

BUSHFIRES

Don't panic: Be prepared

Step 6: Watch your anxiety levels

Becoming more stressed or feeling more emotional is not unusual. Bushfires and bushfire warnings are stressful events.

- Focus on staying as calm as you can, even in the event of the emergency developing.
- Stick with your plan, unless there is a very good reason to change it.
- Keep an eye on others in the household, help them to stay calm too.
- Tell them how you are feeling, and support each other.
- Remember to breathe slowly and calmly and notice how much less fearful you are because you are already prepared.

Step 7: After the emergency has passed

- Did your plan work for you? Were there any 'glitches'?
- What did you do well, what could you have done better?
- If the warning was a false alarm, don't fall into the trap of not taking warnings seriously.

Local emergency numbers

Your local SES: _____

City Council: _____

Radio station: _____

Bureau of Meteorology website: _____



FOR FURTHER PSYCHOLOGICAL
ADVICE, SEE THE APS WEBSITE:
WWW.PSYCHOLOGY.ORG.AU

Psychological Preparedness: Some helpful tips for managing emotions as you get ready for the bushfire season

AIM for psychological preparedness:

- **A**nticipate how you will be feeling, what you will be thinking
- **I**dentify feelings, unhelpful thinking, and matters that need attending to
- **M**anage feelings, thoughts and behaviours



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Step 1: Get ready/anticipate

To cope with the coming bushfire season you need to be psychologically prepared as well as physically prepared.

- This means anticipating how you or others might be thinking, feeling, or behaving if your community enters a bushfire watch or warning situation – and knowing what to do.
- Many people will experience some degree of anxiety and fear.
- These emotions are very natural, and necessary, but they can be uncomfortable, and, importantly, they can get in the way of other necessary preparations.

Step 2: Be mindful/identify feelings

Bushfire season preparations can make you feel anxious or worried, and these feelings can be subtle, but they might still stop you from doing important preparations. This is not unusual, but if you can watch out for these feelings, and identify them, then you will be in a good position to manage them. Signs that you might be getting anxious include:

- 'Butterflies' in your stomach
- Dry mouth
- Difficulty breathing
- Sweating (not due to the weather)
- Worrying

If you notice any of these, then some practical anxiety management might help:

- Breathe calmly and slowly
- Remind yourself that you can cope, and then focus on what you should be doing next

Step 3: Have a plan/manage your response

The local Council and/or Emergency Services provide clear and practical disaster preparedness advice.

- You should read these pamphlets and newspaper supplements and work out what you need to do. Write this down and keep it handy for everyone in your home to see it.
- Your plan should include being psychologically prepared for how you and others might be feeling and thinking.
- Have backup communication strategies in place for contacting family members or friends. Perhaps have a number stored in your mobile for 'In Case of Emergencies' (named ICE).

Step 4: Practise your plan

Before any emergency occurs, practise how you will cope – with your own feelings as well as the situation. Have a 'rehearsal' just as you would for other important events.

- Take one step at a time, breathe calmly, and focus on what you have to do.
- Practise helps you spot any problems with your plan. If you want to increase your confidence, practise without the lights on (as if the power had gone off)! This will help build your confidence in your ability to cope if the 'real thing' occurs.

Step 5: Check evacuation advice

- If there is a major fire, you may need to leave your home. Have you prepared yourself and others for this? Remember, dangerous fires move fast.
- You may wish to have a box ready with your important papers or some special photographs just in case you need to evacuate.
- If you are advised to leave your home, follow the directions of the emergency services.