

Weather Policy

General

Interchange Outer East conducts a large number and range of programs, activities and one to one support for groups and individuals in a variety of locations within Victoria. In conducting these programs and activities we need to be mindful of conditions that may make these programs and activities unsafe. These conditions may include:

- Weather conditions
- Existing events
- Seasonal weather conditions

IOE has a responsibility to ensure all people involved in our programs and activities are safe. This policy sets out the responsibilities of staff members conducting programs, activities and support work when weather conditions and natural events may create unsafe conditions.

Weather Conditions

When extreme weather conditions are predicted IOE shall take a conservative approach in deciding what actions to take. Extreme weather warnings are provided by the Bureau of Meteorology (<http://www.bom.gov.au/>) and broadcast across media outlets. Extreme weather may include strong and damaging wind, high temperature, extreme heat and storms.

Existing Events

When an existing natural / weather event (fire, flood, storms, extreme heat and drought) has occurred or is still occurring IOE shall take actions deemed necessary to maintain the safety of people in our programs and the community. Awareness messages of existing fire areas are listed on the CFA (<http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/>) and DELWP (Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning) websites (<http://www.delwp.vic.gov.au>). Areas of flood and storm are listed on the Bureau of Meteorology web site (<http://www.bom.gov.au/>) and Vic Emergency web site (<http://emergency.vic.gov.au>).

Seasonal Weather Conditions

The key seasonal weather condition for our locality is the fire season. During the fire season (January – March) IOE needs to undertake specific steps to ensure the potential risk of fire is mitigated in order to maintain a safe environment for all people involved in programs. The areas prone to wildfire are mapped via the DELWP website. However it is fair to assume that any area bounded by significant forest is a wildfire risk.

This policy has two components to it.

1. Planning of activities during seasonal weather conditions
2. Procedures when faced with severe weather or existing events

PLANNING

Many of our programs, activities and work in family homes during the fire season occur within wildfire management zones. While this in itself is not a cause of concern there are steps that should be taken to reduce the risk to people involved. For all programs, activities and support worker shifts a fire plan should be available or developed so that all people know what will happen if a wildfire occurs. Fire plans should be undertaken in consultation with people involved and should be clear for all participants. The default for all fire plans is to return to the IOE office at Ferntree Gully.

Planning requirements for fire will differ in regards to the type of activity being conducted.

Day Activities

In planning and booking day activities during fire season thought and care needs to be taken in deciding upon the location of the activity. If you intend to go somewhere with limited access you should develop an alternative if weather conditions of the day raise the potential for fire. The key conditions that increases fire risk are:

- Wind
- Low humidity
- Temperatures over 35c

When a day activity is to be conducted in a wildfire area staff members will need to have a fire plan to follow should an incident occur. This plan needs to include:

- Location of activity
- Who is attending the activity
- Staff member(s) contact number
- Emergency evacuation area
- Local CFA phone number
- Clear fire procedure

This information should be held at the IOE office and with the IOE after hour's emergency phone.

- Fire Procedure
 - Keep people together
 - Leave the area by the safest route or as determined by authorities (CFA, DELWP, Police, SES)
 - Contact IOE to advise
 - If safe, return to the IOE office

Camps/Residential Programs

Many of our camping programs are undertaken in bushland and rural settings. When arranging camps during fire season we need to ensure we have a fire plan to cover a wildfire emergency. For most campsites fire plans will already exist and these need to be adopted in case of an emergency when on site. Copies of these plans should be gathered before the camp to ensure staff understand what to do in those situations and IOE knows what will happen in case of a fire incident. Some campsites may not be appropriate to use during the fire season. These campsites may include those with the following characteristics;

- Sited in heavily forested areas without clearing around the campsite
- Access to campsite is only through heavily forested areas
- Campsites without adequate water supplies
- Campsites without a safe assembly area or fire plan

For day activities whilst on camp the day activity procedure should be followed. Information about where you are going should be left with the campsite operator.

