-) listed in
* the Victorian Fire Risk Register – Bushfire (VFRR-B) area of ‘Extreme’ bushfire risk, and/or
* a Bushfire Management Overlay (BMO), and/or
* a Bushfire Prone Area (BPA).

Relocation must be completed the day before a forecast Catastrophic fire danger day.

**You must notify the department and home-based care service contact of client relocations before 9:00 am on the Catastrophic fire danger day**.

The client’s carer or the relevant service provider can provide notice by 9:00am on the Catastrophic fire danger day.

### When to notify the department

Service providers must notify the department by phone:

* if an emergency results in changes to service delivery
* when normal services have resumed.

Notification is required:

* when an emergency changes or stops service delivery
* when a service relocates to a different address
* including relocation required under the *Social services sector emergency management policy*’s Catastrophic fire danger day requirements
* Home-based carers should contact their regional relocation number
* within five days of services returning to normal operations after an emergency or Catastrophic fire danger day relocation.

**Important:** If your service is still not working normally after five days of an emergency or Catastrophic fire danger day, you must tell us by day five. You must say when you expect services to return to normal.

### Information to provide to the department during and after a relocation

When you notify us of a relocation (before 9:00am on the Catastrophic fire danger day), please include:

* organisation’s or carer’s name and address
* number of clients planned for relocation
* number of planned relocations/cessations completed (according to the plan/different from the plan)
* number of planned relocations/cessations that did not
* any staff/agency/client issues associated or
* what alternate actions were taken (if different from the original plan).

When you notify us of return to normal (**within 5 days after the Catastrophic fire danger day**), please include:

* date the service resumed
* date clients returned
* any direct costs related to the relocation or recovery.

# After an emergency

It can be difficult to make a recovery plan while an emergency is happening. That is why it is a good idea to start thinking about recovery ahead of time.

For most service providers, recovery will focus on supporting your clients’ health and wellbeing. It also means getting back to normal service delivery and daily operations.

It is also important to learn from each emergency. Review and update your plans to be better prepared for future emergencies.

## Health and wellbeing of clients and staff

After an emergency, your first priority should be checking the health and wellbeing of clients and staff who were affected.

Check in with clients and staff to see how they are doing. Make sure help is available as soon as possible. This included psychosocial support for clients’ mental health and emotional wellbeing. Recovery can take time. Some people may need support for weeks, months, or even years after the emergency.

### Public information and support resources

| List of resources |
| --- |
| * [**A guide to psychosocial support**](https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/recovery)https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/recovery.   + This guide explains the department’s role in supporting people’s mental health during emergencies. It includes information about risks, impacts, and supports before, during and after emergencies. * [**Australian Red Cross – Emergency Resources**](https://dhhsvicgovau.sharepoint.com/sites/PolicyPrograms-EmergencyManagementBranch/Shared%20Documents/EM%20policy%20and%20reporting/7.%202025%20policy%20and%20reporting%20cycle/2025%20Policy%20Documents%20for%20distribution%20in%20mid-September/Policy%20supporting%20documents%202025%20for%20approval/Australian%20Red%20Cross%20–%20Emergency%20Resources)https://www.redcross.org.au/   + Provides helpful tools for coping during and after a crisis. Includes tips for supporting clients and staff and information on psychological first aid. * [**Beyond Blue – Mental Health Support**](https://www.beyondblue.org.au/)https://www.beyondblue.org.au/   + Offers support and information for people dealing with anxiety, depression, or trauma. Include helplines, online forums, and advice on seeking professional support. * [**Lifeline – Crisis Support and Suicide Prevention**](https://www.lifeline.org.au/)https://www.lifeline.org.au/   + Provides 24/7 crisis support by phone or online. Services can help people in severe distress, including clients and staff. * [**Headspace – Support for Young People**](https://headspace.org.au/)https://headspace.org.au/   + Offers mental health support for young people aged 12-25. Services include counselling, group therapy, and tools for managing stress, anxiety, and other mental health challenges. * [**National Mental Health Commission – Recovery-Oriented Mental Health Practice**](https://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au/)https://www.mentalhealthcommission.gov.au/   + Gives advice on long-term mental health recovery. Focuses on helping people rebuild their confidence and wellbeing after emergencies. * [**Safe Work Australia – Work-Related Psychological Health and Safety**](https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au)https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/   + Shares information on creating mentally healthy workplaces, especially after critical incidents. Helps leaders and teams support staff recovery. |

