Mid North Christian College
Hope in the Living God

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BUSHFIRE POLICY & PROCEDURES

POLICY

Mid North Christian College is not in an extreme area for bushfires; however, the College is at risk of being affected by bushfires due to its surroundings. Therefore, the College needs to be prepared in case of a fire.

Bushfire Preparation

Mid North Christian College has a bushfire policy and procedure to follow during such events. There is also a process in place to ensure that the College bus service has appropriate plans in place in the event of a bushfire affecting their usual routes.

The College practises its emergency procedures throughout the year and before the fire danger season and works hard to ensure that all staff and students understand what to do in the event of a bushfire emergency.

Total Fire Ban Days

During fire danger season, the CFS advises the public of total fire ban days. The rating is forecast by the Bureau of Meteorology each day and is an early indicator of the potential danger should a bushfire start. A fire danger rating is not a predictor of how likely a bushfire is to occur, but how dangerous it could be if it did occur.

There are three classifications of total fire ban – 'Severe', 'Extreme' and 'Catastrophic' – and the College may be required to take special measures on these days to make sure that it is ready to respond to a bushfire threat (see Bushfire Threat Flowchart on page 6).

Monitoring, Triggers, and Escalation

During Fire Danger Season, the College will actively monitor CFS Fire Danger Ratings and official bushfire warnings, including Advice, Watch and Act, and Emergency Warning messages.
Bushfire response actions may be initiated based on:

- escalation of official CFS warnings;
- forecast or declared Extreme or Catastrophic Fire Danger Ratings; and/or
- situational risk assessment, including visible smoke, embers, fire proximity, weather conditions, or advice from emergency services.

The College will not wait for direction from external authorities before enacting emergency procedures where a bushfire threat presents an immediate or foreseeable risk.

During Fire Danger Season, a minimum of two nominated staff members will be responsible for monitoring bushfire conditions, warnings, and fire danger ratings and assessing potential impacts on College operations and student transport.

Catastrophic Fire Days

A Catastrophic Fire Danger Rating indicates the most extreme bushfire conditions and represents a significant risk to life and safety.

On forecast or declared Catastrophic Fire Danger Days, the Principal or delegate is authorised to enact pre-emptive closure or modification of College operations, including suspension of school bus services, cancellation of activities,

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and restriction of site access for staff, students, contractors, visitors, and service providers, based on advice from the Country Fire Service (CFS), fire danger ratings, bushfire warnings, and situational risk assessment.

Where a Catastrophic Fire Danger Rating is declared in advance, the College may close to enable families, staff, and contractors to enact personal bushfire safety plans and to minimise unnecessary travel.

Where a Fire Danger Rating is elevated to Catastrophic during the school day, the Principal or delegate will assess prevailing conditions, official warnings, and local risk factors and determine appropriate actions to ensure the safety of students, staff, contractors, and visitors.

The College will not delay safety-critical decisions while awaiting external authorisation. All actions will prioritise duty of care and the safety of the College community.

School Closures

When the College is required to close, no person is permitted to be on-site. This means that all services, including out of school hours care, and any scheduled activities by private user groups, will also be cancelled.

Notifying Parents/Caregivers

The College will inform parents/caregivers of potential bushfire threats as soon as the information is provided by the CFS. Contact may be made via telephone, text message or through social media and mobile applications.

Parents/caregivers should only take action in relation to official notifications from the College.

School Excursions and Camps

Teachers in the College need to take into consideration risks associated with the fire danger season when planning any excursions or camps. This includes monitoring daily weather conditions to determine if any planned activities will be cancelled due to fire danger ratings and including potential risks in a risk assessment.

If a Catastrophic rating is declared and/or if a bushfire is burning on the day of an intended camp or excursion and is likely to threaten the destination or bus transit route, the excursion or camp must be cancelled.

PROCEDURE

This Bushfire Policy and Procedure is to be read and implemented in conjunction with the College's Emergency Management Plan.

