



Mernda Hills Christian College

Bushfire Response Policy

Document Control

Revision Number	Review Date	Implementation Date	Description of Changes	Prepared By	Approved By
Gilson College					
New Policy	August 2021	October 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none">New Policy	Exec Leaders	Gilson College Council
Mernda Hills Christian College					
1	May 2023	January 2024	<ul style="list-style-type: none">General reviewAdded ref. to grassfires and Code Red days	Exec Leaders	College Exec Leaders
2	Sept 2025	Dec 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none">General review	Principal	Exec Leaders

Rationale

Bushfires and grass fires are a constant threat in Australia during the warmer months. Although Mernda Hills Christian College is not in a bushfire-prone area, nor listed on the Bushfire At-Risk Register (BARR), the threat of bushfires and grass fires warrants serious caution and preparation. Excursions and camps in bushfire-prone areas are a threat to student and staff wellbeing, as well as when students are in transit to and from school.

Details of how to respond in case of a bushfire emergency while on camps or excursions are given in the *Excursions Policy* and the *Emergency Management Plan*.

Implementation

General

1. The College policy and procedures will be followed in the event a bushfire is active in the area to ensure the safety of students, both at the College and whilst travelling to and from their homes, or on camps and excursions.
2. Media programs are to be monitored during high-risk times so that College Leadership is kept aware of any impending risk.
3. When necessary, **contact will be made with Emergency Services** to discuss options and strategies. This will be necessary on declared **Code Red days** or days where the bushfire rating is 'Catastrophic'.
4. In the event that students cannot travel home, they will be held at the College and the Shelter-In-Place action plan initiated.
5. The switchboard will remain open so that families can confirm that their child is safe.
6. It will be the responsibility of the family to collect the student from the College when it is deemed safe to do so by the Principal/Chief Warden.
7. In the event that the College is evacuated, the telephone (text messaging) system will advise mobile numbers for families to contact.
8. In the event of a major fire in the region, the College will take its instructions from those directing Emergency Services in the area.

Preparation

1. All staff (including bus drivers) will be made aware of this policy and how it impacts upon their responsibilities as detailed in the *Communication of Policies and Procedures Policy*.
2. The College Executive Leadership team ensure evacuation drills are carried out on a regular basis and that all staff and students are aware of the procedures in the event of a fire.
3. Maintenance staff will ensure that flammable material on campus is minimised. For example: green waste eliminated, grass kept low, trees pruned where necessary, chemicals stored correctly etc. See *Maintenance Schedule*

Transportation

1. All bus drivers (both College and contracted) will need to ensure that they:
 - a) are contactable by phone
 - b) are aware of the various fire risk areas
 - c) have a fixed set of safety procedures to follow
2. Bus drivers must take any final instruction from the Police/CFA operating in any fire affected area to ensure the safety of their vehicle and the students using the service.
3. If a bus encounters a bushfire whilst in transit, the Principal of the College must be contacted as soon as possible when safe to do so.

Evacuation Process

1. In the event of a bushfire in the vicinity of the College, the evacuation process, as detailed in the *Emergency Management Plan*, will be initiated.
2. The following procedures will take place:
 - a) College Leadership will assess the risk and determine if an evacuation or lockdown is warranted. If warranted, it will be conducted as specified in the College's Emergency Management Plan.
 - b) At the end of the school day, students will be permitted to travel home on their usual buses, provided the buses will not be travelling through, or to, a risk area. If it is unsafe to use a particular bus route, the students will be held back to shelter in place at College until they are collected by parents, or it is safe to travel home by bus.
 - c) At the end of the school day students who travel by other means will be permitted to do so once their mode of transport has been approved by the Principal. It is important that students do not attempt to go home using a different mode of transport, other than that which they normally use, e.g. swapping buses or taking a lift with parents or students in cars.
 - d) Students wishing to make contact with parents will be allowed to do so. In this regard, parents should provide updated telephone numbers, including mobile numbers to the College Office.

Camps and Excursions – refer to the Excursions Policy for more detail

1. When planning a camp or excursion the organising teacher will list 'Bushfire' as an environmental hazard if the event will be taking place in a bushfire-prone area during the bushfire season.
2. If bushfires are a risk, then suitable risk analysis and management must occur before the event can be authorised. Risk management may include:
 - a) Clearly delineating the high-risk areas in relation to camp-excursion locations
 - b) Outlining shelter and evacuation procedures in case of bushfire
 - c) Nominating alternate safe site
3. Where the risk is high and there is no alternative site the event must be postponed or cancelled.
Excursions will be cancelled on declared **Code Red** or **'Catastrophic' bush fire danger rating days**.

Related Policies and Processes

- Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy
- Critical Incident Policy
- Emergency Management Plan
- Excursions and Camps Policy
- Communication of Policies and Procedures Policy

Relevant Documentation or Legislation

- Education and Training Reform Regulations 2017: Schedule 4, Clause 12
- Ministerial Order 1359 - Child Safe Standards