- Fire Procedure
 - Keep people together
 - Follow the fire plan of the campsite
 - Contact IOE to advise of incident
 - If no site plan exists, leave the site if safe to do so
 - Contact IOE to advise

Support Worker Shifts

Many support worker shifts occur in families' homes or in local communities which are in wildfire zones. When undertaking shifts in these areas it is important to be aware of the potential for fire incidents and have a plan.

- Shifts in family homes

Families that live in wildfire areas should have a fire plan thought out. IOE should have a copy of the plan within the care plan for the individual. However if a fire incident does occur that has the potential to impact on the family home the Support Worker is encouraged to leave with the child(ren) they are caring for to seek refuge. If the family is at home during the shift the Support Worker should consult with the family about what the best option is.

- Activities in the community whilst undertaking support work

During the fire season support workers need to be aware of the risk of fire when choosing activities in the community. Areas of forest and rural parkland should only be used if it is not a day of fire risk. Areas of limited access should also be avoided on days of high fire risk (windy, hot and low humidity). Ensure families know where you are going.

- Fire Procedure

- Leave the area by the safest route or as determined by authorities (CFA, DELWP, Police, SES)
- Contact family & IOE to advise
- If safe go to the refuge place indicated by the family's fire plan (relative, family, friend, etc.)
- If in doubt go to the IOE office

Extreme Heat

Temperatures that hover 10 degrees or more above the average high temperature for the region and last for several weeks are defined as extreme heat.

The risk of heat stress is higher for young children and those with health conditions their bodies get hotter faster as they are less able to regulate their body temperature - they are also less likely to be able to tell you they are dehydrated.

Heat exhaustion and heatstroke are serious conditions occurring when the body's temperature rises and the internal organs start to shut down. Symptoms of heat exhaustion range from muscle cramps, dizziness to nausea, vomiting and fainting.

Staff are to plan activities and ensure measures are taken to avoid people being affected by extreme heat;

- Having access to ample drinking water.
- Do not leave children or adults in hot cars.
- Ensure people keep cool - seek out air-conditioned buildings, draw blinds, use a fan, take cool showers and dress in light and loose clothing.
- Plan ahead - schedule activities in the coolest part of the day.
- Seek medical attention if concerned participants are being affected by extreme heat

PROCEDURES

The best planning in the world will not eliminate severe weather or fire events. This policy sets out the procedures to undertake when faced with these situations.

Forecasted Severe Weather

There are days forecasted by the weather bureau which simply make it unsafe to conduct certain activities or undertake support work. These may be days of extreme fire risk, severe storms, floods or dangerous winds. When activities or shifts are planned to run during these forecasted days the following procedure should apply.

1. Determine the likelihood that the severe forecasted weather may impact upon the activity.
2. Work out what alternatives to the activity are available if it is likely to be impacted.
3. Consult with team leaders and general manager to discuss options.
4. Decide upon the course of action which may include:
 - Proceeding with the activity
 - Changing the activity to a safer option
 - Postponing or cancelling the activity

Fire Events

Where there are existing fire events IOE should ensure that no activities or support work shifts occur in communities currently under *alert* conditions as identified by the CFA website.

When communities are under *aware* conditions activities may proceed as long as the area is not listed as one for visitors to avoid on the CFA website.

The following procedure should apply.

1. Determine the status of the fires in the area the activity or shift is to occur.
2. Decide whether it is appropriate to continue with the activity or shift.
3. Work out what alternatives to the activity/shift is available if it is likely to be impacted.
4. Consult with team leaders and general manager to discuss options.
5. Decide upon the course of action which may include:
 - Proceeding with the activity
 - Changing the activity to a safer option
 - Postponing or cancelling the activity

Severe Weather

When a severe weather (anything but wildfire) event does occur it is possible that it may impact without warning. If this occurs, staff members need to make a determination of the safest course of action. Procedure to follow:

1. Decide on your course of action. Stay if safe to do so/seek refuge close by.
2. Advise Interchange of what you are doing and where you are.
3. Always default to the safest option. Being late is not an issue if it means people are safe.

Participants at Interchange

When severe weather or a fire event occurs, participants at IOE shall stay at the office until it is safe to leave or a parent/guardian collects them. Families are to be advised the participant is safe and needs to be collected from IOE.

