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| Social services sector emergency management policy |
| Version 6.0 |
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Contents

[1. Introduction 4](#_Toc210050200)

[1.1 Commencement 4](#_Toc210050201)

[1.2 About this policy 4](#_Toc210050202)

[1.3 About emergencies in Victoria 6](#_Toc210050203)

[2. Planning for emergencies 8](#_Toc210050204)

[2.1 Service provider emergency planning responsibilities 8](#_Toc210050205)

[2.2 Emergency management plans 8](#_Toc210050206)

[2.3 Australian Fire Danger Rating System 9](#_Toc210050207)

[2.4 Risk assessment 10](#_Toc210050208)

[3. Service-specific policy requirements 14](#_Toc210050209)

[3.1 Disability services 14](#_Toc210050210)

[3.2 In-home and community-based services 15](#_Toc210050211)

[3.3 Residential and home-based care services 15](#_Toc210050212)

[3.4 Social housing and homelessness services 18](#_Toc210050213)

[4. During and after emergencies 20](#_Toc210050214)

[4.1 Activating your emergency management plan 20](#_Toc210050215)

[4.2 Returning to the facility 20](#_Toc210050216)

[4.3 Notifying the department 20](#_Toc210050217)

[4.4 Sources of emergency information 21](#_Toc210050218)

[5. Annual policy attestation reporting requirements 22](#_Toc210050219)

[6. Policy review 23](#_Toc210050220)

[6.1 Document version control 23](#_Toc210050221)

[6.2 Change history 23](#_Toc210050222)

[Appendix 1 – Glossary 25](#_Toc210050223)

[Appendix 2 – DFFH Emergency Management contact numbers for service providers 28](#_Toc210050224)

[Appendix 3 – Policy linkages 29](#_Toc210050225)

[Service agreements requirements for funded services 29](#_Toc210050226)

[State emergency management arrangements 29](#_Toc210050227)

[Business continuity 29](#_Toc210050228)

[Capital Development Guidelines 30](#_Toc210050229)

[Occupational health and safety 30](#_Toc210050230)

# Introduction

The Social services sector emergency management policy (the policy) protects Victorians’ health, safety, and wellbeing by outlining how social and community services plan and prepare for emergencies.

The policy requires agencies whose services are delivered, funded, or regulated by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (the department) to:

* have an appropriate emergency management plan in place
* review this plan at least annually
* report to the department that they are prepared for a range of emergencies.

The policy also outlines specific actions home-based carers and service providers located within areas of heightened bushfire risk must take once a Catastrophic fire danger day has been forecast for the fire weather district where they are located.

Agencies providing services in-scope for this policy only need to attest to their emergency management preparedness once (see section 5). They are not required to attest for each individual service they deliver that is in scope for this policy.

This policy should be read in conjunction with *Preparing for emergencies: a reference guide for the social services sector* and the *Emergency Management Plan Template*, which are available on the department’s [[Service Providers’ Emergency Management](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management)webpage](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management)https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management.

## Commencement

This policy replaces the *Social services sector emergency management policy (v5.0)*.

This version of the policy remains current until it is replaced or repealed.

## About this policy

This policy assists the department and service providers to prepare for and respond to emergencies.

The policy outlines service providers’ responsibilities and what to consider when preparing for, responding to, and recovering from emergencies.

The policy seeks to achieve a consistent approach that allows service providers to take into consideration the local environment, conditions, resources and the health, safety and wellbeing of clients and staff.

### Policy scope

The policy takes an ‘**all hazards, all emergencies’** approach to emergency management planning. That means the policy advocates for service providers to consider and plan for the potential impacts on clients, staff, and services from the range of emergencies they may face. This includes identifying specific risks inherent to each service and location and the individual needs and abilities of clients and staff and planning accordingly.

An ‘all hazards, all emergencies’ approach to emergency management planning requires both service providers, and people most at risk in emergencies, to be well prepared.

This involves preparation and planning for the impacts of a range of potential emergencies that may occur, factoring in the needs of clients, and any risks they face, specific to the emergency.

#### Services in scope for the policy

This policy covers services funded, delivered, or regulated by the department, including:

* services that are directly delivered by the department
* agencies delivering services that are funded by the department, as outlined in service agreements, funding plans, and other relevant performance agreement documentation
* Specialist Disability Accommodation (SDA) and Short-term accommodation and assistance (STAA) properties owned by the department
* agencies providing Supported Independent Living (SIL) and Short-term accommodation and assistance services (STAA) with which the department has a funding relationship
* any other agency or service provider, as stated in contractual agreements or regulatory/registration requirements.

#### Services out of scope for the policy

All agencies providing social services are encouraged to use this policy and the accompanying resources to guide their emergency management planning. However, service providers and agencies that do not meet the above conditions and not in scope for the policy are not required to comply with the policy or its associated reporting processes.

Services that are currently out of scope for this policy include agencies that receive:

* funding from the department for Neighbourhood Houses.

### Other considerations

Services funded, delivered, or regulated by the department should consider the unique support needs and capabilities of clients through their emergency management planning.

This includes:

* considering the needs and voices of all clients, with a focus on those at risk in emergencies
* encouraging clients and staff to identify risks, and take precautions, to reduce their own risks from all types of emergencies.

#### Considering clients’ unique support needs and capabilities during emergencies

Service providers can enhance emergency preparedness and resilience for their service and their clients through emergency management planning. During the emergency planning and preparation phases, service providers should consider their clients’ unique support needs and capabilities during and after an emergency. The client, and where relevant the client’s carer, should actively participate in emergency planning for themselves, identifying what their support needs and strategies are, when possible.

This approach allows service providers to identify individuals who may face a higher chance of experiencing negative consequences or harm during an emergency due to factors such as their health and well-being, safety and security, knowledge and/or connection. A person at risk may not be well connected to advice, support, and services.

