

Tuross Head Rural Fire Brigade



At a time when Total Fire Bans have been declared over much of the State and the new fire danger rating of “catastrophic” has already been applied in the west, it is appropriate to remind everyone to prepare/update their **Bush Fire Survival Plan**. Remember **Prepare. Act. Survive**. If in doubt about what you should do, a good start would be to visit the Rural Fire Service web site at rfs.nsw.gov.au, and view details of:

- ★ how to prepare your Bush Fire Survival Plan
- ★ major fire updates
- ★ fire danger ratings

Talking about Total Fire Bans, hopefully you recently noticed the sign at the intersection of Hector McWilliam Drive and Allenby Road stating that Tuross Head had a Total Fire Ban in force (November 20th). But why was it declared and what were we supposed to do, or not do, about it?

Total Fire Bans are declared for days of extreme fire danger caused by a combination of dry vegetation and hot, dry, windy weather and where fires are likely to be difficult to contain. The Bureau of Meteorology provides advice on forecast weather conditions and fire danger ratings during the Bushfire Danger Period (October 1st to March 31st) and, based on this advice and other information, the RFS Commissioner declares Total Fire Bans for affected NSW Fire Areas. This decision is generally made at around 5pm each afternoon during the Bushfire Danger Period and the Total Fire Ban applies for the following day, from midnight and lasting 24 hours. NSW Fire Areas are groups of contiguous Council areas with similar weather conditions and terrain. Tuross Head is in the Far South Coast Fire Area, covering Eurobodalla and Bega Valley Council Areas.

During a Total Fire Ban no fire may be lit in the open and all Fire permits are suspended. This includes incinerators and barbecues which burn solid fuel, e.g. wood or charcoal. You may use a gas or electric barbecue, but only if:

- ★ it is on a residential property within 20 metres of the house or dwelling
- ★ it is a picnic area and the appliance is approved by Council, National Parks or State Forest
- ★ it is under the direct control of a responsible adult
- ★ the ground within 2 metres of the barbecue is cleared of all materials which could burn
- ★ you have an immediate and continuous supply of water available

Lighting a fire on a day of Total Fire Ban attracts a fine of up to \$5500 and/or 12 months goal. Penalties for a fire that escapes and damages or destroys life, property or the environment can attract much greater fines and goal terms with maximums at \$100,000 and/or 14 years goal. In addition civil law suits can also be brought against the person responsible for a fire by those seeking compensation for losses sustained.

Should a serious fire break out locally you may be advised to check and follow your Bush Fire Survival Plan. If you are physically and mentally prepared to defend your home, you should get ready to take shelter as the fire impacts. If you don't have a Bush Fire Survival Plan and your home is unprepared, you should proceed to your identified “safer place”. This may include a neighbouring property or area close by that is not at risk from bush fire. If you are in doubt, or the path is not clear, seek shelter since if you are caught in the path of the fire you may die or be injured. Protect your body from radiant heat, smoke inhalation and flying embers by covering your skin with protective clothing made from natural fabrics.

If your life is at risk, call Triple Zero (000) immediately. Triple Zero (000) is Australia's primary Emergency Call Service number and should be used to access emergency assistance from all telephones (landline, mobile phones and payphones). Don't use SMS it won't work! You may be aware that **112** is the GSM standard Emergency Call Service number for use with GSM mobile phones, and offers special access features. It can be dialled from other mobile phones, but will

only offer the same features that dialling Triple Zero (000) provides. In many new GSM handsets, Triple Zero (000) is programmed into the firmware as an emergency number. In these handsets, Triple Zero (000) provides the same features as 112, that is, the call will use any available GSM network to reach the Emergency Call Service, regardless of whose network you are accessing. To avoid confusion use **Triple Zero (000)**. Also, regardless of what you may have seen on TV, the operator will NOT be able to automatically pinpoint your location, even if you're on a mobile phone with GPS. You must provide the operator with as much information as possible about the location of the emergency situation, including the State or Territory and the town or suburb. This will ensure that the emergency call is connected to the appropriate state or territory emergency service organisation.

You will notice earlier that mention was made of a “safer place” and may not be aware of this new concept that has evolved out of the tragic Victorian ‘Black Saturday’ bush fires in February 2009. A Neighbourhood Safer Place (NSP) is a place of last resort for people during a bush fire. It can be part of your contingency plan, or for a time when your Bush Fire Survival Plan cannot be implemented or has failed. A NSP is an identified building or space within the community that can provide a higher level of protection from the immediate life threatening effects of a bush fire. If an NSP is part of your contingency plan it should not require extended travel through fire affected areas to get there. If there is not sufficient time or it is unsafe to travel to an NSP you should then consider other pre-identified safer locations such as your neighbours’ home or a wide open space. NSPs still entail some risk, both in moving to them and while sheltering in them and cannot be considered completely safe. They are a place of last resort in emergencies only and the following limitations need to be considered within your Bush Fire Survival Plan. NSPs do not:

- ★ cater for pets
- ★ always have emergency services present
- ★ provide meals, amenity or cater for special needs (e.g. for infants, the elderly, the ill or disabled)
- ★ always provide shelter from the elements, particularly flying embers.

In September 2009, the RFS, in conjunction with other NSW emergency service organisations, developed guidelines for the identification of NSPs across the State. As part of this identification process, potential NSPs are assessed against a set of criteria to determine if the building or open space is suitable. The primary purpose of a NSP is the protection of human life. Local Emergency Management Committees (LEMCs) were tasked with the responsibility of identifying NSPs in their local area and at the time this article went to press, the RFS has received recommended NSPs data from LEMCs for the majority of NSW. Much of this data is currently being subject to a validation process to confirm that recommended NSPs satisfy the necessary criteria, and NSPs have yet to be published for some 63% of Council Areas, including Eurobodalla.

Remember to complete your Bush Fire Survival Plan to ensure that you and your family are prepared and know what to do in the event of a bush fire. If there is a suitable NSP nearby your home, you should note it in you Bush Fire Survival Plan. However, the NSP should only be considered as a place of last resort during a bush fire emergency.

PREPARE . ACT . SURVIVE .

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