In the event of a bushfire threat or emergency, the Emergency Management Plan provides the overarching incident management structure, roles, communication processes, and response procedures that support the actions outlined in this policy.

In the event of a bushfire emergency

If a bushfire is approaching, the safety of children and other occupants is the highest priority. In these situations, the College will:

- move students to a designated bushfire refuge or another suitable location;

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- close windows and doors, and turn off the air conditioning;
- remain inside with students until the main fire front has passed;
- listen to local radio and monitor the CFS website; and
- liaise with the CFS and Emergency Management Unit to manage the situation and keep informed about changing conditions.

Accessing emergency information

The College will liaise with emergency services such as the CFS website, Alert SA app, Metropolitan Fire Service (MFS), State Emergency Services (SES) and South Australian Police (SAPOL).

School Bus Action Plan

Pre-Bushfire Season Planning

Meet with Bus drivers prior to the start of Term 1 and Term 4 each year to discuss and ensure procedure is understood.

- Pre-plan emergency pull off areas, safe refuge locations, noting that arrangements may change during the fire season.
- Ensure bus folders have current emergency contact details listed.

During Bushfire Season – Bus and Transport Operations

During Fire Danger Season, a minimum of two nominated staff members will be responsible for monitoring Country Fire Service (CFS) Fire Danger Ratings, official bushfire warnings, and incidents via the CFS website and/or Alert SA app, with specific attention to conditions in the Mid North that may impact College transport services.

The Property & Transport Manager and Operations Manager or delegate will undertake routine monitoring of bushfire conditions and incidents that may affect bus routes, with monitoring occurring each morning and afternoon during the bushfire season. In the absence of the Property & Transport Manager or the Operations Manager, monitoring responsibilities will be undertaken by a delegated staff member.

Where a Catastrophic Fire Danger Rating is forecast for the following day, the Principal or delegate will ensure the College website bulletin board and social media platforms are updated by 7.00 pm to notify parents and caregivers if services are cancelled.

Scheduled school bus services will not operate on days of a forecast Catastrophic Fire Danger Rating.
Where a Fire Danger Rating is elevated to Catastrophic during the school day, school bus services will operate unless otherwise determined through risk assessment. In these circumstances, the Property & Transport Manager and Operations Manager or delegate will monitor the CFS website for new incidents from 2.00 pm and hourly thereafter until 6.00 pm, or until all bus services are completed.

If a bushfire is reported in the area during the day, the Property & Transport Manager and Operations Manager or delegate will contact local emergency services (SAPOL and/or CFS) to determine whether roads normally travelled by school buses are closed or affected.

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Any affected bus runs will not depart the College until roads are declared safe by emergency authorities. Parents and caregivers will be notified, and students will remain supervised at the College until bus services resume or students are collected by their parents or caregivers, where it is safe to do so.

Bus drivers must carry a mobile phone at all times. Where repeated calls are received, the driver is to safely pull off the road and respond, as the call may contain critical information.

If, during a bus run, a bushfire is observed and there is concern it may affect the route ahead, the bus driver has the authority to abandon the bus run and return to the College or, where safer to do so, proceed to a pre-planned emergency pull-off area and enact emergency procedures on the bus. The driver must then contact the College by mobile phone and advise the Property & Transport Manager and Operations Manager or delegate of the decision taken.

If a bus is unexpectedly overtaken by a fire and threatened by flame, ash, embers, or thick smoke, the driver is to pull off the road in an open area with no overhanging trees and minimal roadside vegetation, activate headlights and hazard lights, close all windows and air vents, turn off the air conditioner, and leave the engine running.

The bus driver is to instruct students to get down as low as possible on the floor and, when safe to do so, contact the College to advise the Property & Transport Manager and Operations Manager or delegate of the situation.

