

Fire Procedures To Be Used At The Siding Spring Site During Bushfire Season

This section describes procedures for identifying bush fire risks and, where appropriate, evacuating the Siding Spring site. As with all procedures, they establish guidelines for use by authorised personnel employed by the ANU, and other institutions with facilities at SSO. With the exception of the pre-season and seasonal checks and the staff training, the guidelines are not prescriptive. Staff handling an emergency may need to make decisions depending on the specific circumstances of the emergency.

In reading these procedures, it should be remembered that the primary objective of the University fire safety strategy is the protection of life. Asset protection remains secondary and under no circumstances should staff, students or visitors be placed in danger to protect the site.

Bushfire Season

Bushfire season is generally between November to March, and a number of the procedures associated with identification of risk only apply during that season. However, from time to time the season may be extended, with bushfire threats existing either earlier or later in the season. The University Fire Safety Officer and/or the Rural Fire Service will advise the SSO Chief Warden if there is a change to the normal periods of the season.

Emergency Personnel

The management of a bushfire emergency will be undertaken in accordance with general procedures as outlined in University policy—that is the Fire Wardens will be responsible for the implementation of relevant elements of this plan and will control the situation until the NSW Fire Brigade or equivalent assume control.

RSAA will appoint a Chief Warden (normally the SSO Manager), and two Deputy Fire Wardens. These staff will form part of the site's Emergency Response Team.

Monitoring and Evacuation Procedures

In the case of any smoke sightings in the area there will be regular communication with the local authorities.

Where an imminent threat is identified, the Chief Warden has the authority, under Australian Standard (AS) 3745, to declare a possible site emergency and commence the evacuation of all visitors, residents, Lodge guests and non-essential personnel from the site. This will be done with the assistance of the Deputy Fire Wardens.

If for any reason it is not possible to evacuate the site, visitors, residents, Lodge guests and staff are to assemble at the AAO Telescope. This building is located on the eastern side of the mountain and provides the highest level of protection available for individuals trapped on the site.

Staged Evacuations

Once a credible bushfire threat has been identified and confirmed with the local Rural Fire Service and National Parks and Wildlife, the Chief Warden will implement a three-staged evacuation procedure.

Stage 1: This stage is primarily designed to initiate the evacuation of all visitors to the site, including visitors at the SSO Exploratory.

The Chief Warden decides there is a threat to the site, after a reported smoke sighting and liaison with the relevant authorities; the Chief Warden will then:

- Advise the RSAA Director of the intention to close the site to visitors.
- Co-ordinate the removal of visitors from the site by wardens.
- Station an appointed staff member (with a two-way radio) at the bottom of the mountain to block further access to the site. (Barricades may need to be established.) The police may assume responsibility for this task.
- Direct Deputy Fire Wardens to all areas of the site, who will instruct visitors to leave the area—reinforcing that they are in no immediate danger to prevent panic.
- Assemble and address staff, guests and residents and brief them on the situation, giving them an opportunity to leave at this time if they wish.
- Instruct all available personnel to go around the site and secure the buildings, remove any combustibles that have been left around, move bins away from buildings etc.
- Contact the local authorities and the ANU Fire Safety Manager to provide details of the actions taken to date.
- Continue to monitor the bushfire threat and remain in contact with Rural Fire Services, Warrumbungle National Parks and Wildlife Service and the ANU Fire Safety Manager. In the event that the threat level increases, the Chief Warden will implement Stage 2 of the evacuation procedures.

(Note that where the emergency occurs after hours, the role of Chief Warden may be filled by a Deputy Fire Warden, who will then become responsible for coordinating the evacuation and other related activities.)

Stage 2: This stage is designed to initiate the evacuation of all non-essential staff from the site.

Once the Chief Warden perceives the threat to be more imminent, Stage 2 of the evacuation process will be implemented:

- Allow the local authorities to set up a divisional command post in the Administration Building.
- The Chief Warden will instruct all non-essential staff to leave the site.
- Deputy Fire Wardens will manually activate the warning systems within the buildings, then physically check all areas where staff may be working. Staff will proceed to the emergency assembly point and be checked off.
- All residents may be requested to leave the site. This will be at the discretion of the Chief Warden / NSW RFS and will be based on an assessment of the likely threat to their lives and property.
- Deputy Fire Wardens and other accredited people may be asked to staff the fire equipment to combat “Spot Fires”
- Any “essential” staff member who wishes to leave the site, will be given the opportunity to do so.
- The Chief Warden or Deputy Warden will manually activate the fire pump.
- A record of all personnel remaining on site (and their current locations) will be compiled by the Chief Warden or his appointee and faxed to the Director, RSAA; Facilities and Services Division, ANU; and the Rural Fire Service.

Stage 3: This stage relates to the site being under direct threat.

Once the fire has breached the site boundary, the Chief Warden will:

- Contact the Rural Fire Service to advise them of the current situation (assuming that they are not already on site).
- Seek advice from the Rural Fire Service regarding the evacuation of remaining staff on site.
- Assuming that it is not possible to evacuate the site safely, coordinate (with the assistance of other wardens) the movement of all remaining personnel to AAO Telescope, as the “designated safe area”. The Chief Fire Warden or nominee will insure that all personnel are present. If anyone is missing, the Chief Fire Warden will inform the SSO Manager and the NSW RFS immediately.
- Once the fire front has passed, the Chief Warden will work with the RFS and authorised personnel to extinguish spot fires.
- Wait for formal advice from the Rural Fire Service that it is safe to leave the site.

In the Event of Power Failure

In the event of power failure, the Chief Fire Warden or Deputy Fire Wardens must manually activate the fire pump.

After Hours

As the Siding Spring Observatory is fully operational outside normal business hours, there are staff on site at all times. In the event of fire threat outside normal business hours, the daytime fire procedures will be followed.

Pre-Season and Seasonal Actions

SSO Site Manager will ensure that a pre-season check of the site is conducted. In undertaking this check the officer should seek to answer the following:

- Is there any combustible material being stored under or next to buildings?
- Are all the gutters clear of debris?
- What is the state of the intumescent paint? Has the surface been compromised?
- Has all ground debris been cleaned up?
- Has all the grass been mowed?
- Are there any trees overhanging buildings?

The University Fire Safety Manager will also conduct a mid-season audit of the site.

Staff Training

A full evacuation drill will also be conducted at least once per year. This drill will be done in consultation with the management of RSAA and the managers of the other stakeholders at the Siding Springs site. The Fire Safety manager will provide assistance in staging the evacuation.

SSO Manager to liaise with the University's Fire Safety Manager regarding the training needs for on-site staff and the best strategy to implement the training.

www.anu.edu.au/bcp/sso_bushfire_season.html