## Returning to business as usual

How long it takes to get back to normal depends on:

* the type of emergency
* how many staff are available
* how badly the site or services were affected
* whether essential services (like electricity, water, or phone/internet) are working.

Things to consider after an emergency:

* facilities that stayed open during the emergency (sheltered in place)
* you may still need to move clients if the building was damaged
* you may need to move clients if power, water, or communication systems don’t work
* facilities that relocated or evacuated
* you should check your building or site for damage
* you may need to complete a site safety inspection to check for safety issues
* if repairs are needed, make temporary arrangements for clients and staff
* home-based care services
* you should resume support as soon as it is safe
* make a plan for clients with immediate needs who are without support
* there may be delays if homes or streets are still unsafe or cut off.

You need a communication plan in place to keep the following groups informed:

* clients
* their families (where appropriate)
* staff
* the department
* other stakeholders.

Tell them about:

* what is happening
* when services will resume
* any service changes.

### Actions to take after an emergency

|  |
| --- |
| Service providers should:   * put client and staff needs first. Make sure everyone has support until normal services resume. * notify the department by phone if services change or return to normal. * check your building’s site, looking for safety risks like:   + - electrical hazards     - unsafe access points     - damage to the building or property     - phone or internet connections     - Any other health and safety issues. * stay in touch with clients and families. Keep them informed about what is happening while waiting for a return to business as usual. * hold a debrief with staff and relevant stakeholder as soon as possible. Discuss the emergency, what worked well and what could be improved. * review and update emergency management plans to reflect lessons learned. Include feedback from clients and careers on what to improve next time. |

# Appendix 1 – Glossary

In this guide, some words have specific meanings:

**Bushfire Leave Early Plan** – A written plan that helps people decide to leave a high-risk bushfire area before a fire starts. It is especially important on days rated Extreme or Catastrophic. The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing has a Bushfire Leave Early Plan policy for children in:

* foster and kinship care
* Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care.

**Bushfire Survival Plan** – A written plan that explains what you will do if there is a bushfire in your area and when to relocate. It helps you make decisions early – before you are in danger.

**Catastrophic Fire Danger Rating** – The most dangerous fire risk rating in Victoria. Fires on these days move quickly and are deadly. It is not safe to stay, and it might be too late to leave if you wait.

**Client** – a person or family receiving support or service. This includes:

* children and young people in out-of-home care arrangements
* people living in residential services.

**Control agency** – the lead organisation in charge of managing an emergency. For example, the Victorian State Emergency Service (VICSES) is the control agency for storms or floods.

**Culturally safe** – A service where people feel respected, accepted and understood, no matter their language, traditions, beliefs, or identity. A culturally safe service listens, supports, and works with people in ways that suit their culture.

**Emergency** – a serious event that puts people’s lives, health, property or the environment at risk. This can include:

* floods, storms, bushfires, earthquakes
* heatwaves
* epidemics or pandemics (like COVID-19 or influenza)
* industrial accidents, explosions or building fires
* cyber incidents (e.g. data breaches or IT system failures)
* windstorm, or another natural event
* a road accident or any other accident
* a plague
* a terrorist attack or threat
* a warlike act
* a hi-jack, siege, or riot.

**Epidemic** – when a disease spread quickly across an area and affects many people.

**Fire danger rating** – a warning system that shows how risky fire conditions are. It helps people decide what actions to take, like leaving early or cancelling plans.

**Forecast Catastrophic fire danger day** – A warning from the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) about a coming day with dangerous fire conditions. These warning can be given up to four days ahead.

