

Bushfires across Australia

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Bushfires across Australia are affecting many parts of the country. Emergency and disaster declarations have been announced this bushfire season across Australia.

For updates on current bushfire incidents and warnings, go to:

- Victoria: [Vic Emergency](https://www.emergency.vic.gov.au/) 
- New South Wales: [NSW Rural Fire Service](http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/) 
- Australian Capital Territory: [Emergency Services Agency](http://www.esa.act.gov.au/) 
- Queensland: [QLD Rural Fire Service](http://www.ruralfire.qld.gov.au/) 
- Northern Territory: [Secure NT](https://securent.nt.gov.au/home) 
- Western Australia: [Emergency WA](http://www.emergency.wa.gov.au/) 
- South Australia: [South Australian Country Fire Service](http://www.cfs.sa.gov.au/) 
- Tasmania: [Tasmania Fire Service](http://www.fire.tas.gov.au/Show?pageId=colCurrentBushfires) 

Or visit the ABC website - [Current ABC Emergency Coverage](https://www.abc.net.au/news/emergency/) 

Many workplaces and individuals are affected by the bushfires and smoke. There are a number of workplace rights and entitlements for employers and employees affected by natural disasters or seeking to access leave, and different places you can seek help.

Read on for more information about:

- [entitlements for different types of leave](#), including annual leave, sick and carer's leave, and community service leave
- [where to go for information about workplace health and safety](#) including if heat or smoke from bushfires is a risk to health or safety at work
- [pay during stand down](#) including if a business needs to close temporarily
- using [flexible working arrangements](#)
- support for [small businesses affected or impacted by the bushfires](#)
- [emergency and useful contacts](#), including state bodies for current bushfire incidents and warnings and accessing assistance packages.

We will continue to update the information on our website as needed. If you have an urgent enquiry about your workplace entitlements or obligations, please [contact us](http://www.fairwork.gov.au/contact-us/call-us) .

Leave entitlements

There are a number of paid and unpaid leave entitlements employees may be able to access if they are affected by the bushfires or smoke, or to assist with emergency management activities. These include:

- [annual leave](#)
- [sick and carer's leave](#)
- [community service leave](#)
- [Defence Reservists](#).

The below minimum entitlements to annual leave, sick and carer's leave and community service leave come from the National Employment Standards (NES).

Awards, enterprise agreements and other [registered agreements](http://www.fairwork.gov.au/Dictionary.aspx?TermID=2034)  can't offer less than the minimums in the NES but they can provide more.

Annual leave

Annual leave can be taken at any time an employer and employee agree. An employer can only refuse a request for annual leave if the refusal is reasonable.

In some cases an employer may be able to direct an employee to take annual leave - these rules are set out in awards and enterprise agreements. Award and agreement free employees can also be directed to take annual leave if the requirement is

reasonable.

Go to our [Annual leave page \(www.fairwork.gov.au/leave/annual-leave\)](http://www.fairwork.gov.au/leave/annual-leave) for more information about taking annual leave and directing an employee to take leave.

Sick and carer's leave

Employees (other than casual employees) affected by a natural disaster or emergency may be entitled to take paid sick and carer's leave (personal/carer's leave).

An employee can take paid sick leave when they can't work because of a personal illness or injury. For example an employee injured during a bushfire, or who is unwell and unable to work due to smoke inhalation, may be entitled to sick leave.

An employee can take paid carer's leave to care for or support a member of their immediate family or household who is sick, injured or has an unexpected emergency. For example, an employee may be able to take carer's leave to care for their child if their child's school closes unexpectedly due to a bushfire emergency.

Full-time and part-time employees who have used all of their paid sick and carer's leave, and casual employees, are entitled to two days unpaid carer's leave per occasion to provide care and support to an immediate family or household member due to illness, injury or in the event of an unexpected emergency.

An employee has to let their employer know that they are going to take sick or carer's leave, and they may need to provide evidence.

Find out more about [Paid sick and carer's leave \(www.fairwork.gov.au/leave/sick-and-carers-leave/paid-sick-and-carers-leave\)](http://www.fairwork.gov.au/leave/sick-and-carers-leave/paid-sick-and-carers-leave) , including [Payment for sick and carer's leave \(www.fairwork.gov.au/leave/sick-and-carers-leave/paid-sick-and-carers-leave/payment-for-sick-and-carers-leave\)](http://www.fairwork.gov.au/leave/sick-and-carers-leave/paid-sick-and-carers-leave/payment-for-sick-and-carers-leave) , [Unpaid carer's leave \(www.fairwork.gov.au/leave/sick-and-carers-leave/unpaid-carers-leave\)](http://www.fairwork.gov.au/leave/sick-and-carers-leave/unpaid-carers-leave) and [Notice and medical certificates \(www.fairwork.gov.au/leave/sick-and-carers-leave/paid-sick-and-carers-leave/notice-and-medical-certificates\)](http://www.fairwork.gov.au/leave/sick-and-carers-leave/paid-sick-and-carers-leave/notice-and-medical-certificates) .