The [*Preparing for emergencies: a reference guide for the social services sect*](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management)*or* and the *Emergency Management Plan Template* areavailable on the [**Service Providers’ Emergency Management** webpage](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management)https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management.

**Note:** The reference guide provides information, guidance, and resources to support agencies to identify people most at risk and assist them in planning for an emergency.

#### Shared responsibility in emergency management planning

The [*State Emergency Management Plan*](https://www.emv.vic.gov.au/responsibilities/semp)[[1]](#footnote-1) (SEMP) recognises that emergency management is the ‘shared responsibility’ of all Victorians - not just the emergency management sector:

“…the collective obligations and accountabilities held by a range of actors. Specifically, it recognises that no single actor can be responsible for emergency mitigation, preparedness, response, or recovery. Shared responsibility therefore suggests that everyone has a role to play in emergency management.”

All Victorians have a role in planning for, responding to, and recovering from emergencies. This policy reinforces the concept of ‘shared responsibility’ in emergency management and risk mitigation, recognising that everyone must contribute to planning and preparedness efforts.

Shared responsibility in this context means that emergency management is everyone’s business. It does not, however, mean that everyone has equal responsibility, nor does it mean a shifting of responsibility.

Shared responsibility reinforces a ‘strengths-based’ approachto emergency management. It means that community organisations, businesses, support services and community members all identify and take precautions to reduce their own risks from emergencies.

For instance, while emergency responders play a crucial role in providing immediate assistance and ensuring public safety during an incident, service providers also have their part to play. While responders may focus on rescue operations and providing essential services, service providers and their clients can contribute by following evacuation protocols, staying informed, and supporting other clients. This collaborative approach ensures that responsibilities are appropriately distributed, and each stakeholder’s unique contribution is valued.

## About emergencies in Victoria

An emergency is an incident or event that threatens the health, safety or wellbeing of a service’s clients, staff, or visitors. An emergency may also impact the way a service is able to operate by threatening, damaging, or destroying property, or by disrupting essential services such as electricity.

Social services in Victoria may experience a range of emergencies and their impacts, including, but not limited to:

* floods, storms, bushfires, grassfires, and earthquakes
* building or industrial fires
* explosions and accidents
* extreme heat and heatwaves
* outbreaks, epidemics, and pandemics (such as COVID-19, thunderstorm asthma, influenza, emergency animal disease)
* food or water supply contamination
* disruption to essential services (such as electricity and/or gas), water, or telecommunications networks)
* cyber incidents (such as data breaches and system failures impacting service delivery, client, and service data)
* terrorism threats and other acts of violence impacting the public.

An emergency does not need to directly affect a service provider for it to have an impact on its clients, staff, and service delivery. For example, smoke from a bushfire or industrial fire may result in poor air quality leading to potential breathing difficulties. In this instance a service may need to consider closing, relocating, or altering the way they operate.

Similarly, a flood or storm may cause prolonged road closures. This could mean a service is unable to evacuate safely, is inaccessible to emergency services, or cannot receive essential deliveries.

An epidemic or pandemic may cause staff or clients to become ill. Secondary impacts could include impacts to the number of regular staff available to deliver services or the availability of suitably qualified relief staff from across the sector.

While each emergency is unique, their impacts can be similar and occur concurrently. The planning undertaken for one type of emergency can be applied across several similar scenarios. For example, a service provider may identify and plan for a prolonged power outage as a potential consequence of a severe storm. This emergency planning could then be used and adapted should a different emergency disrupt the power supply.

### Linkages

This policy is part of a broader legal and policy framework. Service providers are responsible for complying with all relevant contractual, legal, and regulatory obligations.

A full list of linkages can be found in [Appendix 3 – Policy Linkages](#_Appendix_3_–).

# Planning for emergencies

This section outlines service providers’ responsibilities when preparing for emergencies.

Service providers must plan for emergencies and their impacts so that they are ready and able to act to protect the health, safety and wellbeing of their clients and staff. They must also be able to identify and address any implications for ongoing service delivery that arise during an emergency.

## Service provider emergency planning responsibilities

All services in scope for this policy must:

* **at all times** ‒ have an appropriate emergency management plan in place tailored to the service type, location and client need.
* **by 1 November each year** ‒ review emergency management plans to prepare for summer when emergency risks are traditionally heightened.
* **by 30 November each year** ‒ report (attest) to the department that they are prepared for a range of emergencies

Emergency management plans may differ depending on the service provided and service providers’ responsibilities. For example, a service provider landlord’s responsibility will be different to a service provider that operates from that premises.

## Emergency management plans

An emergency management plan records a service provider’s emergency management arrangements. It also directs management, staff, clients, and others on what to do before, during and after an emergency.

At a minimum, emergency management plans must:

* reflect the location, physical environment, client, and staff profile, and other relevant factors
* describe the planned responses for different types of emergencies such as altering or ceasing services, relocation of the service, sheltering and evacuation
* have clear triggers for activation and deactivation, including processes for maintaining situational awareness and sourcing accurate, up-to-date information (such as the VicEmergency mobile app, Bureau of Meteorology weather)
* be tailored to the needs of communities and clients, including First Nations Peoples and multicultural and multifaith communities, to include a culturally safe, inclusive, self-determined and responsive approach
* include agreed emergency management roles and responsibilities, including shared responsibilities, clear lines of authority for decision making and communication arrangements
* wherever possible, have input from clients and communities into the emergency plans that are designed to protect them or their service
* be reviewed, exercised, and updated regularly.

Recent emergencies during the high-risk emergency season highlight the need for service providers to develop and implement an emergency management plan that encompasses all hazards, not just bushfire or grassfire, to effectively respond to emergencies and protect the welfare of all clients.

Further information on how to develop and review emergency management plans can be found in the *Planning for emergencies* reference guide and *Emergency Management Plan Template,* available on the [[**Service Providers’ Emergency Management**](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management)webpage](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management) https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management.

