

Bush Fire Policy



Document Title	NQS2.21 Bush Fire Policy	Version	3
Date Approved	October 2024	Date for Review	October 2027
Warning - Ensure you are using the latest version of this policy.			
DCC Network/All Organisation Information/DCC Policies/Quality Area 2 – Childrens Health & Safety			

1. Policy Statement

River Region Early Education is committed to ensuring the safety, health and wellbeing of employees, volunteers, and children attending our education and care services. This includes ensuring that suitable preparations are made to minimise risks associated with bush fire.

2. Rationale

In recognition of bush fire as an inherent risk in Australian rural and regional areas, this policy provides guidance to ensure that bush fire prone areas where services operate are identified, suitable preparations are made to minimise risk of bush fire, and employees and volunteers know how to respond to a bush fire threat or emergency.

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

- *NQS2.25 Water, Sun and Heat Policy*, for information related to the modification or closure of services during extreme heat events, and
- *NQS2.80 Emergency Management and Evacuation Policy*, for information about emergency drills and responding to emergencies.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all employees and volunteers, including students and trainees.

4. Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of the General Manager to:

- Ensure that services that operate in bush fire prone areas complete bush fire preparedness actions prior to the October start of the bush fire danger period each year,
- Support nominated supervisors to complete and implement a bush fire action plan where the bush fire risk to their service is significant or imminent,
- Authorise the cancellation of services during a bush fire emergency or extreme or catastrophic fire danger rating,
- Support nominated supervisors to find education and care options for children in other services where service is cancelled,
- Support nominated supervisors to allocate alternative work for educators where service is cancelled,
- Support nominated supervisors to contact families and for children to be safely collected where service is cancelled,
- Notify the Regulatory Authority where service is cancelled, and
- Provide support to those affected by bush fire emergencies in line with *NQS7.63 Critical Incident Management Plan Policy*.

Bush Fire Policy

It is the responsibility of Nominated Supervisors or Responsible Persons to:

- Complete a bush fire preparedness audit for their service venue(s) prior to the start of the bush fire danger period each year,
- Ensure that fire danger ratings are checked and recorded daily during the bush fire danger period,
- Ensure information on current bush fires in the locality of the service is checked regularly where the fire danger rating is high, extreme or catastrophic,
- Monitor and record air quality ratings where there is visible smoke and/or bush fires in the area and follow NSW Health guidelines to minimise risks for children and workers with respiratory vulnerability,
- Complete and implement a bush fire action plan where the bush fire risk to their service is significant or imminent,
- Monitor and manage fire risks around their service,
- Ensure employees within their service are supported to understand how to minimise fire risk and respond where there is a bush fire threat or emergency, and
- Implement emergency responses as outlined in *NQS2.80K Emergency Management Plan* and *NQS2.80I Emergency Management Procedures* if a bush fire is threatening their service venue.

It is the responsibility of Mobile Service Nominated Supervisor or Responsible Person to:

- Ensure that a copy of the *Bush Fire Procedures* are kept in the truck during the bush fire danger period and all workers are aware of it and its location,
- Check for fires in the vicinity before any person leaves to travel between the Deniliquin centre and the venue to ensure it is safe to travel,
- Notify the General Manager before leaving a service venue and when safely arriving where the bush fire risk is significant or imminent,
- Notify the General Manager where the fire danger rating is extreme or catastrophic,
- Where Mobile Service is cancelled due to fire danger, support educators to complete rostered hours in another service or to complete allocated office tasks, as instructed by the General Manager, and
- Notify families to collect children where the service has been cancelled after service commences.

It is the responsibility of employees and volunteers to:

- Understand how to minimise fire risk and respond where there is a bush fire threat or emergency.

5. Definitions

Bush fire prone area – An area of land that can support a bushfire or is likely to be subject to bushfire attack. Information about bush fire prone areas, including an online mapping tool, are available on the NSW Rural Fire Service website – www.rfs.nsw.gov.au

Bush fire danger period – The NSW statutory Bush Fire Danger Period runs from 1 October – 31 March but can vary due to local conditions.

Fire danger ratings – An indication of the consequences of a fire, if one was to start, and as determined by the NSW Rural Fire Service. Ratings are determined each afternoon for the

following day. If identified as a forecast rating, this is an indication only and should be checked again when the rating is finalised. See www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/fire-information/fdr-and-tobans

6. Guidelines

a) Bush fire preparedness

All services complete *NQS2.21A Bush Fire Preparedness Audit* in the month prior to the start of the bush fire danger period each year. The audit checks:

- Fire risks in and around venues,
- Suitability and maintenance of fire protection equipment,
- Fire danger monitoring, and
- Employee knowledge and understanding.

b) Bush fire monitoring

Up to date information about bush fires in the locality of services can be monitored in the following ways:

- NSW Hazards Near Me and VIC Emergency applications on mobile phone or tablets,
- Bush Fire Information Line – 1800 NSW RFS (1800 679 737),
- NSW Rural Fire Service website – www.rfs.nsw.gov.au, and
- Local radio or television.

c) Air quality and monitoring

Young children are at a higher risk of experiencing respiratory problems caused by exposure to dense smoke. Smoke from bush fires contains fine particles known as PM2.5 which can cause respiratory inflammation and increase the risk of asthma and allergy flare ups if inhaled.