Community service leave

All employees, including casuals, are entitled to take community service leave for certain voluntary emergency management activities, if what they are doing fits the definition of a voluntary emergency management activity.

This leave applies to the activity and reasonable travel and rest time. The leave is unpaid. There is no limit on the amount of community service leave an employee can take. The employee is entitled to the time off work for as long as the absence is reasonable in all the circumstances.

Go to our [Community service leave page \(www.fairwork.gov.au/leave/community-service-leave\)](http://www.fairwork.gov.au/leave/community-service-leave) for more information including what counts as voluntary emergency management activities, rules and responsibilities for community service leave and how employees access the leave entitlement.

Defence Reservists

Defence Reservists may be called to assist with the bushfires. In addition to the NES, there are a number of rights and protections that apply under the Defence Reserve Service (Protection) Act 2001 if Reservists are absent on defence service. This includes the right to be released from work while undertaking defence service and to continue to be employed on their return.

For more information read our [Defence reservists - rights and responsibilities at work \(www.fairwork.gov.au/how-we-will-help/templates-and-guides/fact-sheets/rights-and-obligations/defence-reservists-rights-and-responsibilities-at-work\)](http://www.fairwork.gov.au/how-we-will-help/templates-and-guides/fact-sheets/rights-and-obligations/defence-reservists-rights-and-responsibilities-at-work) fact sheet.

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Workplace health and safety

The heat or smoke from bushfires may be a risk to health or safety at work in some areas.

Visit the [Safe Work Australia website](https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/) [\(https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/\)](https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/) for information about outdoor air pollution, including links to resources and advice from federal and state or territory bodies. Go to their [Outdoor air pollution news article](https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/media-centre/news/outdoor-air-pollution) [\(https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/media-centre/news/outdoor-air-pollution\)](https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/media-centre/news/outdoor-air-pollution) for more information.

For more information about dealing with smoke and hazardous conditions please visit the relevant page or news for your state:

- Australian Capital Territory: [Heavy smoke and hot conditions in the ACT](https://www.health.act.gov.au/public-health-alert/heavy-smoke-and-hot-conditions-act) [\(https://www.health.act.gov.au/public-health-alert/heavy-smoke-and-hot-conditions-act\)](https://www.health.act.gov.au/public-health-alert/heavy-smoke-and-hot-conditions-act)
- New South Wales: [Bushfire](https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/environment/air/Pages/bushfire-smoke.aspx) [\(https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/environment/air/Pages/bushfire-smoke.aspx\)](https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/environment/air/Pages/bushfire-smoke.aspx)
- Queensland: [Bushfire smoke health advisory](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/news-events/health-alerts/bushfire-smoke-health-alert) [\(https://www.health.qld.gov.au/news-events/health-alerts/bushfire-smoke-health-alert\)](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/news-events/health-alerts/bushfire-smoke-health-alert)
- South Australia: [Bushfires](https://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/public+content/sa+health+internet/protecting+pub-) [\(https://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/public+content/sa+health+internet/protecting+pub-](https://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/wps/wcm/connect/public+content/sa+health+internet/protecting+pub-)

[lic+health/bushfires\)](#)

- Tasmania: [Bushfire Smoke and Your Health](https://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/publichealth/air/bushfire_smoke) [↗](#) (https://www.dhhs.tas.gov.au/publichealth/air/bushfire_smoke)
- Victoria: [Health concerns related to Victorian bushfires](https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/about/news-and-events/healthalerts/health-concerns-bushfires) [↗](#) (https://www2.health.vic.gov.au/about/news-and-events/healthalerts/health-concerns-bushfires)
- Western Australia: [Smoke hazard from bushfires](https://healthywa.wa.gov.au/Articles/S_T/Smoke-hazard-from-bushfires) [↗](#) (https://healthywa.wa.gov.au/Articles/S_T/Smoke-hazard-from-bushfires)

Workplaces or individuals affected by smoke, haze or hot conditions can also contact their relevant state workplace health and safety authority for information about health and safety in the workplace:

