

## **Managing risks in fire-prone conditions and very hot weather: guidelines for leaders and participants**

### *When to cancel a walk:*

It is Club policy to cancel walks in any area where there is a total fire ban, except within urban ACT. Naturally if a National Park is closed for any reason, any walk in it should be cancelled.

The following advice will be useful for walks in hotter weather and walks where fire danger arises unexpectedly.

### *When planning a trip in fire-danger season, consider:*

- The accessibility of safer places, such as broad sandy beaches or deep caves
- Escape routes – is there a choice of escape routes if a fire approached?
- Car parking – would your cars be parked in a wide area that is free of vegetation? Is there more than one driving route out of the fire-risk area?
- Communication – does the area have mobile phone coverage or radio reception, so you could get updates on any fires that develop?

### *Check for warnings and park closures:*

On the Bureau of Meteorology site [www.bom.gov.au](http://www.bom.gov.au) the 'Warnings current' link will tell you, for each state and territory, whether there is a Fire Ban in place, and whether there is fire danger.

On the ACT Territory and Municipal Services web page 'Parks and reserves' [www.tams.act.gov.au/parks-recreation/parks\\_and\\_reserves](http://www.tams.act.gov.au/parks-recreation/parks_and_reserves), under the name of each park, you can find information on any closures. For NSW, the equivalent site is [www.environment.nsw.gov.au/nationalparks/fireclosure.aspx](http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/nationalparks/fireclosure.aspx)

The ACT Emergency Services site [esa.act.gov.au](http://esa.act.gov.au) has updates on local emergencies includes fires.

### *Before you leave Canberra:*

- Consider the capabilities of your party – does anyone have a respiratory condition likely to be worsened by smoke? Could everyone swim if it became necessary to seek refuge in a deep body of water?
- Give your party a detailed description of the aspects of the activity that are relevant to hot weather – extent of climbs, frequency of drinkable and swimmable water, availability of shade
- Remind your party of the need to carry water; recommend Staminade powder or similar
- Remind your party to carry a torch, since fire smoke can block daylight
- Plan a route that maximises shade and accessibility of water e.g. a south facing slope with many creeks, rainforest, stopping spots with solid shade
- Avoid afternoon routes on west-facing slopes

- Aim to get most of the walk, or at least any uphill bits, done early in the day
- Plan a route that can be shortened if necessary
- Review first aid information on heat exhaustion
- Consider packing containers of spare water in the car and a spare sunhat

*At the start of the walk*

- Ask everyone how much water they are carrying; offer extra water
- Check everyone has a shady hat

*During the activity:*

- Have frequent drink stops
- Consider suggesting that your party dip their shirts and/or hats in a creek
- Keep the tail-enders in sight if possible, or re-group frequently
- If someone is heat affected, treat them and don't move on till they are recovered
- Consider delaying the end of the walk till the evening; this can be a good strategy if you find that the climb out of a deep valley is hotter than expected
- Keep watch for smoke, falling burnt leaves and twigs
- Be aware of your nearest safer place, and of wind direction

*Safer places in the bush during fire danger (listed in approximate order of safety with the safest listed first):*

- In a limestone cave, beyond the limit of daylight (if you can see daylight, radiant heat can reach you).
- On a broad beach or coastal rock platform.
- In a wide body of water. A depth that reaches to your shoulders provides maximum protection while not requiring you to use energy to stay afloat.
- In dark damp hollows under large boulders in a creek.
- A wide area of rainforest; rainforest may burn but is less likely to do so than Eucalypt forest
- Underground e.g. in pipes in a culvert, or in a wombat hole, or a hole in a bare rock face, as far in as you can get.

Wherever you take refuge, consider covering yourself with a jacket, sleeping bag, inner sheet or similar item thoroughly soaked in water. The best way to wet a sleeping bag is to submerge it while it is in its stuff sack and remove it slowly underwater. If you are in a small area (e.g. under boulders or in an underground pipe), try to block most of the entrance with rocks or soil.

If thick smoke reaches you, breathe with your face as close to the ground as possible or lean down close to the water surface.

*After a fire front has passed*

- Immediate care – drinking water, first aid, food – is more important than leaving the area
- Communicate if possible, to get information on safe routes out, and let the Club Check-In officer know your situation:  
checkin@canberrabushwalkingclub.org or 02 6230 1081.
- Remember that if there are still leaves on some trees or grass on the ground, a second fire front may come
- Consider the possibility that the cars will be burnt or the road out will be undriveable because of fallen timber or burnt bridges; it may be safer to walk a longer route to say, a highway or a small town
- Be aware that burnt trees may fall.

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Approved by Manager, Community Bushfire Protection, ACT Rural Fire Service