

# **BUSH FIRE SURVIVAL**

Within West Australia the bush fire danger period is from the 1st of October until the 31st of March. This may vary according to conditions.

## **Total Fire Ban**

During a total fire ban no fires are to be lit in open spaces. This includes incinerators and BBQ's which burn solid fuels, eg; wood or charcoal.

## **Fire survival measures**

Radiated heat can kill you if you are unprotected from an intense fire burning in heavy fuels or caught in front of a fast moving fire. Fire intensity is affected by the amount and type of fuel available to the fire, and is greatest at the head of the fire.

Radiant heat travels in straight lines. You can protect yourself by having a barrier between you and the fire.

Use any means that will shield you from radiant heat. Some of the best ways are:

- Cover all exposed skin with materials made from natural fibre (e.g. wool, drill cotton). Synthetic materials burn easily and should be avoided except as a last resort
- Find refuge in a vehicle that is parked away from heavy fuels, in a house, behind logs or rocks, in holes made by fallen trees, or in deep wheel ruts.
- Dig a hole or a trench if the soil is soft.
- The air is fresher near to ground.

## **Survival in a vehicle**

Should you be in a vehicle and trapped in a bushfire, the vehicle offers you the best chance of survival, provided you follow these basic rules:

- Don't panic
- Don't attempt to drive through dense smoke
- Select an area on which to park the vehicle that has the least amount of flash fuels (leaves and small branches which burn quickly and intensely). Where possible use road cuttings, large logs or similar objects to protect the vehicle from the oncoming fire. This will also provide you with extra protection against radiant heat
- Use any available time to remove flash fuels from the immediate vicinity of the vehicle, but do not exhaust yourself in doing so
- Do not attempt to back burn or burn down-wind
- Turn the hazard lights on, and keep the motor running to avoid vapour lock
- Ensure all windows, doors and vents are shut to keep out smoke, heat and burning embers.

Set the air-conditioning to recycle

- Remain outside the vehicle for as long as possible, using it as protection
- When it becomes impossible to remain outside, enter your vehicle quickly on the lee side. Protect yourself from radiant heat by remaining on the floor and covering your body with a blanket or rugs, floor carpets, etc
- Remain in the vehicle for as long as possible. The flaming or flash period rarely exceeds 5 to 10 minutes in a forest fire or 2 minutes in a grass fire
- Exit on the lee side and take care not to touch the outside of the vehicle

Contrary to popular belief fuel tanks do not "just explode". Even in the worst situation it will be some minutes before the vehicle catches fire and the heat becomes intolerable. Remember, those few minutes will probably save your life.

## **Survival on foot**

If caught on foot in a bushfire you must make a decision:

- Try to escape
- Seek refuge until the fire passes

## **Escaping on foot**

If you decide to try to escape follow these guidelines:

- Remain calm, never try to outrun a fire
- Individuals must be encouraged not to break away from a group
- Don't run, but walk briskly if there is a clearly indicated way of escape
- Use any hills or elevated sites to determine where the fire is and the direction it is taking
- Seek bare or previously burnt ground, e.g. gravel pits, clearings, roads, beaches
- Move across slopes and out of the path of the fire. Do not run uphill or away from the fire unless you are certain a safe refuge is nearby
- Select the path that is least obstructed by logs, dense growth or uneven ground
- Avoid being caught near the top of a hill where the fire will move quickly and intensely up the slope
- Run through flames only when they are less than about one metre high, and only if you can see clearly what is on the other side of them
- Beware of the danger from burning branches and trees in forest country
- Avoid dense vegetation in gullies as these areas are often impenetrable and can be subject to intense fire. If conditions become severe, use every possible means to protect yourself from radiant heat. Use clothing to best advantage as a shield.

## **Seeking refuge on foot**

If you decide to seek refuge, follow these guidelines:

- Seek bare or previously burnt ground which provides a buffer between you and heavy fuels
- Excavate a depression, hole or trench
- Clear debris and fine fuel away from the vicinity
- Build a mound of dirt on the side of the depression towards which the fire is approaching
- Lay in the depression and cover yourself with earth or sand or a blanket as a protection against radiant heat
- Make use of wheel ruts, depressions, large rocks, culverts or logs to give protection
- Do not attempt to back burn or burn down-wind - the wildfire could miss you but your fire may not
- Take refuge in ponds or running streams
- Do not take refuge in elevated water tanks
- Take refuge in at a Bibbulmun Track campsite, which will normally have a cleared area around its wooden shelter. Take refuge in the shelter, or if the fire is approaching the shelter on its open side, remain outside, behind the rear wall
- A major advantage of seeking refuge at a Bibbulmun Track campsite is that you can be easily found by Emergency Services personnel