**Funded agency** – an organisation that has a formal service agreement with the department to deliver health or human services.

**Heightened bushfire risk** – a service or facility may be in an area of higher risk of risk when any or all of the following apply:

* it is located within a Bushfire Prone Area (BPA)
* it is located within a Bushfire Management Overlay (BMO)
* it is located within a Victorian Fire Risk Register – Bushfire (VFRR-B) area of ‘Extreme’ bushfire risk.

**Home-based care** – foster care and kinship care for children and young people

**Home-based care service contact** – the funded agency or department area office that works with a foster carer or kinship carer.

**In-home and community-based services** – services provided in someone’s home or local community. This includes things like:

* personal care
* day services
* community-based respite
* information and referral services.

**Pandemic** – a large disease outbreak that spreads across countries or continents, causing serious health, social and economic impacts. Pandemics are more severe than epidemics.

**Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP) –** A tool that helps people understand their support needs during an emergency and make a personal plan with help from their support network before, during and after an emergency or disaster.

**Residential services** – services where people stay overnight at a facility. This includes:

* residential and lead tenant out-of-home care arrangements
* supported independent living (including respite)
* youth foyers
* Forensic Disability Residential Services.

**Shared responsibility** – everyone has a role in preparing, responding to, and recovering from an emergency – not just emergency services. It does not mean everyone has the same level of responsibility.

**Service continuity** – Making sure a client continues to receive care and support during and after an emergency. This could include getting support in a different place or from a different provider.

**Social service provider** – an agency/organisation providing services in the social services sector. A service provider may or may not have a formal service agreement with the department.

# Appendix 2 – Hazard-specific information and resources

## Australian Fire Danger Rating System (AFDRS)

Fire Danger Ratings help people understand how dangerous a fire could be if one started. The higher the rating, the more dangerous the conditions.

Fire Danger Ratings are shown in weather forecasts during the fire season. They are important for helping services plan ahead and protect lives.

Service providers should:

* stay alert – watch conditions and check official sources for warnings
* act early – if a fire starts nearby, act immediately to protect lives
* do not wait for a warning
* follow all local rules and restrictions about fire activity.

For more details, refer to the ‘*Know your fire danger rating’* table below or visit the [Australian Fire Danger Rating System](https://afdrs.com.au/) website https://afdrs.com.au/.

### Know your fire danger rating

| Fire Danger Rating | Fire behaviour | Actions |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Moderate**  Plan and Prepare | Most fires can be controlled | Stay up to date and be ready to act if there is a fire. |
| **High**  Be ready to act | Fires can be dangerous. | * There is a heightened risk. Be alert for fires in your area. * Plan ahead – know what you will do if a fire starts. * If a fire starts, your life and property may be at risk. The safest option is to avoid bushfire risk areas. |
| **Extreme**  Act now to protect your life and property | Fires will spread quickly and be extremely dangerous. | * These are dangerous fire conditions. * Check your bushfire plan and that your property is fire ready. * If a fire starts, take immediate action. If you and your property are not prepared to the highest level, go to a safer location well before the fire impacts. * Reconsider travel through bushfire risk areas. * Expect hot, dry, and windy conditions. * Leaving bushfire risk areas early in the day is your safest option. |
| **Catastrophic**  For your survival, leave bushfire risk areas | If a fire starts and takes hold, lives are likely to be lost. | * These are the most dangerous conditions for a fire. * Your life may depend on the decisions on you make, even before there is a fire. * For your survival, do not be in bushfire risk areas. * Stay safe by going to a safer location early in the morning or the night before. * If a fire starts and takes hold, lives and properties are likely to be lost. * Homes cannot withstand fires in these conditions. You may not be able to leave, and help may not be available. |

**Important information to note:**

* **Watch conditions and check official sources for warnings**
* **Follow all local rules and restrictions about fire activity**
* **Ensure any industrial or agricultural activities follow the relevant industry guidelines**
* **If a fire starts near you, act immediately to protect your life**
* **Do not wait for a warning**.

