



Bushfire Risk Assessments and School Closures

All Victorian schools and early childhood centres are required to adopt a Risk Assessment and Categorisation Process that determines their bushfire risk. This process involves consideration of multiple factors unique to each site:

BAL	Bushfire Attack Level	The method for rating the intensity of a site's potential exposure to a bushfire.
BARR	Bushfire At Risk Register	The official annually updated list of schools and early childcare centres in Victoria that are assessed as being at the highest risk of bushfire.
SIP	Shelter In Place	A temporary shelter for staff and students from a potential or actual bushfire, which can be secured from the outside at times when it is safer to shelter indoors

The above factors, coupled with the Local Government Area (LGA) location of a school, determine the precautionary actions taken in response to **Extreme** or **Catastrophic** Fire Danger Rating (FDR) days.

What is the Bushfire At Risk Register (BARR) and is my school on this list?

The BARR is jointly managed by the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) and the Victorian Department of Education. It came about following recommendations of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission and is reputed to be the most sophisticated bushfire risk assessment and categorisation process in the state and likely the country. The CSIRO developed and utilises the *Victorian Education Facilities Fire Risk Methodology* to analyse school locations.

This methodology considers:

- if the school is located within a bushfire prone area
- the terrain, fuel load, vegetation proximity (ie set back of the buildings from trees) and type
- if the school has a suitable Shelter-in-Place (SIP) building and viable evacuation and egress routes

Categories of 0 to 6 are assigned to schools, based on their risk:

Categories 0-3: Significant risk

These schools are listed on the [Bushfire At-Risk Register \(BARR\) | vic.gov.au](https://www.vic.gov.au/bushfire-at-risk-register)

*Schools categorised as 0, 1 or 2 are required to close on **Extreme** Fire Danger Rated days.*

*Some Category 3 MACS schools are also required to close on **Extreme** days.*

*All 0, 1, 2 and 3 schools must close on **Catastrophic** days.*

Category 4: Some risk

These schools are listed on the Category 4 List: [Schools and early childhood services at risk of grassfire - Category 4 | vic.gov.au](https://www.vic.gov.au/schools-and-early-childhood-services-at-risk-of-grassfire-category-4)

*These schools are required to close on **Catastrophic** Fire Danger Rated days.*

Categories 5-6: Low risk

*These schools are **not** required to close on **Extreme** or **Catastrophic** Fire Danger Rated days.*



Why does my school need to close?

- MACS applies the same formula as the Department of Education to enact pre-emptive school closures and relocation plans, on **Extreme** or **Catastrophic** rated days.
- Fire Danger Ratings (FDRs) issued by the Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) are used as a trigger for school closures and other precautionary measures ahead of an elevated fire danger day.
- These actions align with the requirements for school registration set by the Victorian Registration and Qualifications Authority (VRQA).
- BoM LGA data is issued twice daily during the summer period (October to April) to the Department of Education and education partners, to provide a more exact measure within the larger district footprint.
- The use of this data to enact pre-emptive school closures is backed at the Cabinet level of the Victorian State Government.

When will my school need to close?

- When an **Extreme** fire danger rating day is forecast for a local government area, schools rated 0-2 on the BARR close.
- **Select MACS Category 3 schools are also required to close at Extreme**, depending on their BAL rating and SIP categorisation.
- This was a management decision made in 2025, made in consultation with the Department of Education and in the interest of staff and student safety.
- All schools on the BARR (0-3) and the Category 4 list close when a **Catastrophic** fire danger rating day is forecast in their fire weather district.
- All school bus routes that travel in or through a district with Catastrophic fire danger must also be cancelled, except for specific routes in Central fire weather district that operate only in inner metropolitan Melbourne.

Why does my school need to close when the school nearby is open?

Each school site has a unique BARR, BAL and SIP categorisation that impacts its requirement to close. These are all inter-related but form part of the 'whole of risk' assessment required for bushfire:

- The BARR relies on the assumption that every school has a SIP onsite.
- The SIP requirements are informed by the BAL (ie. The higher the BAL, the more onerous the SIP standards).
- The BAL rating of two properties in the same area may differ from each other based on vegetation, terrain and other risk factors.
- Whilst the BARR is the pre-emptive component of bushfire risk planning, the SIP is the responsive component (ie. backstop in the instance it is too late to leave). The SIP is a critical safety measure and factor in the 'whole of risk' assessment.
- In accordance with revised 2025 VRQA Guidelines requiring strengthened SIP assessment and compliance, schools are actively working to achieve more robust SIP arrangements.



Why is the LGA forecast used to enact pre-emptive school closures at Extreme FDR?

- When the Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) provides public fire danger rating forecasts, only fire weather district ratings are communicated. In Victoria, there are 9 fire weather districts, which include numerous Local Government Areas (LGAs).
- LGA forecasts are a subset of the weather district ratings. They are provided to emergency services and government departments to support planning and operational activities. **These are shared with MACS but are not issued publicly.**
- The rationale for this is that the Victorian fire weather districts are large and the fire risk may be higher for one LGA than another.
- It is also recognised that a school community requires greater time to evacuate in the instance of an approaching bushfire and is a more vulnerable cohort, amongst other reasons.

How do MACS schools keep parents informed of elevated fire danger days?

- MACS closely monitors the BoM FDR and notifies School Principals in the instance that school closure is required. **Whilst we aim to provide as much advance notice as possible, weather forecasts can change at short notice and late notice may be unavoidable.**
- Schools will notify staff, parents/carers and third parties utilising school premises when fire danger ratings or imminent bushfire risk affects normal operations. Alternative arrangements may need to be made for camps and excursions.
- The type of communication will depend on the school's circumstances and the amount of time received from the BoM (in the instance of an Extreme or Catastrophic FDR) or VicEmergency (for times when a warning is issued).
- Of course, immediate school closure applies if there is a bushfire or grassfire in the vicinity of a school and in this instance, the FDRs are irrelevant and schools follow emergency warnings.
- Families are encouraged to enact their own bushfire survival plan, monitor the VicEmergency App and emergency radio stations, and follow the advice of emergency services, when required.

