

Southern Australia Seasonal Bushfire Outlook 2014-15

The Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC Hazard Note, released on 2 September 2014, states that a preliminary investigation of factors affecting the fire season outlook for 2014-15 point to an above normal season in many areas of central, north and western Victoria. Key factors are an overall rainfall deficit coupled with the potential for an earlier start to the season. Areas with long-term rainfall deficits run from the west of Melbourne to the central Wimmera and also north through central Victoria into the Mallee. Another band exists extending from the north east of Melbourne to the northern slopes of the great Dividing Range. Shorter term deficits are emerging in a broad band across much of the State's north, extending south to the northern rises of the great Dividing Range. Similar deficits are emerging in coastal and Southern Victoria, though the exact pattern in these areas is not yet clear. Climatic signals indicate a likely return to warm conditions in spring. There is no strong signal on rainfall, and agencies will be closely monitoring rainfall amounts across the State. Widespread above average rainfall conditions are not likely, but even in the event they occur, **Victoria may still expect, given the antecedent conditions, a fire season slightly more active than 2013-14.**

Targeting those Most at Risk of Bushfire or Grassfire

Picture the many communities you drive through and reflect on what you see as you come to their outskirts. Many of you will have an image of older houses, in many cases they have significant grasslands and/or bush to the edge of the property. Some of you will have an image of new homes on larger blocks nestled amongst the trees lived in by people new to the area. You've got the picture - idyllic Australian settings for the most part until, as we know, fire threat emerges from that grassland or bush. We know this idyllic setting can quickly become life threatening for the unaware or ill prepared over summer.

80% of losses to lives and property are lost **within 100 metres of the bush** according to CSIRO analysis. The very setting we were describing just moments ago. According to CFA research, only **24.6% of Victorians believe they are well prepared** for bushfire and **69% will wait until fire threatens** before deciding what action to take. So bringing this together we have people living in houses, often not built to bushfire standards, living in close proximity to the hazard. People who are often undecided or under prepared or both for a significant bushfire event – not an ideal scenario for fire services.

Given what we know there are some things you can do to help. It's time to act differently. Firstly, if they won't come to us, we as CFA can go to them. Pointing out the hazard threatening them, encouraging them to plan to leave early and giving them some helpful tips to prepare their home can have a really positive effect. With this in mind, CFA has developed the **Property Advice Visit Service**. This program provides target area mapping, materials, training and ongoing support to CFA members who want to connect with their at-risk communities.

For the brigade: an increase in local knowledge (e.g. Water points, access issues, vulnerable residents), opportunities to recruit, increase local brigade profile and a greater chance locals will make informed decisions when fire occurs. **For the community:** reaching people with limited or no contact with us, who may never have thought about the risk on their doorstep. Giving them simple advice which may save lives. By taking contact details, preferably their email address, we will follow them up to keep them focussed on their bushfire preparedness.

If you want to become involved talk it over with your brigade and get in touch with Andrew Thomas to register your interest at a.thomas@cfa.vic.gov.au or on 03 9262 8559. We have the maps, we have the material to give to our community and we have the training ready to go.

"Insanity is doing the same thing over again and expecting different results"

- Albert Einstein