### Catastrophic fire danger day

A Catastrophic fire danger rating is the highest fire danger rating in Victoria. These are the most dangerous conditions for a bushfire. If a fire starts, it may spread quickly and be deadly.

If a Catastrophic fire danger day is forecast, services in high bushfire-risk areas must prepare to act early. This includes following your emergency or bushfire survival plans. People’s safety may depend on decisions made before a fire starts. Buildings are not safe to stay in. You may not be able to leave, and help may not be available.

### Triggers for relocating or stopping services

Some services have to move their clients when there’s a high risk of bushfires. This includes services like residential and home-based care services. You must do this:

* if you are in a high bushfire-risk area
* when there is a forecast Extreme or Catastrophic fire danger day.

These requirements are outlined in the [**service-specific policy requirements**](#_Service-specific_policy_requirement_1) section.

Other service providers can choose what to do on days with Extreme or Catastrophic fire danger. They might decide to relocate clients, change how they deliver services or stop services altogether. These decisions should be in your emergency management plans.

**You must relocate the day before a forecast Catastrophic fire danger day.**

**If you’re relocating, you must notify the department or your home-based care service contact before 9:00 am on the Catastrophic fire danger day.**

Service providers should **monitor weather forecasts and fire danger ratings.** You need to be ready to activate your emergency management and/or Bushfire Survival Plans.

Service providers must continue with the plan, even if the forecast later changes.

## Bushfire and grassfire

To help plan and prepare for bushfire safety:

| * [**Country Fire Authority**](file:///C:\Users\spry1010\Downloads\Country%20Fire%20Authority) https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au   + includes tips on planning for fires, leaving early, and when it is safe to return. It also has information about fire danger ratings and local alerts * [**Country Fire Authority**](https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au)’s https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au   + *Fire ready guide for community workers* helps community workers support clients with bushfire safety planning * State Bushfire Plan which is available on [**Emergency Management Victoria**](https://www.emv.vic.gov.au/responsibilities/semp-sub-plans/state-bushfire-plan) https://www.emv.vic.gov.au/responsibilities/semp-sub-plans/state-bushfire-plan * explains how Victoria prepares for and responds to bushfires. |
| --- |

Fire training for community service workers:

**Online learning modules** for people who work, travel or care for people in high bushfire areas are available on [**Country Fire Authority e-learning**](https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/workers) https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/workers

Available modules include:

* Bushfire Safety for Workers
* Bushfire Planning: How to support your clients
* Bushfire Planning: You and the Person You Care For.

### Heightened bushfire risk

A client, service or facility is in an area of heightened bushfire risk if it is located in any or all of the following:

* Bushfire Prone Area (PBA)
* Bushfire Management Overlay (BMO)
* Victorian Fire Risk Register – Bushfire (VFRR-B) area of ‘Extreme’ bushfire risk.

The VFRR-B is a mapping tool used by different groups to understand bushfire dangers and risk.

These groups include:

* Local Government
* fire services
* public land managers
* utility companies
* community groups

This tool helps them identify places and things that could be at risk during a bushfire. It also helps them assess how serious the risk is.

When service providers are located in high-risk bushfire areas, they must have emergency plans in place. There are two main types:

* Bushfire Survival Plan
* Bushfire Leave Early Plan.

These plans are aligned to service-specific policy requirements in the *Social services sector emergency management policy*.

Homes Victoria’s Fire Services Team prepare some Bushfire Survival Plans. These plans include important triggers that tell service providers when to relocate clients. For example, if an Extreme or Catastrophic fire danger day is forecasted, the plan might tell you to move clients the night before. These triggers are based on a risk assessment process.

Extra planning might also be needed. For more help, read the Social services sector emergency management policy on [Service Providers’ Emergency Management webpage](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management) https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management.