- Australian Capital Territory: [Work Safe ACT](http://www.worksafe.act.gov.au/) [↗](#) (http://www.worksafe.act.gov.au/)
- New South Wales: [SafeWork NSW](http://www.safework.nsw.gov.au/) [↗](#) (http://www.safework.nsw.gov.au/)
- Northern Territory: [NT WorkSafe](https://worksafe.nt.gov.au/) [↗](#) (https://worksafe.nt.gov.au/)
- Queensland: [Workplace Health and Safety Queensland](https://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au/) [↗](#) (https://www.worksafe.qld.gov.au/)
- South Australia: [SafeWork SA](http://www.safework.sa.gov.au/) [↗](#) (http://www.safework.sa.gov.au/)
- Tasmania: [WorkSafe Tasmania](http://www.worksafe.tas.gov.au/home) [↗](#) (http://www.worksafe.tas.gov.au/home)
- Victoria: [WorkSafe Victoria](http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/) [↗](#) (http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au/)
- Western Australia: [WorkSafe WA](http://www.commerce.wa.gov.au/WorkSafe/) [↗](#) (http://www.commerce.wa.gov.au/WorkSafe/)

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Pay during stand down

Bushfires, smoke, haze or hot conditions may affect whether some workplaces can stay open.

If a business needs to temporarily close, employers may be able to stand down an employee in some circumstances if the employee can't be usefully employed. This includes when an employee can't do useful work because of:

- equipment break down, if the employer can't reasonably be held responsible for it
- stoppage of work for which the employer can't reasonably be held responsible, which may include severe and inclement weather or natural disasters (such as bushfires).

During a stand down period, an employee:

- doesn't need to be paid
- accrues leave in the usual way.

Under the FW Act, employee stand down provisions do not apply during a period when an employee is already authorised to be absent from work (including taking paid or unpaid leave). It may be appropriate to seek guidance on these matters if you are unsure.

Enterprise agreements and employment contracts can have different or extra rules about when an employer can stand down an employee without pay. If an employer stands down an employee under an enterprise agreement or employment contract, they need to follow the enterprise agreement or employment contract rules for stand down.

Go to [Pay during inclement weather & stand down \(www.fairwork.gov.au/pay/pay-during-inclement-weather-and-stand-down\)](http://www.fairwork.gov.au/pay/pay-during-inclement-weather-and-stand-down) for more information about when an employer can stand an employee down, whether they need to be paid, and the difference between a stand down and a shut down. If you have one, check your agreement or workplace contract for further information.

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Flexible working arrangements

Some employers and employees may wish to negotiate ways to make their workplace more flexible to help deal with the effects of the bushfires and smoke. Examples include changing what hours are worked and where work is performed.

To find out about the formal ways employers and employees can make their workplace more flexible go to [Flexibility in the workplace \(www.fairwork.gov.au/employee-entitlements/flexibility-in-the-workplace\)](http://www.fairwork.gov.au/employee-entitlements/flexibility-in-the-workplace) .

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Support for small businesses

There are a number of support services and organisations available to help small businesses who have been impacted or affected by the bushfires, including business advice, financial services and health and wellbeing support.

Business advice and support services overview

A summary of support services available for Australian businesses affected by the recent bushfires is available on the Australian Government business.gov.au website - [Help for Australian bushfire affected businesses \(https://www.business.gov.au/news/bushfire-](https://www.business.gov.au/news/bushfire-)

support) [↗](#).

Mental health and wellbeing support services

- Lifeline (<https://www.lifeline.org.au/>) [↗](#) or call 13 11 14
- Beyond Blue (<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>) [↗](#) - [Bushfires and mental health](https://www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/bushfires-and-mental-health/) (<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/bushfires-and-mental-health/>) [↗](#) or call 1300 22 4636.

Financial assistance and counselling

Urgent financial assistance from the government is available to bushfire-affected communities. Find information on the types of assistance available on the [Australian Government Disaster Assist](https://www.disasterassist.gov.au/Pages/home.aspx) (<https://www.disasterassist.gov.au/Pages/home.aspx>) [↗](#) website.

Financial Counselling Australia provides free and confidential support to people in financial difficulty through the [National Debt Helpline](https://ndh.org.au/) [↗](#) (<https://ndh.org.au/>) (1800 007 007).

Tax, insurance claims and business services

The Australian Taxation Office is providing support to small businesses affected by the bushfires, such as giving extra time to pay or lodge tax forms. Visit the [ATO - Bushfires 2019–20](https://www.ato.gov.au/Individuals/Dealing-with-disasters/In-detail/Specific-disasters/Bushfires-2019-20/) (<https://www.ato.gov.au/Individuals/Dealing-with-disasters/In-detail/Specific-disasters/Bushfires-2019-20/>) [↗](#) page for more information.

The Australian Financial Complaints Authority has information on [lodging insurance claims](https://www.afca.org.au/news/significant-events/bushfire-disaster-support/) (<https://www.afca.org.au/news/significant-events/bushfire-disaster-support/>) [↗](#) as well as a dedicated bushfire disaster support hotline (1800 931 678).