Where PM2.5 levels are increased due to bush fire, NSW Health has the following advice based on the five air quality categories. Sensitive groups include people with asthma, infants and children. See <https://www.airquality.nsw.gov.au/health-advice> for more information.

Up to date information about air quality can be monitored in the following ways:

- AirRater application (recommended by Asthma Australia), or
- NSW Government Air Quality website, including SMS or email updates and alerts – www.airquality.nsw.gov.au

Category	For sensitive groups	Everyone else
Good	No change needed	No change needed
Fair	REDUCE outdoor physical activity if respiratory symptoms develop CONSIDER closing windows and doors Monitor and manage symptoms Seek medical or emergency help if concerned	No change needed
Poor	AVOID outdoor physical activity if respiratory symptoms develop CLOSE windows and doors Monitor and manage symptoms	REDUCE outdoor physical activity if respiratory symptoms develop Monitor and manage symptoms

Category	For sensitive groups	Everyone else
	Seek medical or emergency help if concerned	Seek medical or emergency help if concerned
Very poor	STAY INDOORS as much as possible CLOSE windows and doors RELOCATE if possible Actively monitor and manage symptoms Seek medical or emergency help if concerned	AVOID outdoor physical activity if respiratory symptoms develop CLOSE windows and doors Monitor and manage symptoms Seek medical or emergency help if concerned
Extremely poor	STAY INDOORS and reduce indoor activity CLOSE windows and doors RELOCATE if possible Actively monitor and manage symptoms Seek medical or emergency help if concerned	STAY INDOORS as much as possible CLOSE windows and doors RELOCATE if possible Monitor and manage symptoms Seek medical or emergency help if concerned

d) Bush fire action planning

Services will complete a bush fire action plan using the *NQS2.21B Bush Fire Action Plan* template under the following circumstances where the service is operational:

- The Fire Danger Rating is extreme or catastrophic, OR
- The Fire Danger Rating is high, extreme or catastrophic and there is a fire within 50km of the service that has not been controlled, OR
- A bush fire is directly threatening or affecting a service.

The Bush Fire Action Plan will include planning about what equipment is needed, when to leave, what to do when leaving, and where to go.

The approach of the organisation is that employees should 'leave early' rather than 'stay and defend.'

e) Bush fire prone areas and cancellation of service

The following River Region Early Education services are in bush fire prone areas:

- Deniliquin Mobile Service – Blighty
- Deniliquin Mobile Service – Conargo
- Deniliquin Mobile Service – Pretty Pine
- Deniliquin Mobile Service – Wanganella

Due to increased risks for the Mobile Service, where the Fire Danger Rating is high or above:

- The responsible person will check for fires in the vicinity before any person leaves to travel between the Deniliquin centre and the venue to ensure it is safe to travel, and
- A copy of the Bush Fire Procedures in *NQS2.80I Emergency Management Procedures* will be kept in the truck.

Mobile services will be cancelled if the Fire Danger Rating for the day is extreme or catastrophic or a bush fire is considered to be a significant or imminent threat.

- The procedure for cancellation will be in line with that for cancellation of service due to extreme heat, as outlined in *NQS2.25 Water, Sun and Heat Policy*.

Bush Fire Policy

- Cancellation of service is approved and managed by the General Manager.
- The service may be relocated to Deniliquin Preschool facilities if they are available with excursion procedures implemented as per *NQS2.90 Excursion Policy* and Mobile fees applied,
- Individual children may be able to access casual vacancies at Deniliquin Childcare if they are available, and
- Educators can complete office duties or work in other services, as directed by the General Manager, Nominated Supervisor or Responsible Person.

7. Relevant Legislation, Regulations and Standards

Legislation	
Education and Care Services National Regulation	
97	Emergency and evacuation procedures
98	Telephone or other communication equipment
National Quality Standards	
2.2.1	At all times, reasonable precautions and adequate supervision ensure children are protected from harm and hazard.
2.2.2	Plans to effectively manage incidents and emergencies are developed in consultation with relevant authorities, practised and implemented.
7.1.2	Systems are in place to manage risk and enable the effective management and operation of a quality service.
Child Safe Standards	
1	Child safety is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture
3	Families and communities are informed and involved
7	Staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children safe, through continual education and training
10	Policies and procedures document how the organisation is child safe
Early Years Learning Framework Learning Outcomes	
Early Years Learning Framework Principles	
	Critical reflection and ongoing professional learning
	Collaborative leadership and teamwork
Early Years Learning Framework Practices	

8. Related Documents

Doc #	Attachments
NQS2.21A	Bush Fire Preparedness Audit
NQS2.21B	Bush Fire Action Plan Template
NQS2.21C	Fire Danger Ratings Fact Sheet
NQS2.21D	Bush Fire Procedures

Doc #	Intersections with other key documents
NQS2.80	Emergency Management and Evacuation Policy
NQS2.80I	Emergency Management Procedures
NQS2.80K	Emergency Management Plan
NQS3.20D	Daily Safety Checklists
NQS2.25	Water, Sun and Heat Policy
NQS7.63	Critical Incident Management Plan Policy
NQS2.90	Excursion Policy

9. Document Control

Doc #	Doc Title	Version	Approved	Next Review
NQS2.21	Bush Fire Policy		October 2019	October 2021
NQS2.21	Bush Fire Policy	2	October 2021	October 2024
NQS2.21	Bush Fire Policy (minor changes due to name change and new policy document format)	2a	January 2024	October 2024
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