### Bushfire risk assessment tools

Some areas in Victoria are more likely to have bushfires. These tools can help you check if a property is at risk:

* Bushfire Prone Area (BPA): You can check if your property is in a BPA using the Department of Transport and Planning’s [Vic Plan tool](https://mapshare.vic.gov.au/vicplan/) https://mapshare.vic.gov.au/vicplan/
* Bushfire Management Overlay (BMO): This is a planning overlay that applies to land in Victoria that may be at risk from bushfire. You can also check your property’s location using the Department of Transport and Planning’s [Vic Plan tool](https://mapshare.vic.gov.au/vicplan/) https://mapshare.vic.gov.au/vicplan/
* [Victorian Fire Risk Register (VFRR)](file:///C:\Users\spry1010\Downloads\Victorian%20Fire%20Risk%20Register%20(VFRR)) https://www.vfrr.vic.gov.au/: Emergency services and councils use this register to identify and assess bushfire risk in different locations. It helps prioritise what needs protection but does not give detailed risk information for specific properties.

#### The difference between BPA and BMO and why should you check both

BPA and BMO show different types of bushfire risk:

* BPA is about where bushfires are likely to start
* BMO is about where bushfires are likely to impact land and buildings

Your property might be in one, both or neither. Knowing this helps you plan ahead, make your property safer and follow any building, planning or emergency rules.

Bushfire risk assessments can be complex. Service providers may need help from qualified bushfire planning experts. A list of accredited planners is available from the [Fire Protection Association Australia](http://www.fpaa.com.au/) http://www.fpaa.com.au/.

### Electricity supply disruptions

Information about keeping safe during power outages and using generators:

* [Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action’s Power outages](https://www.energy.vic.gov.au/safety-and-emergencies/power-outages) https://www.energy.vic.gov.au/safety-and-emergencies/power-outages
* [Better Health Channel Coping without gas or electricity](https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/servicesandsupport/emergencies--coping-without-gas-or-electricity) https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/servicesandsupport/emergencies--coping-without-gas-or-electricity
* [Health.Vic Power blackouts](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/environmental-health/environmental-health-in-the-home/power-blackouts-generators-carbon-monoxide) https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/environmental-health/environmental-health-in-the-home/power-blackouts-generators-carbon-monoxide.

## Extreme heat and heatwaves

**Extreme heat** happens when the temperature goes above a certain level in your area.

A **heatwave** means three or more days of extreme heat in a row.

Extreme heat can make people unwell, especially:

* older people
* young children
* people with health conditions
* people who have little or no contact with other people
* people who live alone with limited support
* people who find it hard to connect with others due to illness, disability, age, or where they live.

During heatwaves, the impacts can be serious and affect many people at the same time. Heatwaves can disrupt essential services, facilities and infrastructure.

The Department of Health has a heat health alert system that sends alerts to registered subscribers when dangerous heat conditions are expected. Subscribers include:

* local government agencies
* program areas
* hospitals
* statewide and major metropolitan health and community service providers
* general community.

More information about extreme heat and heatwaves:

* [Health.vic Extreme heat and heatwaves](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/environmental-health/climate-weather-and-public-health/heatwaves-and-extreme-heat) https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/environmental-health/climate-weather-and-public-health/heatwaves-and-extreme-heat
* [Health.vic Heat health status](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/environmental-health/climate-weather-and-public-health/heatwaves-and-extreme-heat/heat-health-alert-status) https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/environmental-health/climate-weather-and-public-health/heatwaves-and-extreme-heat/heat-health-alert-status
* where you can sign up for notifications of forecast heat conditions
* **State Extreme Heat Sub-plan**, on [Emergency Management Victoria](file:///C:\Users\vidc5td\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.Outlook\DLDSVZN1\Emergency%20Management%20Victoria) https://www.emv.vic.gov.au/responsibilities/semp-sub-plans/state-extreme-heat-sub-plan
* [Bureau of Meteorology Heatwave Forecast Service for Australia](http://www.bom.gov.au/australia/heatwave%3e) http://www.bom.gov.au/australia/heatwave.