Responsibilities of After Hours Emergency Phone Coordinator

Severe Weather Warning:

Whilst it is not necessary to send out an SMS every time a severe weather warning is forecast please be aware of what shifts and recreational activities are occurring in fire risk areas during these periods. If there are several consecutive days of severe weather consider sending a group SMS to all support workers notifying them to take note of the areas they may be working in. *Example: "Please be aware there is a SEVERE WEATHER WARNING from the DAYS AND DATES. Monitor conditions and avoid bush areas. Contact IOE to make changes to shifts if necessary."*

Extreme Weather Warning:

Send out group SMS to support workers working that day as per bookings listing advising them of the warning. The following pre-typed message can be found on sms send - *"DAY AND DATE is an EXTREME WEATHER WARNING DAY. Monitor Conditions and avoid bush areas. Contact IOE to make changes to shifts if necessary."*

Day activities:

Check activities running are suitable for forecasted weather. Contact program staff to discuss if necessary.

Camps:

Contact program staff to advise of weather warning and ensure planned activities will be suitable for forecasted weather.

CODE RED (Catastrophic):

Send out group SMS to support workers working that day as per bookings listing advising them of the warning. The following has been saved in pre-typed message on sms send *"DAY & DATE has been declared a Code Red Day. No shifts are to occur in any fire risk suburbs or areas. Call IOE After Hours Emergency Phone to make alternate arrangements for shifts if necessary. Monitor conditions and avoid fire danger areas."*

Identify which shifts may be occurring in higher risk areas. This is updated each fire season in 'FAMILIES LIVING IN HIGH RISK AREAS' and 'Fire risk suburbs' in the Fire Watch folder on the public drive. Contact families/support workers to make alternative arrangements to shift as needed. This may include changing pick up and drop off locations, or cancelling shifts.

Day activities:

Check activities running are suitable for forecasted weather. Contact program staff to discuss.

Camps:

Contact program staff to advise of weather warning and ensure planned activities will be suitable for forecasted weather.

Cancellation of camps

In the event that you believe a camp will need to be cancelled due to forecasted weather or fire activity follow the following procedure:

1. Contact Victorian Bushfire Information Line. Explain location of camp, number of staff, participants, volunteers and vehicles. Obtain recommendation then undertake step 2.
2. Contact team leader, general manager or CEO. Provide recommendations.
3. Team leader, general manager or CEO makes final decision as to whether camp is cancelled, postponed or relocated.
4. Advise camp staff, families and volunteers of any changes.

Contacts:

- **Victorian Bushfire Information Line (VBIL): 1800 240 667**
- Kimberley Hannett Team Leader Children's Services: 0439 574 863
- Ellen Clacy Team Leader Adult Services: 0407 873 560
- Belinda James General Manager: 0419 005 443
- Fred Brumhead CEO: 0417 557 357

Fire Outbreak

In the event of a fire outbreak follow this procedure:

1. Check CFA, BOM, DELWP and or Emergency Victoria websites:
 - <http://www.bom.gov.au>
 - <http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au>

- <http://www.delwp.vic.gov.au>
- <http://emergency.vic.gov.au>

Tune into Radio 774. During times of high fire activity some websites may struggle with high levels of activity.

2. If the fire is deemed to be small/safe/controlled continue to monitor websites and radio for updates.
3. If fire is medium/large send SMS to all support workers on shift within the suburb the fire is active in. For example, if the fire is in Ferntree Gully, all support workers on a shift within Ferntree Gully would receive a text message. Example message: *"Please note there is a large grass fire burning in Ferntree gully, Burwood hwy. Avoid area and contact AH Emergency Phone if any assistance is required."*
4. If support workers and or families need to evacuate the area during shift they may evacuate to the IOE Yose Street offices or another pre arranged safe place for handover.

Staff on camps must follow the evacuation procedure provided by the camp site. A copy of evacuation plans is kept in both the camp folder and fire watch folder.

5. After support workers on active shifts have been notified of fire outbreak, identify if any shifts planned for the rest of the day are in a 10km vicinity of the fire outbreak. If so, contact worker and family to make alternative arrangements.