



PREPARING YOUR DAIRY FARM FOR FIRE THREAT

Victoria is one of the most fire-prone areas in the world. As a Victorian dairy farmer, you need a fire survival plan to help protect your family, staff, production facilities, and livestock. Your plan will also help emergency service teams better understand your property.

In February 2009, Victoria suffered the worst bushfires in its history. During this fire event, many dairy farmers in Gippsland had fire survival plans and therefore suffered less damage and disruption to their businesses.

CFA and Dairy Australia have developed this toolkit, combining lessons from the Gippsland fires and current CFA information, to help you prepare your dairy farm for fire threat.

You are encouraged to make a three-step plan based on:

- 1. Preparation** – farm, stock, plant and people management
- 2. Response** – putting preparation into action
- 3. Recovery** – getting back to normal as soon as possible

Have you thought about planting a summer crop or discing around the perimeter of the house and key buildings to establish a fuelbreak? These actions helped two farmers protect their property and stock during the 2009 Gippsland fires.

One dairy farmer planted 10 hectares of millet to provide summer feed for his herd. "I was originally going to graze this crop, but it proved its worth as a fuelbreak and helped save my machinery, sheds and 100-year-old farmhouse."

Another dairy farmer was able to run the disc around the main farm buildings to provide a bare soil fuelbreak. "Luckily, we had sufficient warning to prepare and it was the best thing we could have done. I would recommend this approach to others."

Preparation

A key to minimising the impact of fire on your business is to think ahead and be prepared. The following points outline lessons learned in Gippsland and the current CFA advice.

- 1. Refuge paddock:** At the start of the fire season, identify a suitable refuge paddock such as a green summer crop or bare paddock in the middle of your farm with good laneway access. Have a clear plan about how and when animals will be moved.
- 2. Remove weeds and debris:** Slash and spray along fences and disc around buildings to create a bare soil fuelbreak. Clear rubbish and debris regularly from around your property.
- 3. Fencing:** Fencing may be lost in a fire and it can be hard to calculate your replacement needs on the spot. You can use the mud map (overleaf) to record in advance the approximate length of fencing on your property, especially your outer perimeter.
- 4. Hay and silage management:** Make an inventory and consider the location of your hay silage stocks. Are they stored in more than one place on your property to reduce risk? Try to ensure the location is protected from ember attack and stored in a well-maintained shed.

Who will complete a hay and silage inventory and when?

- 5. Machinery and chemicals inventory:** Keep an approximate inventory of your chemicals and machinery, and identify where they can be stored safely.

Who will complete a machinery and chemicals inventory and when?

- 6. Water:** You will need easy access to water and a well-maintained, working petrol/diesel pump. Mark all your water sources located on the mud map overleaf.

Who will be responsible for maintaining the pump?

- 7. Private firefighting equipment:** It is good practice to test your firefighting equipment at the beginning of each fire season.



Preparation (continued)

8. **Power:** Outages could significantly disrupt your recovery, so plan to have a power generator, or wiring ready for a generator, to keep you milking and help to maintain milk quality.

Who will be responsible for organising / maintaining a generator?

9. **Marking the herd:** Marking the milking herd will help you sort mixed livestock ready for the first milking after a fire event.

Who will be responsible for making sure the milking herd is marked?

10. **Insurance:** Check the wording of insurance policies – do you have sufficient cover?

What other actions would help should you need to make a claim e.g. an inventory of valuable assets including machinery with supporting photographs?

11. **Shareholder/leasing agreements:** Have you discussed emergency scenarios in advance with owner/s to ensure everyone understands expectations and shareholder/leasing contractual conditions around ongoing rental payments etc?

12. **Farm records:** Keep important farm records, contracts and documents in a safe place or together as part of your relocation kit (with family documents).

13. **Fire Danger Ratings:** Victoria's Fire Danger Ratings help to predict how a fire would behave under certain conditions and help you to decide what action to take. During the fire season, you will need to check warnings regularly to keep safe.

Who will be responsible for checking fire warnings on a regular basis?