## Flood, storm, earthquake

* [Victoria State Emergency Service](http://www.ses.vic.gov.au) www.ses.vic.gov.au
* provides information about floods, storms and earthquakes, including safety videos, and how to prepare for these hazards.
* Your local water catchment management authority may have information about the flood risk in your area.
* [Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action’s Catchment management framework](https://www.water.vic.gov.au/catchments/catchment-management-framework) https://www.water.vic.gov.au/waterways-and-catchments/our-catchments/catchment-management-framework

## Pandemic

### Influenza

National, international, and state plans for pandemic influenza:

* [Emergency Management Victoria Action plan for pandemic influenza](https://www.emv.vic.gov.au/responsibilities/semp-sub-plans/victorian-action-plan-for-pandemic-influenza) https://www.emv.vic.gov.au/responsibilities/semp-sub-plans/victorian-action-plan-for-pandemic-influenza
* [Health.vic Pandemic Influenza](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/emergencies/emergency-type/infectious-diseases/pandemic-influenza) https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/emergencies/‌emergency-type/infectious-diseases/pandemic-influenza
* [Department of Health](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/publications/management-of-acute-respiratory-infection-outbreaks-including-covid-19-and-influenza) [www.health.vic.gov.au/publications/management-of-acute-respiratory-infection-outbreaks-including-covid-19-and-influenza](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/publications/management-of-acute-respiratory-infection-outbreaks-including-covid-19-and-influenza)
* for information on managing acute respiratory infection outbreaks, including COVID-19 and influenza in residential care facilities.

### Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19)

COVID-19 pandemic and response plans:

* **Commonwealth Department of Health** – [Commonwealth Department of Health Australian Health Sector Emergency Response Plan for Novel Coronavirus](https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/australian-health-sector-emergency-response-plan-for-novel-coronavirus-covid-19) https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/australian-health-sector-emergency-response-plan-for-novel-coronavirus-covid-19.

COVID-19 resources for community services and care providers:

* [[Coronavirus (COVID-19) Victoria](https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au/)](https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au) https://www.coronavirus.vic.gov.au
* [Commonwealth Department of Health COVID-19 resources for health professionals, including aged care providers, pathology providers and health care managers](file:///C:\Users\vidc5td\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\INetCache\Content.Outlook\DLDSVZN1\COVID-19%20resources%20for%20health%20professionals,%20including%20aged%20care%20providers,%20pathology%20providers%20and%20health%20care%20managers) https://www.health.gov.au/resources/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-resources-for-health-professionals-including-aged-care-providers-pathology-providers-and-health-care-managers

## Smoke exposure

Information about the health effects of bushfire smoke:

* [Health.vic Bushfires and public health](https://www.health.vic.gov.au/environmental-health/bushfires-and-public-health) https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/public-health/environmental-health/climate-weather-and-public-health/bushfires-and-public-health
* [Better Health Smoke and Your Health](https://dhhsvicgovau.sharepoint.com/sites/PolicyPrograms-EmergencyManagementBranch/Shared%20Documents/EM%20policy%20and%20reporting/7.%202025%20policy%20and%20reporting%20cycle/2025%20Policy%20Documents%20for%20distribution%20in%20mid-September/Policy%20supporting%20documents%202025%20for%20approval/Better%20Health%20Smoke%20and%20Your%20Health) https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/campaigns/smoke-and-your-health.

## Cyber Incident

Information on how to prepare and respond to cyber incidents and manage privacy impacts of a data breach:

* [Australian Cyber Security Centre](https://www.cyber.gov.au) https://www.cyber.gov.au
* [Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner](https://www.ovic.vic.gov.au) https://www.ovic.vic.gov.au

# Appendix 3 – Risk assessment

You should think about what types of emergencies might affect your service or clients. This is called a risk assessment. The results should be included in your emergency plan.

## Likelihood – how likely is it to happen?

There may be multiple factors that contribute to the likelihood and degree of risk for a particular emergency. You can adjust the definitions for each likelihood level as appropriate to your service and clients.