## Australian Fire Danger Rating System

The Australian Fire Danger Rating System (AFDRS) tells how dangerous a fire could be if one started. The higher the rating the more dangerous the fire conditions. Fire danger ratings feature in **weather forecasts** during the fire season and include four rating levels, each with a message to encourage people to take action to protect themselves and others from bushfire risk.

The AFDRS levels are as follows:

* Moderate: Plan and prepare
* High: Prepare to act
* Extreme: Take action now to protect your life and property
* Catastrophic: For your survival, leave bushfire risk areas

Figure 1 Australian Fire Danger Rating System

**Note:** The white bar under ‘Moderate’ is provided for days where no proactive action is required by a community. This does not mean that fires cannot happen, but that any fires that start are not likely to move or act in a way that threatens the safety of the community.

More information on the AFDRS and how to assess bushfire risk can be found in the *Preparing for emergencies: a reference guide for the social services sector*, available on the [[**Service Providers’ Emergency Management**](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management) **webpage**](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management) https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management.

### Catastrophic and Extreme fire danger rating days

A Catastrophic fire danger day is the highest fire danger rating in Victoria. These are the most dangerous conditions for a fire. If a fire starts and takes hold, lives are likely to be lost.

If a Catastrophic fire danger day is forecast, leave bushfire risk areas. Your life and the lives of the clients and staff within your facility may depend on decisions you make, even before there is a fire. Buildings cannot withstand fires in these conditions. You may not be able to leave later, and help may not be available.

**Note:** Victorian service providers whose emergency management plans, and Bushfire Survival Plans include ceasing or relocating on a forecasted Extreme or Catastrophic fire danger day **must enact these plans at 9:00 am the day before the Extreme or Catastrophic fire danger day.**

### Service cessation and relocation triggers

Many services (including residential and home-based care services) located in areas of heightened bushfire risk are required to relocate before a forecast Extreme or Catastrophic fire danger day. These requirements are outlined in section 3. [Service-specific policy requirements](#_Service-specific_policy_requirement_1).

Other service providers may choose to include relocation, changes to the way they deliver services or other Extreme or Catastrophic fire danger day provisions within their emergency management plans.

Service providers should **independently monitor forecasts, fire danger ratings,** and **prepare to enact** their emergency management and bushfire survival plans when required.

Once service providers have begun to enact the service closure or relocation provisions in their emergency management and bushfire survival plans, they must continue to close or relocate regardless of any change in weather or fire danger forecasts.

## Risk assessment

### Identifying and assessing risks

Service providers may be affected by a range of emergencies, with types of risk and consequences associated with each emergency varying based on the type of service, location, setting and demographic of the people who use it (amongst other things).

In identifying and assessing risks, service providers should:

* conduct a risk assessment, considering the location, service type/s and client demographics
* identify specific risks and develop mitigation strategies
* review and update risk assessments regularly.

For example, a service located near an area of native bushland or grassland will need to prepare for specific fire risks and closely monitor fire danger ratings. By contrast, a service located within an urban area may need to place greater emphasis upon preparing for a period of extreme heat or prolonged power outage. Similarly, a facility-based service will need to prepare differently to services delivered in a client’s home.

More information on how to identify and assess risk can be found in the *Preparing for emergencies: a reference guide for the social services sector*, available on the [[**Service Providers’ Emergency Management**](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management)webpage](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management)https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management.

### Emergency risk planning

Emergency management requirements differ depending on the service type, location, and the people who access the service. See [section *3. Service-specific policy requirements*](#_Service-specific_policy_requirement_2) below for more information.

Effective emergency management risk planning is crucial for maintaining the safety and resilience of services, clients, and staff.

Each day all service providers should undertake the following risk planning actions:

* monitor conditions and official sources for warnings
* take action immediately if a fire starts near you
* adhere to local regulations governing fire activity.

The section below includes but is not limited to specific risks and the necessary planning measures to mitigate these risks.

#### Bushfire and grassfire risks

Victoria is one of the most fire-prone areas in the world. Services located in areas of heightened bushfire or grassfire risk across the state should undertake additional emergency management planning.

Bushfire-specific planning should include:

* a separate bushfire survival plan which details early relocation triggers, a safe relocation destination, transport, and relocation processes and procedures
* a site inspection to identify required site preparation and maintenance, including minimising flammable materials
* a schedule to prepare and maintain the site
* a plan to relocate the day before a forecast Catastrophic or Extreme fire danger day
* staff bushfire survival training that covers:
	+ understanding fire danger ratings and what they mean for your service
	+ identifying your fire district and monitoring conditions and official sources for warnings
	+ how to relocate or evacuate safely.

Foster and kinship care should have a *Bushfire Leave Early Plan* in place (see [section 3.3 Residential and home-based care services](#_Residential_and_home-based)). This will assist these services to be ready and able to respond if they are threatened by a fire, or if conditions become too dangerous to continue to operate.

More information on where to access bushfire planning and safety training can be found in the *Preparing for emergencies: a reference guide for the social services sector*, available on the [[**Service Providers’ Emergency Management**](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management)webpage](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management) https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management.

#### Heightened bushfire risks

A client, service or facility may be in an area of heightened bushfire risk when they are located within any or all of the following:

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

**Note:** The VFRR-B is the current process in which representatives from Local Government, fire services, public land managers, utilities and community groups identify assets at risk from bushfire and assess the level of risk to the assets.

VFRR-B ratings include Low, Medium, High, Very High, and Extreme. Properties within an area of heightened bushfire risk (e.g., Extreme) may be required to have a Bushfire Survival Plan or a Bushfire Leave Early Plan as outlined in section 3. [Service-specific policy requirements](#_Service-specific_policy_requirement_1) below.

Bushfire Survival Plans prepared by Homes Victoria’s Fire Services team nominate the relevant triggers for relocation (including relocation the day before a forecast Catastrophic or Extreme fire danger day), through a risk assessment process.

