Preparing for bushfires

Lesson: Know the risks

Overview

**Curriculum levels:** 7 and 8

**Time:** 50 minutes (approximately)

**Links to the Victorian Curriculum F–10:**

Geography, Years 7 and 8

Geographical Concepts and Skills

Identify, analyse and explain spatial distributions and patterns and identify and explain their implications [(VCGGC100)](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCGGC100)

Collect and record relevant geographical data and information from useful primary and secondary sources, using ethical protocols [(VCGGC102)](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCGGC102)

Geographical Knowledge

Different types of landscapes and their distinctive landform features [(VCGGK116)](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCGGK116)

Causes of a geomorphological hazard and its impacts on places and human responses to it to minimise harmful effects on places in the future [(VCGGK121)](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCGGK121)

Personal and Social Capability, Levels 7 and 8

Self-Awareness and Management

Discuss the range of strategies that could be used to cope with difficult tasks or changing situations [(VCPSCSE036)](https://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/Curriculum/ContentDescription/VCPSCSE036)

**Learning intention:**

This lesson explores what the risks of bushfires are, who is affected, and how – by knowing the risks – everyone can be prepared to face them.

**Suggested resources:**

* Online resources such as the following images from the [Resources](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/foundation-10/crosscurriculumresources/bushfireeductation/Pages/Resources.aspx) section of the VCAA Bushfire Education webpages:
* Topography – houses in the suburbs
* Topography – houses on the coast
* Topography – house on a farm
* Topography – suburban homes close together
* Topography – home among big trees
* Topography – home amongst trees and ferns
* Topography – rural home
* Topography – home in the bush

Activities

Starting

Refer to the [Fire Danger Ratings](https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/warnings-restrictions/total-fire-bans-and-ratings/about-fire-danger-ratings) and discuss what Severe, Extreme and Code Red ratings mean for individuals and communities.

Pose the following questions:

* Which factors generally increase the risk of bushfire?
* How do we assess the risk in our own particular situations?

Use students’ responses to delve deeper into why these factors increase the risk of bushfire.

Exploring

Case studies

During the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires, many residents thought that they were safe because they were in a town. Have students study the following extracts of transcripts from the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission. These extracts express local residents’ views on their risks and preparations for bushfire:

* Jillian Kane, Bendigo (Paragraphs 4–6)
* Anna Macgowan, Bendigo (Paragraphs 4–7)
* Sue Exell, Haven (Paragraphs 5 and 6)
* Professor Ed Cherry, Marysville (Paragraphs 7 and 11)
* David O'Halloran, Flowerdale (Paragraphs 7–10)

Note: Witness statements from the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission final report can be accessed via [the archived version of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission webpages](https://webarchive.nla.gov.au/awa/20100927012906/http%3A/pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/96781/20100923-0223/vol4.royalcommission.vic.gov.au/indexfa2a.html) held by the National Library of Australia.

Ask students to examine the residents’ reasoning for believing they were safe. What knowledge and assumptions about bushfires underpinned the residents’ way of thinking, in terms of their risks?

**Please note:**All educators need to be aware that there is potential for discomfort or distress among some students when talking, viewing and reading about bushfires. Teachers need to preview, adapt and manage the teaching and learning activities and resources with respect to the particular needs and backgrounds of their students. For more information and support, see the Department of Education and Training’s [Supporting children and young people with distressing events](https://www.education.vic.gov.au/school/teachers/health/mentalhealth/Pages/publicincident.aspx).

**Applying a risk assessment**

Have students relate factors that influence bushfires (such as climate, weather, fuel and topography) to the area in which they live or holiday in summer. Ask them to assess the area’s bushfire risk by giving it a rating on a scale of one (negligible risk) to five (very high risk). Have them discuss their ratings with the class and explain why they rated the area’s risk as they did.

Ask students to review images that show homes in different vegetation settings (see images on the [Resources](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/foundation-10/crosscurriculumresources/bushfireeductation/Pages/Resources.aspx) section of the VCAA Bushfire Education webpages). Alternatively, have students bring photographs of their homes and the surrounding vegetation, or photographs of natural areas near their homes. If appropriate, students could create photographs of the school’s vegetation environment. Ask students to use the images from the [Resources](https://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/curriculum/foundation-10/crosscurriculumresources/bushfireeductation/Pages/Resources.aspx) section to classify the vegetation around their homes, the school, or where they holiday. Pose the question, ‘What vegetation best resembles the vegetation in our area, at home, on holiday or at school?’ Ask students to discuss whether the surrounding vegetation is a fire danger.

Bringing it together

Risk assessment

Have students review the ‘Am I at Risk?’ section in the CFA’s [Fire Ready Kit](https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/plan-prepare/before-and-during-a-fire/fire-ready-kit). Ask them to review the factors that create bushfire risks and then study the photographs and assessments of each of the four location scenarios. Ask them to identify which scenario most closely resembles their home or school location. Have students re-evaluate the level of bushfire risk in that location based on the ‘Am I at Risk?’ assessments. Did students’ assessments differ from their original evaluations? If so, why? Have students explain what can happen to that location during a scrub fire, grassfire or bushfire.

Extending

Other bushfire risk scenarios

To emphasise that it is important for everyone to assess their situation on days of high fire risk, have students work in small groups to examine the scenarios below. Ask students to:

* assess the risks for the individuals in the scenarios
* propose advice they might offer in each scenario
* research websites about these regions to assess bushfire risks (see [Great Otway National Park](https://parkweb.vic.gov.au/explore/parks/great-otway-national-park) and the [Grampians National Park](https://parkweb.vic.gov.au/explore/parks/grampians-national-park) on the Parks Victoria website).

**Scenario 1:** You and your family have plans to drive from your home in suburban Melbourne to Lorne along the Great Ocean Road. The night before you are due to leave, you hear on the news that the CFA has upgraded the fire danger rating to Extreme for the central and south-west regions of Victoria. Should you be concerned? What risks might you face? What can you do to minimise the risks and stay safe?

**Scenario 2:** You have decided to go camping for a week in the Grampians (Gariwerd) at the end of January. In planning for your trip, what can you do to maintain a watchful eye on the bushfire risks you might face in that week?

**Scenario 3:**You suffer from seasonal hay fever and asthma during spring and early summer. During that time of year, you usually stay close to the city and away from the country. This year, however, you have been invited to spend Christmas at a relative’s retreat on the Goulburn River, near Mansfield. What can you do to assess your risk of serious bushfire danger?