

GRASSFIRE

Prepare. Act. Survive.



Good people to know.

Grass is the most common bushfire fuel type in Australia. Grasslands cover nearly 75 per cent of the country, ranging from treeless plains, to areas cleared for agriculture or grazing, to open forests with a history of regular burning. Grassfires spread rapidly and can quickly threaten lives and property. If you live in a grassland area you should have a Bushfire Survival Plan to prepare yourself and your property for grassfire.

UNDERSTAND THE RISK

- Grassland includes pasture grass, crops and areas of undisturbed natural grasslands.
- Grassfires tend to produce far fewer embers than forest fires. They spread quickly and are extremely dangerous.
- Grassfires can travel up to 25 kilometres per hour, in extreme circumstances pulsing up to 60 kilometres per hour in open grassland.
- Grassfires tend to be less intense than a forest fire however they can still generate enormous amounts of radiant heat.
- The taller and drier the grass, the more intensely a grassfire will burn. The shorter the grass the lower the flame height and the easier the fire will be to control. Short grass under 10 centimetres is a much lower risk.
- Grassfires can start earlier in the day than forest fires as grass dries out more quickly than forest when temperatures are high.
- Living in a grassland area with dried-out brown or golden-coloured grass that is over 10 centimetres high is a high risk. Some grasses such as Phalaris grass will burn even when green.

PREPARE YOUR PROPERTY

- Make sure you've got adequate levels of insurance for your home, contents, machinery, crops and stock. Call your local WFI area manager to discuss your insurance requirements.
- Check the Fire Danger Rating with your local fire authority. The Fire Danger Rating gives you an indication of the consequences of a fire, if a fire was to start.
- Having well maintained firebreaks mowed, ploughed, slashed or even grazed along fence lines or around your home, shed and storage areas which can slow a fire's spread.
- Have a well maintained area around your home, such as lawns, paths or gardens. Keep the grass cut.
- Seal under floor spaces to stop embers entering under your house.
- Make sure you've got water for firefighting, in case a fire is on your property. Have water tanks filled and connected to a pump.
- Have a diesel pump. Electric pumps won't work during a fire if the power goes out.
- Store things like fuel or woodpiles well away from your house.
- Check the access to your property and ensure cattle grids or bridges can hold the weight of a fire truck.

MACHINERY CAN START FIRES

To help reduce the risk of fires starting or spreading:

- Check with your individual local government to see if any Harvest and Vehicle Movement Bans (which prohibit the use of engines, vehicles, equipment or machinery likely to cause a fire) are in place. It is your responsibility to be aware of any bans in place when you are harvesting or operating a vehicle. Your local ABC radio regularly broadcasts bans during harvesting and bushfire seasons. Local governments may also use additional tools, including recorded messaging services and SMS, to advise you of bans.

- Check machinery is free from any faults and mechanical defects which could start a fire.
- Ensure machinery is fitted with an approved spark arrestor.
- Carry a working water fire extinguisher or knapsack. Ensure that all portable fire extinguishers are serviced in accordance with Australian Standards.
- Limit the use of equipment during hot, dry and windy conditions.

PROTECT YOURSELF

If you are threatened by a grassfire, always protect yourself by covering up all exposed skin with protective clothing like:

- Long-sleeved shirt and pants made from a natural fibre, such as cotton or wool.
- Sturdy boots and woollen socks.
- Tough leather gloves.
- A wide-brimmed hat.
- A face mask or towel to cover your mouth and nose.
- Eye protection, such as smoke goggles.

Even if you take all the possible precautions to prevent fires, losses can still occur, therefore, you should ensure you have the adequate level of insurance protection just in case the unthinkable happens.

If you would like to review your insurance policies or you would like further information about other practical measures you can put in place to reduce the risk of grassfires please contact your WFI local area manager on **1300 934 934** or visit **wfi.com.au**.

Sources:

Country Fire Authority of Victoria (CFA), 2011, Grassfires Fact Sheet <http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/firesafety/bushfire/resources/grassfires.htm>
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Fire and Emergency Services Authority of Western Australia (FESA), 2012, Safe Harvesting Practices - Stay Ahead of Crop Fires <http://www.fesa.wa.gov.au/safetyinformation/fire/bushfire/pages/ruralandfarmfire.aspx#croppfiresafety>
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