#### Flood risk

Victoria is also prone to flooding, which can significantly impact services, clients, and staff. Services located in areas susceptible to flooding must undertake emergency management planning to mitigate risks.

Planning for floods should include:

* a thorough risk assessment to identify flood risks specific to the location, including historical flood data and potential sources of flooding such as rivers, creeks, storm surges, using Victoria State Emergency Service (VICSES)/local government authority flood maps for information
* clear triggers for early relocation based on flood forecasts and warnings (on the Vic Emergency mobile app or website)
* a plan for transportation and safe relocation
* regularly site inspection to identify necessary preparations and maintenance to mitigate flood risks, such as proper drainage
* measures to prepare the site, such as elevating critical infrastructure and furniture, securing hazardous materials, and installing flood barriers or sandbags
* staff training that covers flood risk awareness and emergency procedures, such as:
	+ understanding flood warnings and their implications for service operations
	+ monitoring conditions and official sources for flood warnings and updates
	+ enacting relocation plans efficiently and effectively.

More information on how to access flood risk planning can be found in *Preparing for emergencies: a reference guide for the social services sector*, available on the [**Service Providers’ Emergency Management** webpage](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management) https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management.

### Anticipating and preparing for emerging risks

Dealing with emerging risks requires planning ahead and taking proactive measures. By identifying potential dangers early, creating suitable plans, advising clients most at risk about emerging risks, and allocating resources, service providers can reduce risks, be better prepared, and strengthen the ability for people most at risk and their organisation to recover from emergencies.

#### Cyber incidents

Any organisation is at high risk of having their systems, networks and data targeted by a cyber-attack.

Organisations hold confidential information on staff and clients that requires protection, such as:

* personal identifiable information (PII) such as contact information; birth date; marriage and family details; passport, driver licence and other government identification numbers; and healthcare data
* financial information and bank account details
* the organisation’s data and intellectual property (competitive intelligence).

With access to PII, cyber attackers can:

* commit identity theft
* access financial information
* steal money
* damage credit
* compromise medical records
* file false insurance claims
* sell personal data for profit
* blackmail victims and hold them to ‘data ransom’
* use the information to launch further attacks.

Funded agencies must apply cyber resilience and online safety practices to reduce risk and protect the organisation and its staff and clients from the effects of cyber-attacks and stolen data.

More information on where to access all hazard planning and safety training can be found in the *Preparing for emergencies: a reference guide for the social services sector*, available on the [**Service Providers’ Emergency Management** webpage](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management) https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management.

# Service-specific policy requirements

This section includes specific policy requirements that apply to individual service types or sectors. In-scope services not listed below must still adhere to the above provisions.

## Disability services

### Department-owned specialist disability accommodation and short-term accommodation and assistance properties

The following specific emergency management responsibilities apply to specialist disability accommodation owned by the department.

The department will, either directly or through a funding or lease arrangement, ensure:

* an annual risk assessment is undertaken on properties located within Bushfire Prone Areas that identifies property maintenance and emergency preparedness work that is required
* the Supported Independent Living provider who provides daily living support to residents is notified of works required to be undertaken by them on the property following the assessment
* the department completes all works for which it is responsible, as is identified through the assessment.

### Supported independent living and short-term accommodation and assistance services funded by the department

Supported independent living and short-term accommodation and assistance services plans must:

* make provisions for early relocation before and evacuation during emergencies
* include a plan for ceasing, relocating, or altering services during an emergency, and for resuming services afterwards
* plan to continue to meet individual resident needs and requirements
* review and exercise emergency management plans annually.

Emergency management planning for supported independent living and short-term accommodation and assistance services located in areas of heightened bushfire risk must also include:

* an on-site bushfire risk assessment undertaken by Homes Victoria Bushfire Plan Services that considers client profiles and the vulnerability of the service’s buildings to bushfire
* arrangements for reporting or completing site and building maintenance works identified through the on-site assessment according to property management agreements in place for that site
* a Bushfire Survival Plan which details:
	+ early relocation triggers, including for a forecast Extreme or Catastrophic fire danger day, if required
	+ any site maintenance works prior to the bushfire season
	+ emergency contact details
	+ safer sites to which clients may be relocated
	+ transport arrangements.
* staff bushfire survival training that includes enacting relocation plans.

Supported independent living and short-term accommodation and assistance services must implement their Bushfire Survival Plans when:

* the fire weather district is subject to the service’s Bushfire Survival Plan relocation trigger – either an Extreme fire danger day or a Catastrophic fire danger day.

**Depending in the Bushfire Survival plan relocation trigger, relocation must be completed the day before the forecast Extreme or Catastrophic fire danger day.**

**The department must be notified of client relocations before 9:00 am on the Extreme or Catastrophic fire danger day.**

### Forensic disability residential services

Emergency management planning for forensic disability residential services owned, operated, or funded by the department must also include:

* an annual on-site risk assessment undertaken by the provider that includes emergency preparedness and considers resident profiles and the vulnerability of the service’s buildings
* the assessment will identify property maintenance and emergency preparedness work to be undertaken by all parties
* completion of any site and building works identified through the on-site assessment.

Emergency management plans must also include:

* provisions for early relocation before, and evacuation during emergencies
* plans for continuing to meet individual resident needs and requirements
* Emergency management plans must be reviewed and exercised annually.

Emergency management plans must comply with legislative requirements of particular facilities or residents, and with any obligations on services or facilities because a resident is subject to a court order, for example an order under the [[Serious Offenders Act](https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/serious-offenders-act-2018/006)](https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/serious-offenders-act-2018/008) https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/serious-offenders-act-2018/008.

## In-home and community-based services

In-home and community-based service providers’ emergency management plans must include:

* a plan for ceasing, relocating, or altering services during an emergency and for resuming services after the emergency
* a communication plan to inform clients and staff of any changes to service delivery
* transport to alternative locations to continue to provide the service, if necessary
* contingency planning for clients for whom usual service provision arrangements cannot be delivered during emergencies.

