



# Scouts Australia (SA Branch) Policy Statement Catastrophic Fire Danger Rating

## 1 BACKGROUND

The South Australian Country Fire Service (CFS) Fire Danger Rating system comprises six 'Fire Danger Ratings' (FDR), ranging from "Low-Moderate" through to "Catastrophic". The CFS fact sheet reflecting the FDR and the actions required under the six ratings is attached. The FDR is forecast by the Bureau of Meteorology after 4pm each day and is an early indicator of the potential danger should a bushfire occur. The advisory will attempt to provide time to react to the conditions considered to be most likely the next day (the advisory can be located at [https://www.cfs.sa.gov.au/site/bans\\_and\\_ratings.jsp](https://www.cfs.sa.gov.au/site/bans_and_ratings.jsp))

***Importantly, the DFR is NOT a 'predictor' of how likely a bushfire is to occur, but it IS an indicator of how dangerous it could be, if a fire did occur.***

The FDR level is not tied solely to temperature. The ratings are derived by assessing and forecasting the combination of temperature, relative humidity, wind speed, vegetation and drought factors at the time. Importantly, the system introduces the Rating of CATASTROPHIC as follows:

**ACTION: For your survival, leaving is the best option.**

- Fires will be uncontrollable, unpredictable and fast moving. Significant firefighting resources and cooler conditions will be required to bring the fire under control.
- Homes are not designed or constructed to withstand fires in these conditions.
- Spot fires will start well ahead of the main fire and cause rapid spread of the fire. Embers will come from many directions.
- The safest place to be is away from bushfire prone areas.

Of course, the FDR warning may be escalated or decreased at any time as the situation and/or conditions worsen or ease. The 'after 4pm' advisory will attempt to provide time to react to the conditions considered to be most likely the next day (the advisory can be located at [https://www.cfs.sa.gov.au/site/bans\\_and\\_ratings.jsp](https://www.cfs.sa.gov.au/site/bans_and_ratings.jsp)).

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Clearly, given the above ramifications of a fire occurring during a period designated as a 'Catastrophic' Fire Danger Rating, it is advisable that no youth members, leaders or helpers be in the path of or area declared to be a Catastrophic Fire Danger area in any 'Scouting' capacity.

## 2 Policy Statement

Scouts Australia (SA Branch) has determined that for the periods and geographic areas where a FDR of 'Catastrophic' has been announced, all 'Scouting' activities, including business operations, will effectively close. This means that:

**2.1** On an advisory of 'Catastrophic' being issued for an area after 4pm, no individual or collective Scouting activity is to be undertaken from that time in the area concerned, until the rating has eased. Obviously, there will be preceding conditions leading to an announcement of a 'Catastrophic' warning.

**2.2** On the advisory reaching the level of 'Catastrophic' at any time, individual or collective Scouting activity is to cease in the area concerned until the rating has eased. This is also the 'prompt' for parents to collect youth members (if travel is allowed) immediately (or as soon as possible) from Scouting premises or campsites. In the camping situation, Scout Leaders may evacuate youth members (dependent on prearranged contingency planning and the arrangements for the particular camp) from the danger area. In the case where an external client (eg, Education Department) is camped at one of our properties, their own 'Catastrophic' policy will usually dictate that they evacuate. Where this is not the case, the client is to be invited to evacuate – call forward buses etc. When a 'Catastrophic' level is announced, and an external or internal hirer is camping/accommodated for consecutive days, negotiation and 'common sense' is to apply. After saying this, it is MOST preferable for the client to evacuate (see para 1). Clients (including Scouts) may be able to leave the area/site for the day (or for the period of warning) and return when the level has eased. For all clients, buses may be able to be brought forward and placed on standby for the duration of warning (to be used immediately a fire occurs – the size of each group for this option to apply is not to exceed one bus). In these situations, should the warning last for more than one day, the client is to be invited to evacuate. Where clients are reliant on transport services

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for arrival, it is their responsibility to have an alternate contingency for their departure (this is to be discussed during the taking of bookings during the fire season).

**NOTE: A last minute evacuation is extremely perilous. CFS experience has shown that last minute evacuations can result in vehicles crashing in thick smoke and egress can be blocked by falling trees or the fire itself. Vehicles may be impacted by smoke and extreme radiant heat resulting in death and injury.**

**2.3** In the case of a major Scout event (Jamboree etc), event organisers and the State and Local Authorities will have conducted close liaison in the planning and conduct of the event. The ‘Catastrophic’ (and other) levels of Fire Danger Rating are to be specifically considered and addressed in the risk management planning for all major Scout events (500 persons +). These specific contingency plans (including emergency evacuation where applicable) for major events developed in conjunction with the State and Local authorities are to apply over and above this policy statement.

**2.4** staff and volunteer managers of Scout campsites and businesses in areas over which a level of ‘Catastrophic’ fire danger is advised are to remain in place to manage the situation and provide advice and assistance to scouts and other clients to evacuate. This is the 1st priority for management. Once this has been achieved, staff and volunteer management are subject to the advisories from the State and Local authorities at the time. That is, if and when local residents are advised to evacuate, staff and volunteer managers (and their staff) are also to evacuate.

### **3 GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

Although the above Policy is quite specific in terms of the actions Scouts Australia (SA Branch) requires, it is acknowledged that a Policy cannot take into account every scenario imaginable. Where doubt exists, the following overarching principles are to be followed:

**3.1** Youth members, adults and all clients should leave the area as soon and as safely possible. CFS experience has shown that leaving late, is the main contributor to the very worst of outcomes. The general philosophy for preparing for “Catastrophic” periods is to leave early – the evening or morning before the “Catastrophic” weather starts.

**3.2** The operational ‘direction’ of State and Local emergency authorities (CFS, POLICE, SAMFS & SES) overrides all other considerations, including this policy, where any conflict

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exists. The flexibility referred to, in allowing buses to come forward and placing them on standby for activity centre bookings (effectively enabling a level of 'risk management') is to be exercised by the Manager of the property (volunteer or paid manager) in close conjunction with CFS guidance at the time.

**3.3** A FDR of 'Severe' and 'Extreme' is also a situation where a fire may ignite and grow very quickly. All Scouts Australia (SA Branch) members - volunteers, youth and staff are to adhere to the restrictions and fire bans that accompany each fire rating at all times.

**3.4** This policy is set by the Branch Executive Committee (BEC) and forms part of the Scouts Australia (SA Branch) Risk Management System. As such, it is included in the Branch 'Risk Register'. Amendments to this Policy are authorised only through BEC approval and will be promulgated by the Branch CEO as required.

By Authority  
Scouts Australia (SA Branch)  
Branch Executive Committee  
February 2013

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