You should also think about what has happened in the past. Your local council may have information about emergencies that have happened in your area.

The table below gives simple definitions to describe how likely something is to happen:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Likelihood | Example definitions |
| **Almost certain** | **Will occur at least once per year or more frequently** |
| **Likely** | **Will potentially occur once within every two years** |
| **Possible** | **May occur once in every five years** |
| **Unlikely** | **Could occur once in every 10 years** |
| **Rare** | **Will only occur in exceptional circumstances, such as once every 50 years** |

## Consequences – what could happen if it does?

Consequences are about how much harm or damage an emergency could cause, like:

* injuries
* loss of life
* damage to services or buildings.

The table below helps you think about what impact might be if the emergency happens.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Consequence | Example definitions |
| **Catastrophic** | **Death of clients or staff, ongoing impact on facilities and service continuity** |
| **Major** | **Extensive injuries requiring hospitalisation, major impact on facilities and service continuity** |
| **Moderate** | **Clients require medical treatment, residential facilities temporarily uninhabitable, impact on service continuity** |
| **Minor** | **First aid treatment, some impact on client wellbeing, some impact on facility, Impact on service continuity** |
| **Insignificant** | **No injuries, no structural damage, minimal impact on business** |

Each service should adjust these definitions for their safety plans that suit their clients and how they operate. The chance of an emergency happening, and how serious it could be, depends on two factors:

* How well staff and clients know the emergency plans
* How much training staff and clients have about the emergency plans.

## Risk rating

* The risk matrix helps you work out how serious a risk is – extreme, high, medium, or low – and how quickly you need to act to reduce the risk.
* Focus first on extreme and high risks, as they need quicker action.
* If risks have the same overall rating, give more attention to those that are more likely to happen or could cause more serious harm.

Risk Acceptability Chart

| Risk | Acceptability |
| --- | --- |
| **Extreme (E)** | **Unacceptable (Must have Chief Executive Officer oversight)** |
| **High (H)** | **Tolerable (with senior manager review)** |
| **Medium (M)** | **Tolerable (with frequent risk owner review)** |
| **Low (L)** | **Acceptable (with periodic review)** |

### Risk assessment matrix

To use the matrix:

* find the likelihood (how likely it is to happen) on the left
* find the consequences (how bad the impact is) across the top
* where they meet in the table shows the risk rating.

Consequences and likelihood chart

| Likelihood | Insignificant | Minor | Moderate | Major | Catastrophic |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Almost certain** | **H** | **H** | **E** | **E** | **E** |
| **Likely** | **M** | **H** | **H** | **E** | **E** |
| **Possible** | **L** | **M** | **H** | **E** | **E** |
| **Unlikely** | **L** | **L** | **M** | **H** | **E** |
| **Rare** | **L** | **L** | **M** | **H** | **H** |

Example risk assessment matrix

| Hazard | Likelihood | Consequence | Rating | Example Comments |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Grassfire | Unlikely | Major | H | Facility is in an area that could experience grassfire. Emergency planning for relocation underway |
| Heatwave | Likely | Minor | H | Impacts of heatwave may exacerbate effects of client’s medical condition. Mitigation: air conditioning installed in their home |
| Heatwave + Power outage | Possible | Major | E | Client requires additional support in the event of a combined power outage and heatwave. Refer to client’s support plan and follow first aid guidelines if client or staff are affected by heat. |

### Likelihood assessment chart

Use the table below to define what each level of likelihood means for your service. Think about how often emergencies or incidents have happened in the past and what could happen in the future. Then, write your own definitions in the blank column.

This helps your team assess risk in a way that makes sense for your service’s location, size, and the people you support.

Complete definitions appropriate for your service.

| Likelihood | Definition |
| --- | --- |
| **Almost certain** |  |
| **Likely** |  |
| **Possible** |  |
| **Unlikely** |  |
| **Rare** |  |

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### Consequence assessment chart

Use this chart to describe how serious the impact of an emergency could be on your service. You should define each level of consequence in a way that makes sense for your organisation, based on your service type, the people you support, and the kind of emergencies you might face.