## Residential and home-based care services

This section outlines specific emergency management planning required for home-based carers and residential care service providers. This includes planning and preparing for bushfires and required actions on Catastrophic fire danger days.

### Residential care services

The following specific emergency management responsibilities apply to residential care services including residential out-of-home care and lead tenant services.

* Residential care services’ emergency management plans must prepare for early relocation before, and evacuation during emergencies
* Facility-based services must plan for ceasing, relocating, or altering services during an emergency, including continuing to meet client needs, and for resuming services afterwards.

Residential care and lead tenant services located in areas of heightened bushfire risk must also include:

* an on-site bushfire risk assessment completed by Homes Victoria that considers client profiles and the vulnerability of the service’s buildings to bushfire
* completing any site and building maintenance works identified through the on-site assessment
* a Bushfire Survival Plan which details:
	+ early relocation triggers, including a forecast Extreme or Catastrophic fire danger day, if required
	+ any site works to be undertaken prior to the bushfire season
	+ emergency contact details
	+ safer sites where clients may be relocated
	+ transport arrangements
* staff bushfire survival training that includes relocation processes.

### Home-based care

Specific emergency management responsibilities apply to home-based care (foster care, kinship care and Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care) regardless of whether the child is managed by Child Protection or Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care (ACAC). Carers must:

* have a current Bushfire Leave Early Plan in place
* always relocate any child or young person in their care to a safe location when confronted with an emergency or safety threat
* consider modifying their routine behaviour when emergency warnings, including Heat Health Alerts are in place
* immediately evacuate to a safe place if able to do so, if Victoria Police or the designated control agency recommends evacuating because of an emergency
* notify their service contact as soon as practicable following evacuation.

Bushfire Leave Early Plans **must** include:

* suitable arrangements to relocate ahead of forecasted Catastrophic fire danger days, or when advised to do so by emergency services
* safe destinations that are not in heightened bushfire risk areas, which carers and clients can safely access
* alternative contact details for clients when they are away from their recorded residential address.

Carers **must** review Bushfire Leave Early Plans:

* by 1 November each year, before summer, a high-risk emergency season
* as required between 1 November and 30 April if the carer/supervisor’s Bushfire Leave Early Plan changes
* when a new child is placed with the carer/supervisor between 1 November and 30 April.

A template *Bushfire Leave Early Plan* is available in the *Home-based care emergency management factsheet,* available on the [[**Service Providers’ Emergency Management**](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management)](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management)webpage https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management.

### Residential and home-based care services - Catastrophic fire danger day relocation requirements

Residential and home-based (foster and kinship) care services, including ACAC, must implement their relocation, Bushfire Leave Early or Bushfire Survival Plans when:

* they are located in an area of heightened bushfire risk (i.e., located in a VFRR-B area of ‘Extreme’ bushfire risk, or within a BPA or BMO), and
* the fire weather district is subject to a Catastrophic fire danger day.

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

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

**The department must be notified either by the client’s carer or the relevant agency by 9:00am on the Catastrophic fire danger day.**

A list of operations divisions’ emergency management contacts is in [Appendix 2](#_Appendix_2_–) - DFFH Emergency Management contact numbers for service providers

If the situation requires an alteration from the agreed plans, the department must be notified as soon as practicable.

**Note**:

* Some Bushfire Survival Plans for residential care services also require relocation on Extreme fire danger days.
* When developing Bushfire Survival Plans and Bushfire Leave Early Plans that involve cross-border relocations from Victoria to New South Wales or South Australia, it is important to check the bushfire-prone area risk of the relocation area.

More information on cross-border relocation can be found in the *Preparing for emergencies: a reference guide for the social services sector*, available on the [**Service Providers’ Emergency Management**](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management)webpage https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management.

### Residential and home-based care services ‒ exemption from Catastrophic fire danger day relocation requirements

Residential care services and Supported Independent Living (SIL) providers in department-owned specialist disability accommodation may apply for an exemption from mandatory Catastrophic fire danger day relocation provisions contained within a Bushfire Survival Plan prepared by Homes Victoria’s Fire Services team.

An exemption will only be granted where a service can demonstrate that they are unable to relocate, or relocation will result in a significant negative impact to their clients’ health, safety, or wellbeing.

An application must outline how the service plans to operate safely while staying in place. For example, by reducing the number of people on site. It must also include an evacuation plan that will be implemented should Victoria Police or another emergency service organisation recommend evacuation.

Homes Victoria’s Fire Services team must be consulted before an application is submitted for approval.

Applications will be assessed, and the service notified of the outcome.

No changes to the requirements for providers can be made or agreed to until they get approval.

If an on-site property assessment has not been completed, exemption from relocation will not apply and the service will be required to relocate in response to a forecast Catastrophic fire danger day.

## Social housing and homelessness services

This section outlines specific emergency management planning required for public and community housing, as well as transitional housing, crisis accommodation and funded homelessness services.

### Homes Victoria

The following specific emergency management responsibilities apply to property owned or leased by Homes Victoria (Director of Housing), including public and community housing.

Homes Victoria must:

* complete any site and building maintenance works identified through reports or site inspections
* undertake a fire preparedness inspection for any newly acquired or identified properties.

### Community housing

Specific emergency management responsibilities apply to community and transitional housing.

Emergency management plans must include:

* procedures to ensure providers receive or are advised of VicEmergency alerts
* a plan for forecasted Catastrophic fire danger days
* a schedule to complete any site and building maintenance works identified through reports or site inspections.

Community housing providers are encouraged to:

* involve management, staff, and residents in the development of emergency management plans
* communicate relevant emergency warnings to clients and tenants, where appropriate and practicable.

### Homelessness services, including on-site staffed residential facilities and other client-facing services

Specific emergency management responsibilities apply to crisis accommodation services and funded homelessness services. These include, but are not limited to:

* crisis accommodation (congregate and other)
* youth refuges and youth foyers
* family violence refuge accommodation and other family violence accommodation programs
* permanent supportive housing, assertive outreach, homelessness entry points, day programs and day and night drop-in services, support services and case management support.

