

# Frequently Asked Questions



## Information for principals

Version 4 | June 2019

### Bushfire-Related School Closures & Fire Danger Rating – Industrial Relations Advice

Victoria has a six-tiered Fire Danger Rating scale. The Fire Danger Rating scale starts at Low-Moderate and proceeds to High, Very High, Severe, Extreme and Code Red. The Fire Danger Rating scale will help you understand the fire risk in your school's area on any given day. You can check the fire risk level of your area on the [CFA website](#).

Catholic schools at high-risk of bushfire will be pre-emptively closed on days declared by fire authorities as being at Code Red Fire Danger Rating. Where possible principals will be provided with three days' notice of the planned school closures although it may be at shorter notice. Once a final decision to close a school is confirmed at 12 noon the day prior, this decision will not change regardless of the weather forecast.

A Code Red Fire Danger Rating in your area could also mean a closure or change to school bus routes, out-of-school hours and off-site activities (e.g. after school care, camps, excursions).

Below are some frequently asked industrial relations questions regarding bushfire-related school closures.

<b><i>Are staff required to be at the school if it is closed due to a Code Red Fire Danger Rating or other reasons relating to bushfire?</i></b>	No. If the decision has been made to close a school, no staff, contractors, volunteers, etc. are permitted to be on site.
<b><i>Are staff paid for the days that the school is closed due to a Code Red Fire Danger Rating?</i></b>	Yes. Staff will be paid for the days that the school is closed on a declared Code Red Fire Danger Rating day. Staff may be directed to work from home which might include planning, report writing or administrative work. In this case, staff must be available by telephone.
<b><i>Are staff entitled to paid leave if their school is open but their child's school has been closed due to a Code Red Fire Danger Rating day, an evacuation or a Watch and Act alert?</i></b>	Staff should notify their principal if they are unable to attend school because their child's school has been closed due to a bushfire. Depending on the circumstances, the staff member may have an entitlement to leave such as personal leave, annual leave, long service leave or unpaid carer's leave. The principal may also choose to grant 'special' paid leave. Where leave is not granted or requested the principal may direct the staff member to work from home which might include planning, report writing or administrative work. In this case, staff must be available by telephone.



<p><b>Are staff entitled to paid leave if they volunteer for the CFA, SES or St John's Ambulance?</b></p>	<p>Clause 37 of the <i>Victorian Catholic Education Multi Enterprise Agreement 2018</i> entitles employees (other than casual employees) to up to three days' paid leave on each occasion an employee is absent for a voluntary emergency management activity such as the CFA, SES or St John's Ambulance. Importantly, this leave covers time to attend and return from an activity as well as recovery time. Casual employees are entitled to be absent from work but not to be paid.</p>
<p><b>Are staff expected to be at school on days declared Severe or Extreme by the fire authorities?</b></p>	<p>Unless a decision has been made to close the school staff are expected to be at school. This includes on days with a Fire Rating Danger Rating of Severe or Extreme. If staff decide not to attend work on days declared Severe or Extreme they will not be paid for those days.</p>
<p><b>Are staff required to drive through fire affected or high risk areas to get to work?</b></p>	<p>Staff should not put themselves in danger for the purposes of attending work. Where a staff member is impacted by fire related road closures or fire affecting their route to school, the principal should not unreasonably expect them to attend work. Each case should be considered with regard to its particular circumstances. It may be possible for staff to undertake some work from home or access other forms of paid leave such as annual or long service leave.</p>
<p><b>Where can Catholic schools access bushfire toolkit materials?</b></p>	<p>Bushfire toolkit materials, which include templates for newsletters and letters to parents regarding school closures, can be downloaded from the <a href="#">CEVN website</a> under Emergency Management/<a href="#">Bushfire Resources</a>.</p>