

WHAT ABOUT LIGHTING CAMP FIRES?

Camp fires may only be lit when...

- a four-metre radius around the fire has been cleared of flammable material;
- the fire is attended at all times;
- the Fire Danger Rating is LOW, MODERATE or HIGH; and
- they can be completely extinguished with water or soil.

Camp fires must not be lit during prohibited burning times when...

- it is windy;
- the fire danger forecast is VERY HIGH or EXTREME; and
- it is banned by local regulations.

The use of gas appliances for cooking is safer than an open fire because the flame is contained and there is little risk of sparks escaping. Gas appliances can also be used on days of very high or extreme fire danger ratings.

FIRE DANGER RATINGS

Ratings can provide a guide to appropriate fire use during the dry season, but these signs are being phased out in the Northern Territory and Queensland.

- **LOW:** High humidity, rainfall and the bush is wet.
- **MODERATE:** High humidity, rainfall and little wind. The bush is damp.
- **HIGH:** Warm conditions with some wind. The bush is dry.
- **VERY HIGH:** Hot, windy conditions. The bush is dry and the use of open fires is prohibited.
- **EXTREME:** Very hot and windy. The bush is very dry and fires may be unmanageable.



WHOM DO I CONTACT?

To report fires in northern Australia:

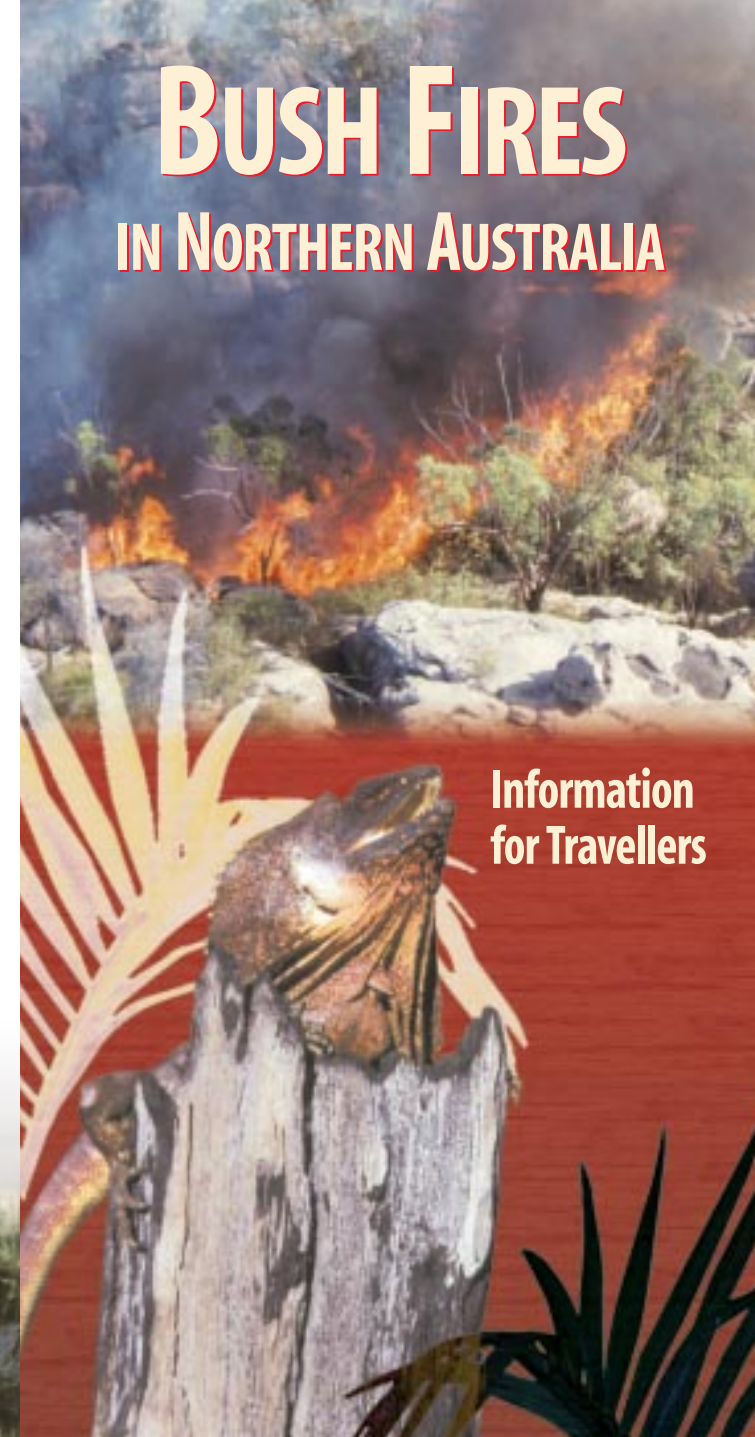
- In Western Australia and Queensland contact the Fire Services on 000
- In the Northern Territory, contact the Bushfires Council on (08) 8984 4000