Homelessness services’ emergency management plans **must** address:

* any vulnerabilities or special needs of clients and staff
* any risks associated with relocating clients including transport
* the appropriateness of alternative accommodation within community settings
* how any changes to service delivery will be communicated to clients and staff.

Emergency management planning for agencies that operate homelessness services in areas of heightened bushfire risk must have a bushfire emergency management plan, which covers:

* collaborative planning with clients, as part of individual service and risk management planning
* triggers for changes to services on forecasted Catastrophic fire danger days covering what changed operations might look like
* communicating service delivery changes to clients and staff.

# During and after emergencies

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

## Activating your emergency management plan

Service providers are responsible for activating their emergency management or relocation plans immediately when they become aware of a risk or actual emergency, including a forecasted Catastrophic fire danger day.

**Do not wait for notification or advice from the department or emergency services.**

Services need to continually monitor risks and warnings through local networks, as well as mainstream media, official emergency channels, and maintain regular contact with local emergency service agencies, particularly during high-risk periods. Services must be prepared to act where an emergency may impact on clients or staff.

Emergency services cannot guarantee their support in larger-scale emergencies. This includes Ambulance Victoria, which may not always be able to assist with evacuation.

## Returning to the facility

Service providers should assess local conditions when deciding to return to their facility. This should include local weather conditions, emergency warnings and official communication.

Service providers may consider consulting police, fire, or other emergency services to assess when it is safe to return following an emergency incident. Approval to return to the facility is to be provided by a senior manager, based on the information and advice they receive.

When returning to a facility, service providers must inform the relevant departmental operations divisions’ emergency management contact (refer to Appendix 2) in line with the provisions below.

More information on what to consider when returning to business as usual can be found in the *Preparing for emergencies: a reference guide for the social services sector*, available on the [[**Service Providers’ Emergency Management**](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management)](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management)webpage https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management.

A list of operations divisions’ emergency management contacts can be found at [**Appendix 2** - **DFFH Emergency Management contact numbers for service providers**](#_Appendix_2_–).

## Notifying the department

Service providers must notify the relevant departmental Operations Division (Appendix 2) by phone if an emergency results in changes to service delivery, and again when normal services have resumed.

Notification is required:

* when there is a change to the way services are delivered, including a decision to stop providing services
* when a service is required to relocate, including a relocation required under this policy’s Catastrophic fire danger day provisions
* within five days of services returning to normal operations after an emergency/threat or Catastrophic fire danger day has passed.

If the service or placement has not or is not expected to return to normal within five days of the emergency or Catastrophic fire danger day, the department must be notified by the fifth day, indicating when the service expects to return to normal.

A list of DFFH Operations Divisions’ emergency management contacts can be found at [**Appendix 2 - DFFH Emergency Management contact numbers for service providers**](#_Appendix_2_–).
More information on how to notify the department can be found in the *Preparing for emergencies: a reference guide for the social services sector*, available on the [[**Service Providers’ Emergency Management**](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management)](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management)webpage https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management.

## Sources of emergency information

Information about current and forecasted conditions is available from a variety of media sources, including radio, television, and the internet. Agencies such as the Bureau of Meteorology, the VICSES, fire services and Victoria Police monitor forecast hazards and provide advice and warnings.

**VicEmergency**

[VicEmergency](https://dhhsvicgovau.sharepoint.com/sites/PolicyPrograms-EmergencyManagementBranch/Shared%20Documents/EM%20policy%20and%20reporting/6.%202024%20policy%20and%20reporting%20cycle/Policy%20and%20supporting%20resources/Policy%20and%20supporting%20documents/VicEmergency)https://www.emergency.vic.gov.au

Victoria’s primary information source for incident information and warnings. It is available as a website and mobile app. It displays a real-time map with incidents across Victoria including fires, floods, storms, power outages, hazardous material incidents and traffic incidents. The site also includes information from the Environment Protection Authority and the Chief Health Officer.
The mobile app allows users to create a location-based profile to access official emergency-related warnings and information.

**Bureau of Meteorology**

[Bureau of Meteorology](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/Final%20approved%20documents/Bureau%20of%20Meteorology) (BoM) http://www.bom.gov.au

The website and mobile app has up-to-date information on local weather conditions, including fire weather warnings and public fire danger ratings forecast for four days.

**Country Fire Authority**

[Country Fire Authority](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/Final%20approved%20documents/Country%20Fire%20Authority) (CFA) https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/warnings-restrictions

This website has up-to-date information on local fire danger ratings, total fire bans and forecast Catastrophic fire danger days.

**Australian Broadcasting Corporation**

The [Australian Broadcasting Corporation](https://www.abc.net.au/news/) (ABC) https://www.abc.net.au/news/

The website, radio and mobile app 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

They broadcast emergency warnings and alerts relevant to local areas on a range of frequencies across Victoria.

More information and links to information provided by other agencies is available in the *Preparing for emergencies: a reference guide for the social services sector,* available on the [**Service Providers’ Emergency Management**](https://www.emv.vic.gov.au/responsibilities/victorias-warning-system/emergency-broadcasters/list)webpage https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/emergency-management.

# Annual policy attestation reporting requirements

Agencies that provide services in-scope and are covered by this policy must annually report (attest) to the department that they have:

* reviewed their emergency management plans
* undertaken appropriate risk assessment, preparation, and maintenance to reduce the likelihood and impact of any emergency upon their service, clients, and staff.

Funded and regulated services are required to attest their emergency preparedness annually prior to the high-risk emergency fire season (by 30 November).

To complete the report, agencies must complete the online Emergency Preparedness Attestation form in the Service Agreement Module (SAM). Services can access SAM via the ‘My Agency’ area of the Funded Agency Channel (FAC).

Reporting for directly delivered services will be managed through Operations Divisions.