Businesses facing hardship due to the bushfires can talk to the Australian Securities & Investments Commission for help with payment arrangements for company fees. See the [ASIC - Bushfire relief page](https://asic.gov.au/for-business/payments-fees-and-voices/bushfire-relief/) (<https://asic.gov.au/for-business/payments-fees-and-voices/bushfire-relief/>) [↗](#) for more information.

Workplace health and safety

The heat or smoke from bushfires may be a risk to health or safety at work in some areas. Employers have obligations relating to health and safety in the workplace. Each state and territory has a work health and safety body responsible for enforcing and regulating WHS laws.

See [Workplace health and safety](#) above for a list of bodies.

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Emergency and useful contacts

In case of emergency call 000.

Visit [Current ABC Emergency Coverage](https://www.abc.net.au/news/emergency/) [↗](#) (<https://www.abc.net.au/news/emergency/>) page for alerts and warnings summaries.

For information on current bushfire incidents and warnings, please visit:

- Victoria: [Vic Emergency](https://www.emergency.vic.gov.au/) [↗](#) (<https://www.emergency.vic.gov.au/>)
- New South Wales: [NSW Rural Fire Service](http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/) [↗](#) (<http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/>)
- Australian Capital Territory: [Emergency Services Agency](http://www.esa.act.gov.au/) (<http://www.esa.act.gov.au/>) [↗](#)
- Queensland: [QLD Rural Fire Service](http://www.ruralfire.qld.gov.au/) [↗](#) (<http://www.ruralfire.qld.gov.au/>)
- Northern Territory: [Secure NT](https://securent.nt.gov.au/home) [↗](#) (<https://securent.nt.gov.au/home>)
- Western Australia: [Emergency WA](http://www.emergency.wa.gov.au/) [↗](#) (<http://www.emergency.wa.gov.au/>)
- South Australia: [South Australian Country Fire Service](http://www.cfs.sa.gov.au/) [↗](#) (<http://www.cfs.sa.gov.au/>)
- Tasmania: [Tasmania Fire Service](http://www.fire.tas.gov.au/Show?pagelId=colCurrentBushfires) (<http://www.fire.tas.gov.au/Show?pagelId=colCurrentBushfires>) [↗](#).

If you have been affected by bushfires and are in need of financial or welfare support, or assistance, please visit:

- [Australian Government Disaster Assist](https://www.disasterassist.gov.au/Pages/home.aspx) (<https://www.disasterassist.gov.au/Pages/home.aspx>) [↗](#) (<http://www.disasterassist.gov.au/>) - financial assistance for individuals
- [Services Australia](https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/help-emergency/bushfires) [↗](#) (<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/help-emergency/bushfires>) (<http://www.emergency.nsw.gov.au/>) - support for people directly affected by bushfires in disaster declared areas
- [Disaster Health Care Assistance Scheme](https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/medicare/disaster-health-care-assistance-scheme) [↗](#) (<https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/individuals/services/medicare/disaster-health-care-assistance-scheme>) (<http://www.emergency.nsw.gov.au/>) - for help with health related out of pocket expenses resulting from a natural disaster
- [ATO - Bushfires 2019–20](https://www.ato.gov.au/Individuals/Dealing-with-disasters/In-detail/Specific-disasters/Bushfires-2019-20/) (<https://www.ato.gov.au/Individuals/Dealing-with-disasters/In-detail/Specific-disasters/Bushfires-2019-20/>) [↗](#) - for information on deferrals for any lodgements and payments due.

Mental health and wellbeing support services

- [Lifeline \(https://www.lifeline.org.au/\)](https://www.lifeline.org.au/)  or call 13 11 14
- [Beyond Blue \(https://www.beyondblue.org.au/\)](https://www.beyondblue.org.au/)  - [Bushfires and mental health \(https://www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/bushfires-and-mental-health/\)](https://www.beyondblue.org.au/the-facts/bushfires-and-mental-health/)  or call 1300 22 4636.

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Contact us

Fair Work Online: www.fairwork.gov.au

Fair Work Infoline: 13 13 94

Need language help?

Contact the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS) on 13 14 50

Hearing & speech assistance

Call through the National Relay Service (NRS):

For TTY: 13 36 77. Ask for the Fair Work Infoline 13 13 94

Speak & Listen: 1300 555 727. Ask for the Fair Work Infoline 13 13 94

The Fair Work Ombudsman is committed to providing advice that you can rely on. The information contained on this website is general in nature. If you are unsure about how it applies to your situation you can call our Infoline on 13 13 94 or speak with a union, industry association or workplace relations professional. Visitors are warned that this site may inadvertently contain names or pictures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have recently died.