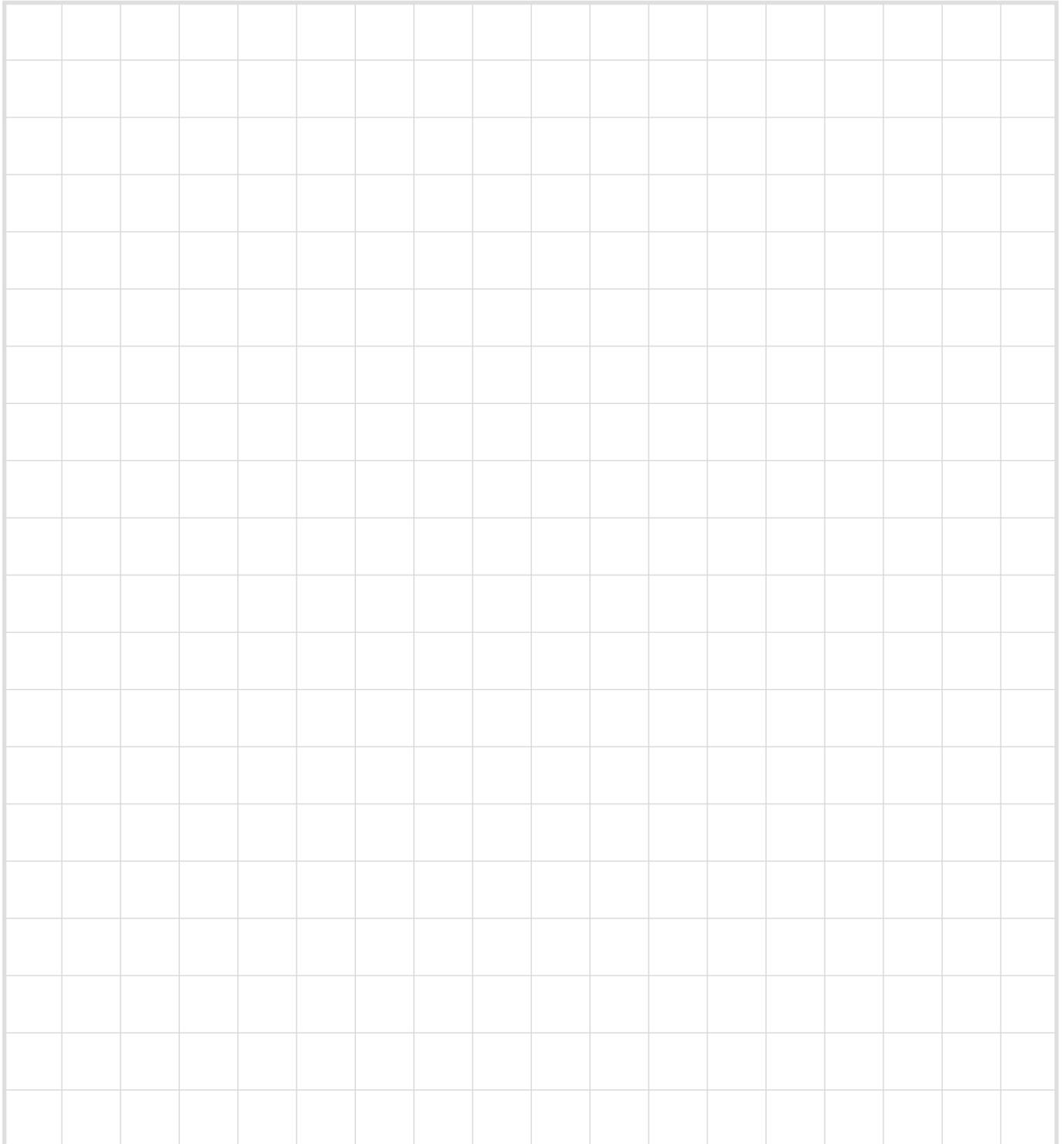
All dairy farmers should be aware it is a legal requirement during the fire danger period in Victoria to:

- Not operate welders or grinders on Total Fire Ban days
- Have machinery fitted with working, maintained and appropriate spark arrestors (except if with a turbo charger or an aspirated exhaust air cleaner)
- Have a working nine-litre water extinguisher on tractors and machinery and
- Report fires that have started on your property by calling Triple Zero.

Farm Mud Map

Draw a 'mud map' of your farm to help you and your staff understand where important buildings, refuge spots and access points are located. It will also help emergency service teams better understand your property. Include:

- Main buildings and sheds including storage sites for machinery, feed and chemicals
- Water sources
- Refuge paddock(s)
- Access points and gates wide enough for firetrucks and
- Total fencing including outer perimeter length.



Response

Check fire warnings regularly and use your local knowledge and observations to assess your level of risk. While CFA will do its best to provide official warnings, you should not wait to receive a warning to activate your plan. Fires can threaten lives and farms within minutes. Just because you do not receive a warning does not mean there is no threat.

Make sure all staff and family members are clear about the fire survival plan and who is doing what and when - you may not always be present.

- On Code Red days, the safest option is to relocate your family early in the morning or the night before. Possibly identify a nearby township as your place of relocation.
- Remember, if you are located in a high fire risk area and Code Red conditions are predicted, the safest option is to move livestock offsite or to a refuge paddock early.
- If your farm is impacted by fire, you will need to respond extremely quickly to prevent the fire spreading.
- In Victoria you are legally required to control fires that start on your property so make sure your firefighting equipment is maintained and regularly checked.

Recovery

With good planning and preparation comes better recovery. Factors to consider for a swift return to business include:

- Welfare of people – fire events can be physically and emotionally challenging
- Stock management – including animal health, welfare, feed and water
- Milking and cooling – power alternatives in a prolonged outage
- Fencing – safe containment of stock
- Land and pasture management – including resowing and weed management
- Insurance – photographs can help provide evidence of damage.

A short video has also been developed to support this toolkit. Watch it at:

www.cfa.vic.gov.au or www.dairyaustralia.com.au

And for more information CFA recommends:

- Ordering or downloading the free CFA publications '*On the Land*', '*Operating Private Fire Equipment*' and the '*FireReady Kit*'
- Attending a local FireReady Victoria meeting, Community Fireguard Group or Bushfire Planning Workshop in your area
- Requesting a site visit from CFA to help assess your risk
- **Calling the Victorian Bushfire Information line on 1800 240 667.**