The department uses the information collected through this process to:

* get an overview of the sector’s emergency preparedness
* develop the emergency management policy, resources, and support
* contribute to the department’s twice yearly attestation reporting process to the Emergency Management Commissioner.

**Please note**: Agencies providing more than one service in-scope of this policy only need to attest to their emergency preparedness once. They are not required to attest for each individual service they deliver.

# Policy review

The department can trigger a review of this policy at any time due to changes in legislative and operational requirements.

The policy owner (see section 6.1 below for details) is responsible for reviews of this policy.

Changes will be issued as a complete replacement document with a new version number.

Recipients should remove superseded versions from circulation and refer to the current version of the policy.

## Document version control

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Field | Information |
| **Document name** | Social services sector emergency management policy |
| **Document status** | Version 6.0 |
| **Policy owner** | Policy and Programs, Emergency Management Branch |
| **Authorised by** | Operational Strategy and Performance Subcommittee  |
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| **Distribution** | Emergency Management Branch, funded social services sector |

## Change history

| Version  | Document Name | Issue date | Document Owner | Changes |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| 1.0 | *Health and human services sector emergency management policy*  | July 2019 | Emergency Management Branch, DHHS | Align policy with the change of regulatory and funding arrangements for disability services as a result of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) transition.  |
| 2.0 | *Social services sector emergency management policy*  | November 2021 | Emergency Management Branch, DFFH  | Complete review of policy due to 2021 MoG, separating DHHS to DFFH and DH.  |
| 3.0 | *Social services sector emergency management policy* | September 2022 | Emergency Management Branch, DFFH | Align policy with changes to the AFDRS, responsible agency to declare a Catastrophic fire danger day and triggers to relocate under the policy.  |
| 4.0 | *Social services sector emergency management policy* | August 2023 | Emergency Management Branch, DFFH | Policy updates reflecting changes implemented following the October 2022 flood event, as well as approaches in Victoria to shared responsibility for people most at risk and person-centred emergency preparedness.  |
| 5.0 | *Social services sector emergency management policy* | July 2024 | Emergency Management Branch, DFFH | Policy updates reflecting the *After-Action review report Social service sector emergency management policy V4.0* |
| 6.0 | *Social services sector emergency management policy* | July 2025 | Emergency Management Branch, DFFH | Policy updates reflecting outcomes of the 2024-2025 policy review. |

# Appendix 1 – Glossary

The terms below have specific meaning in the context of this policy.

**Aboriginal Children in Aboriginal Care (ACAC)** – a program for Aboriginal children and families involved with the child protection system where authorised Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations provide vital child safety services.

**Bushfire Management Overlay (BMO)** – a designation that signifies a heightened bushfire risk. Service providers with services operating within a BMO should also assess the need for a bushfire survival plan.

**Bushfire Prone Area (BPA)** – these areas are at higher risk of bushfires. Any service provider or agency with services located within a BPA should have a Bushfire Survival Plan.

**Bushfire Survival Plan** – a plan that includes a tailored response to bushfires. It should include triggers, response strategies and location-specific considerations to maintain client and staff safety. The plan helps a service to prepare for and respond to a bushfire, grassfire, or other conditions where it becomes too dangerous to continue to operate.

**Business continuity plan** – documented information that guides an organisation to respond to a disruption and resume, recover, and restore the delivery of products and services consistent with its business continuity objectives (AS ISO 22301:2020).

**Client/s** – individuals or families who are receiving a service. This includes children and young people in out-of-home care arrangements and residents of residential services.

**Catastrophic fire danger day** – the highest fire danger rating in Victoria. These are the most dangerous conditions for a fire. If a Catastrophic fire danger day is forecast, leave bushfire risk areas. Your life and the lives of the clients and staff within your facility may depend on decisions you make, even before there is a fire. Buildings cannot withstand fires in these conditions. You may not be able to leave, and help may not be available.

**Competitive intelligence** – the collection and analysis of information from multiple sources e.g., research projects.

**Control agency** – the primary or lead organisation responsible for responding to the emergency. For example, VICSES is the control agency for storm and flood events.

**Emergency** – an actual or imminent occurrence of an event which in any way:

* endangers or threatens to endanger the safety or health of any person in Victoria,
* destroys or damages, or threatens to destroy or damage, any property in Victoria,
* endangers or threatens to endanger the environment or an element of the environment in Victoria.

Emergencies may include:

* floods
* storms
* bushfires
* earthquakes
* grassfires
* building or industrial fires
* explosions and accidents
* extreme heat and heatwaves
* health outbreaks, epidemics, and pandemics (such as COVID-19, thunderstorm asthma, influenza, emergency animal disease)
* the contamination of food or water supplies
* disruption to essential services (such as electricity and/or gas, water, or telecommunications networks)
* cyber incidents (such as data breaches and system failures impacting service delivery, clients, and service data)
	+ terrorism threats and other acts of violence impacting the public
	+ windstorms, or another natural event
	+ road accidents or any other accident.

**Emergency management plan** – a plan that addresses a wide range of emergency scenarios and types of emergencies, such as floods, storms, power outages, and cyber incidents. This comprehensive approach ensures that agencies are prepared for any emergency that may arise, not solely bushfires.

**Forecasted Catastrophic fire danger day** – a catastrophic fire danger day forecast by the BoM. The BoM may forecast a Catastrophic fire danger day up to four days in advance of one occurring. Catastrophic fire danger day forecasts may be communicated via mainstream media outlets, during weather forecasts, on the VicEmergency and CFA websites/apps.

**Funded agency** – an organisation that has a formal service agreement with the department for the delivery of health and/or human services.

**Heightened bushfire risk** – a service or facility may be in an area of heightened bushfire risk when it is located within any or all of the following:

* Bushfire Prone Area (BPA)
* Bushfire Management Overlay (BMO)
* 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 with whom a foster carer or kinship carer regularly engages.