You can write your own definitions in the blank column to help your team understand what each level means for your setting.

Complete definitions appropriate for your service.

| Consequence | Definition |
| --- | --- |
| **Catastrophic** |  |
| **Major** |  |
| **Moderate** |  |
| **Minor** |  |
| **Insignificant** |  |

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# Appendix 4 – Preparing a relocation and evacuation kit

Having a kit ready with important emergency items and information can save time and stress if you need to leave quickly. This list includes useful items to pack. You should check your kit often, especially if it has anything that can go out of date e.g. batteries, medicine, etc.

**Note:** This is just a sample list. Services should think about the unique needs of each client and adjust the kit accordingly.

## General equipment and supplies

* Traffic/emergency safety vest and tabards
* Facility keys
* Charged mobile phone and charger (batteries checked and charged)
* Battery-powered radio, and spare batteries (check expiration dates)
* Torches in good working order and spare batteries
* Woollen blankets
* Garbage bags and ties
* Whistle
* Paper, pens, and markers
* First-aid kit
* Client evacuation travel kit (if applicable)
* Antibacterial wipes, hand sanitiser gel, surgical face masks, N95 mask (smoke)
* Toilet paper
* Bottled water
* Non-perishable food and snack items
* Sunscreen and spare sunhats.

## Client-specific items

* Medication and medical aids
* Copies of care plans
* Any important documents (including prescriptions)
* Thickened fluids and enteral feeding
* Continence aids
* Changes of clothes (natural fabrics), toiletries
* Identification documents.

## Facility-based residential services requirements

* Emergency contact details (facility-based service):
* your local government emergency contact
* your regional departmental emergency contact
* your state/federal agency emergency contact
* local emergency services
* hospitals, ambulance etc.
* An up-to-date list of residents that includes information such as medical conditions, mobility status and next-of-kin emergency contact information and a photo
* Resident identity bands if applicable
* Spray water bottles (particularly useful is relocating during hot weather)
* Cool packs for transporting refrigerated medicines
* Clipboard with notes, pens, and pencils to record information.

# Appendix 5 – Key roles and responsibilities in emergency management

Emergency management planning happens at different level: national, state, regional and local. There are different committees that help with this planning. How big the response is, depends on how serious the emergency is and how it might affect people and communities.

Victoria’s emergency management arrangements are guided by laws such as the *Emergency Management Act 1986*, *Emergency Management Act 2013* and detailed in the State Emergency Management Plan and associated documentation. All levels of government and services work together to help communities be safer and stronger in emergencies.

Understanding emergency management roles and responsibilities relevant to social services helps us all plan and work together during emergencies.

## Local government

Councils work with providers in their area. They have a range of emergency management responsibilities, including to:

* plan and prepare for emergency events
* help to reduce risk and mitigation activities
* support the community to respond to, and recover from, emergency events.

Councils bring together the Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee. This committee includes emergency responders, local services, support agencies and other relevant parties, including community members. They develop and update municipal emergency management plans.

## State government

In Victoria, the state government is responsible for:

* developing emergency management response and recovery capabilities
* protecting life, property, and the environment
* coordinating a multi-agency response.

Emergency Management Victoria has the overarching responsibility for control, command, and coordination across government. There are also agencies across government responsible for specific elements of the emergency response. These responsibilities are detailed in the State Emergency Management Plan.

## Commonwealth government

### National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) supports and services

The NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission makes sure that NDIS providers meet safety and care standards. This includes making sure that:

* these providers are prepared for emergencies
* important supports can keep going during and after emergencies.

### Residential aged care

At the national level, the Department of Health is responsible for:

* helping residential aged care services get ready to respond to emergencies. This includes creating emergency plans
* checking that aged care services can look after residents during and after an emergency
* giving aged care services important information. This includes and reminding them about their responsibilities during an emergency.