To find out more about fires in the north:

- Contact the Tropical Savannas CRC on (08) 8946 6285 or (07) 4781 5967
- Visit the Tropical Savannas CRC website on <http://savanna.ntu.edu.au> and go to the "Savanna Information" section
- Contact CSIRO Wildlife and Ecology on (08) 8944 8411
- Contact the Fire and Emergency Services Authority of Western Australia on (08) 9323 9300.

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BUSH FIRES IN NORTHERN AUSTRALIA



Information
for Travellers

When visitors first see bush fires in northern Australia it can come as something of a shock—fires and smoke seem common, fire trucks are rare and the country is often burnt and black.

Bush fires are a natural part of the savanna landscape in northern Australia. But they still raise many questions. What do I do if a fire comes close? How are these fires affecting the animals and plants? Should I report fires to the authorities?

This brochure answers many of these questions and provides contacts for more detailed information on fire.



AM I AT RISK FROM BUSH FIRES?

In most cases no—the fires you see will not harm you. These fires are much less intense than the bush fires of southern Australia because they simply don't have the fuel to burn.

This is because much of the fuel, grass and tree litter, either decomposes or gets burnt each year. The amount of grass and litter in the north never rises above the equivalent of a few years' growth, in contrast to southern forests where litter can accumulate over decades.

The intensity of bush fires also depends on the time of year. There are few fires in the tropical wet season (December to April) with its heavy rains. Fires become common in the early dry season (May to July) but cooler conditions limit their intensity.

Outbreaks can be more dangerous, however, in the late dry season (August to November), when the grass and tree litter is drier, it's hotter, and fires can be started by lightning and fanned by strong winds. These fires can be a threat if adequate precautions are not taken.

ARE BUSH FIRES HARMING ANIMALS AND PLANTS?

Aboriginal people have been using fire in this landscape for thousands of years and the climate may have encouraged fire for many years before that, consequently many plants and animals are well adapted to fires. Many trees require fire to germinate their seeds, and various animals use burnt areas to forage in.



There are some plants and animals, however, which are not well adapted to fire. These are found in places like the rocky country of Kakadu and the Kimberley and the rainforests of north-east Queensland. But even these areas can be burnt by the fiercer late dry season outbreaks. Evidence that this type of fire has become more common is a concern for conservation in the north.

SHOULD BUSH FIRES BE REPORTED?

Fires in the early dry season (May to July) generally do not need to be reported.

Many of these fires are lit to manage the land. To prevent destructive wildfires, it is necessary to reduce the grass and litter load before the hotter time of year, by lighting low intensity fires in the early dry season in key areas.

Later, hotter bush fires, seen from August to November, can be more harmful to property and the environment and may be reported by contacting the numbers on the back of this brochure.



WHAT IF I ENCOUNTER A BUSH FIRE WHILE DRIVING?

If the fire is just burning the undergrowth with little smoke you should not be in any danger. In these northern regions even higher intensity fires that are burning the canopy of the trees, rarely put out enough heat to make roadways impassable.

If there is a lot of smoke...

- turn car headlights on;
- slow down and be aware that there could be people, vehicles, large trucks and livestock on the road;
- follow directions of police and firefighters if present; and
- if you cannot see clearly, pull over to the side of the road, stop your vehicle, keep the headlights on and wait until the smoke clears.

If you become trapped by a fierce fire...

Stay in your car, park it in a fuel-free area, turn off the ignition and turn on the hazard lights. Close the doors and windows, lie on the floor and cover your body with any available blankets or cloth. Wait until the fire has passed.

WHAT IF I ENCOUNTER A BUSH FIRE ON FOOT?

- move to clear or already burnt ground;
- seek shelter that will provide protection from radiated heat; and
- if your clothes catch fire, don't run—stop, drop, cover your face and roll over and over to extinguish the flames.