**In-home and community-based services** – services provided in the home or in community settings such as personal care, day services, community-based respite, or information and referral services.

**People-centred** – a focus on how one interacts with individuals preparing, responding, and recovering from emergencies. It is about listening and treating people in a way that considers their needs, allows them to make decisions and choices and gives them control over their own preparedness and recovery so they are involved and feel empowered. It is about working together and making sure everyone’s voice matters.

**People at risk** – individuals who face a higher chance of experiencing negative consequences or harm during an emergency. These risks can be related to their safety, health, well-being, knowledge, and connections. It is important to identify and support these individuals because they may not have easy access to advice, support or services that can assist them. By prioritising their needs and providing them with the necessary help, they will be better prepared and protected before, during and after an emergency.

**Residential services** – overnight accommodation services provided in a facility-based setting. For example, residential and lead tenant out-of-home care arrangements, supported independent living, facility-based respite, youth foyers and the Forensic Disability Residential Services.

**Service continuity** – means a client continues to receive a service during and after an emergency and could include the service being delivered from an alternative setting or by an alternative provider.

**Service provider landlord** – responsible for property maintenance, safety, regulatory compliance, and lease management.

**Service provider** – an agency that provides services within the social services sector. A service provider may or may not have a formal service agreement with the department.

**Social housing** – public housing and community housing, including transitional housing and crisis accommodation.

**Strengths-based** – an approach to risk management that identifies and builds on the existing capability of an individual, household, or community to reduce risk.

**Victorian Fire Risk Register – Bushfire (VFRR-B)** – areas which have an 'Extreme' bushfire risk require special attention. Service providers within these areas should develop a Bushfire Survival Plan.

**Well-informed** – for this policy, emergency planning is supported through tailored and culturally appropriate information. This information is delivered through timely, effective, and accessible communication before, during and after emergencies. Communication processes use reliable data, good practice and lessons learned from the experiences across agencies and all levels of government and delivery partners.

# Appendix 2 – DFFH Emergency Management contact numbers for service providers

Operations divisions emergency management contact numbers are not made publicly available. They are dedicated DFFH emergency management lines **only for use by service providers and emergency management agencies**.

If a service provider is required to relocate or evacuate due to an emergency or a declared Catastrophic fire danger day, they must advise department via the relevant contact number below.

### Operations divisions emergency management contact numbers

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Division | Contact number |
| North Division | 1300 080 829 |
| West Division | 1800 780 354 |
| East Division | 1300 576 518 |
| South Division – Gippsland  | 1300 528 951 |
| South Division – Southern Metro | 1800 309 916 |

# Appendix 3 – Policy linkages

## Service agreements requirements for funded services

A service agreement is a legal contract between a government department and a funded organisation for delivery of services in the community on behalf of the department.

The Service Agreement Requirements is a contractual document and outlines the departmental responsibilities and the policies and obligations that all funded organisations must comply with. To meet the terms of the service agreement, funded organisations must ensure they comply with:

* the service agreement
* the standard policies and obligations in the Service Agreement Requirements
* the specific policies and obligations in each relevant activity description.

For more information refer to the [Funded Agency Channel service agreement](https://fac.dffh.vic.gov.au/service-agreement%20for%20more%20information) https://fac.dffh.vic.gov.au/service-agreement.

## State emergency management arrangements

The Victorian Government’s emergency management responsibilities are outlined in the:

* [*Emergency Management Act (1986)*](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/Final%20approved%20documents/Emergency%20Management%20Act%20%281986%29) https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/emergency-management-act-1986/051
* [*Emergency Management Act* (*2013 update)*](https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/emergency-management-act-2013/020)https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/emergency-management-act-2013/020
* [*State Emergency Management Plan*](https://www.emv.vic.gov.au/responsibilities/semp) (SEMP) https://www.emv.vic.gov.au/responsibilities/semp
* [*Social Services Regulation Bill*](https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/social-services-regulation-reform)https://www.dffh.vic.gov.au/social-services-regulation-reform **Note:** The Social Services Regulatory Scheme will come into effect on 1 July 2024.

The department’s role under the SEMP is to reduce the impact emergencies have on the health and wellbeing of Victorian communities and individuals, especially those at greater risk.[[2]](#footnote-2)

This includes providing a policy framework that requires the social services sector to plan and prepare for a broad range of emergencies.

## Business continuity

Service providers are required to have business continuity plans in place to ensure ongoing service provision or communication around suspensions, should their service be disrupted.

This policy assumes service providers have business continuity plans in place. However, there are significant overlaps between emergency management and business continuity planning and the two should be undertaken and reviewed together. It is recommended to keep both digital and hard copies of your business continuity and emergency plan so that it remains accessible during power or system outages.

## Capital Development Guidelines

[*Capital Development Guidelines (series 7)*](https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/capital-development-guidelines-series-7)https://providers.dffh.vic.gov.au/capital-development-guidelines-series-7#

These guidelines outline the department's policy, procedures, and processes to manage fire risk in buildings or facilities that are owned, managed, or funded by the department.

These guidelines are provided for assistance in determining appropriate fire safety measures for department buildings. The guidelines are in addition to any statutory, common law and contractual obligations of owners, occupiers and operators of facilities and buildings.

## Occupational health and safety

Service providers have a duty of care to take reasonable steps to prevent injury to the people who access or work in their services. This extends to taking reasonable steps to identify, assess and manage risks, and reasonable steps to plan, prepare, respond, and recover from an emergency.

These obligations are set out in the [*Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004*](https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/occupational-health-and-safety-act-2004/o37) https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/in-force/acts/occupational-health-and-safety-act-2004/o37 and associated materials.

1. https://www.emv.vic.gov.au/responsibilities/semp [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Emergency Management Victoria, n.d. *Role statement - Department of Families, Fairness and Housing*, https://www.emv.vic.gov.au/responsibilities/semp/roles-and-responsibilities/role-statements/dffh [↑](#footnote-ref-2)