

# News Release

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**Premier Mike Rann**  
**Hon Michael Wright**

Minister for Emergency Services

**Hon Jay Weatherill**

Minister for Environment and Conservation

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Thursday, 10 September 2009

## **GOVERNMENT TAKES ACTION ON BUSHFIRE TASKFORCE**

The State Government today responded to comprehensive recommendations by the Bushfire Task Force, set up to analyse key issues arising from the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission.

A new telephone and text messaging warning system will be up and running in time for this year's fire danger season.

Premier Mike Rann said the State Government would invest \$12.4 million over the next five years to establish and roll out the system in tandem with the Federal Government, which is injecting \$15 million into the project.

"This new warning alert system means alerts relating to the most severe fire threats will be sent to landlines and mobile phones based on the owner's billing address for this bushfire season.

"People will also be able to 'opt in' to the service should they have friends or relatives living in bushfire prone regions," Premier Rann said.

"I am told that by the 2010/11 Bushfire Season, the system will be advanced enough to send messages to mobile phone users travelling through a defined emergency area.

"We want to have as many warning systems in place as possible to protect South Australians in the event of a serious bushfire.

"People need to remember that they must exercise vigilance and responsibility and not rely on a single warning system during a bushfire threat.

"I can also announce that we'll be adopting a new nationally agreed slogan of **PREPARE. ACT. SURVIVE.**

"This is being introduced to reinforce the very real message that people simply won't survive unless they are prepared and take the appropriate action," Premier Rann said.

The **PREPARE. ACT. SURVIVE** slogan will be used extensively in all communication material during the impending bushfire awareness campaign.

A new Fire Danger Ratings scale will be implemented which will include the new categories of “Severe”; “Extreme”; and “Catastrophic” (Code Red) – indicating that the Fire Danger Index exceeds 100,” Mr Rann said.

“The purpose of this new category is to let South Australians know that if a fire starts on one of these catastrophic days it is highly likely to be fast moving, uncontrollable and they should not try to defend their homes but relocate,” Minister Wright said.

Other key recommendations made by SA’s Bushfire Task Force that will be implemented include:

- CFS introducing guidelines and procedures for “directed evacuation” involving Police and other emergency services
- Identifying “Neighbourhood Safer Places” to be used as an alternative for shelter from a bushfire
- Conduct “Bushfire Prevention and Awareness Week” in preparation for fire danger season
- Develop a dwelling bushfire shelter guideline
- Amend the CFS siren policy recommending that working CFS station sirens can be used to provide warnings to communities in specified bushfire emergency situations
- Conduct an audit for the provision of more sirens
- Investigate a framework where State and Federal Government call centres are inter-linked and a capacity for mass incoming calls established

“Another recommendation includes encouraging commercial radio operators to enter into a Memorandum Of Understanding, similar to those that currently exist with the ABC and 5AA for the broadcasting of bushfire warning messages,” Mr Wright said.

“I have written to those stations asking that they get on board with the CFS to broadcast bushfire-warning messages this fire danger season, which is just 51 days away. Obviously this would extend community warnings even further during the danger season, and the more people we can reach the better.”

“Whilst SA fire and emergency services can provide advice and warnings to communities, ultimately each individual living in a high risk area needs to be prepared to take protective action should a bushfire strike.”

“Since 2002, the Rann Government has implemented a number of important initiatives relating to bushfire prevention and we will continue to ensure that South Australia has the most effective bushfire management practices in place,” Minister Wright said.

Environment and Conservation Minister, Jay Weatherill said that the Government also was announcing changes to the rules about managing native vegetation for bushfire prevention purposes.

“People can now clear all native vegetation within 20 metres of a building without approval, Mr Weatherill said.

“Approval processes for other clearances, including for fuel reduction and fire breaks, have been simplified, with most approvals now being granted by the CFS rather than the Native Vegetation Council.

“A new, simplified guide setting out the new rules will be released in coming weeks.”

Continuing the Government’s commitment to increasing its prescribed burning effort to reduce fuel loads on public lands, more prescribed burning over a larger area is planned for this season.

And in the Mt Lofty Ranges, the three public land agencies – Department for Environment and Heritage, SA Water and Forestry SA, will join in a combined fuel reduction program.

“This joint approach will allow Government to undertake more burns over a wider area, and to take greater advantage of the small windows of opportunity for burning provided by the weather,” Mr Weatherill said.

“In SA we are heading towards the Fire Danger Season and want to see our communities prepare, act and survive the bushfire threat. Now is the time to start preparing,” Premier Rann said.

The new ratings will have the following levels:

<b>New Fire Danger Ratings</b>	
<b>Category</b>	<b>Fire Danger Index</b>
<b>CATASTROPHIC (CODE RED)</b>	<b>100 +</b>
<b>EXTREME</b>	<b>75 – 100</b>
<b>SEVERE</b>	<b>50 – 75</b>
<b>VERY HIGH</b>	<b>25 - 50</b>
<b>HIGH</b>	<b>12 – 25</b>
<b>LOW – MODERATE</b>	<b>0 - 12</b>

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