Once the fire front has passed, the driver is to keep students calm and reassured, assess the bus for damage (using the fire extinguisher if required to extinguish smouldering embers), and determine whether it is safer to relocate students away from burning vegetation or to drive away from the area.

The driver must contact the College, with the Property & Transport Manager and Operations Manager or delegate responsible for keeping the Principal informed of developments.

Under no circumstances is a bus driver or staff member expected to place themselves at further risk to protect school property, including the bus. The safety of students, passengers, and the bus driver is paramount.

Expectations

In case of a bushfire, parents will be advised to keep their children at home through email, social media, and other sources of communications available. If students are at the College, parents will be contacted to come and collect them immediately if it is safe for them to do so.

The College considers the needs of all students, staff, and site users when planning for bushfire and other emergency responses.

Emergency procedures are designed to ensure appropriate supervision, support, and assistance are provided to any individual who may require additional help during an emergency, based on the circumstances at the time.

Where specific needs are identified, the College will implement suitable arrangements to ensure safety and duty of care obligations are met.

Staff will be instructed to leave the College premises immediately after all students

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have been collected.

Reducing Fuel Around the College

- Long grass and dense scrub are trimmed back regularly. Dead material is removed.
- Rubbish is removed frequently.
- Gutters are checked regularly for leaves and other combustible material.
- Fences are non-combustible.

Water

- The College has independent hydrant water supplies.
- Fire hoses and extinguishers are available throughout the College.
- Fire hydrants are in the Middle courtyard between the Staff Room and Science Laboratories and the bus parking bay behind the language building.

On the day the bushfire threatens

- Keep updated with bushfire information.
- Leave early if possible – triggers to go.
- Close all doors, windows and shutters.
- Listen to the radio, check the SA government website or local police for updates.
- In the event of an emergency evacuation refer to the emergency evacuation procedure.
- If the muster point is deemed unsafe, the College may be directed by the CFS.

Notes

- The plan is reviewed regularly.
- Students and Staff are prepared through discussions about what to do during an emergency.
- Equipment is checked regularly.

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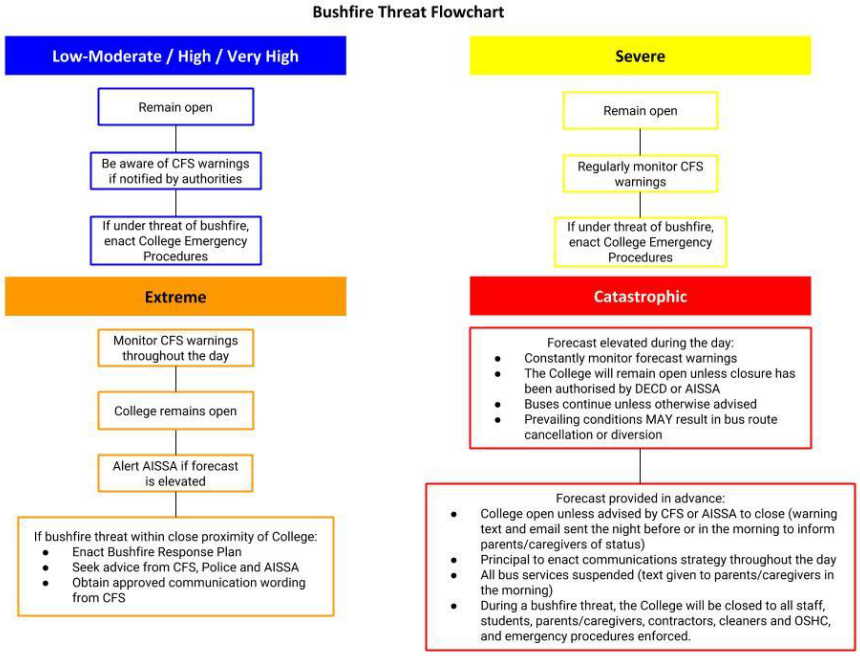
Bushfire Action Plan



Policy Reviewer: Principal
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