

WHAT IS A BUSHFIRE?

Learn about what causes bushfires and how you can help those affected...

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Bushfires are fires that burn through areas of bushland. They are a type of **wildfire** – fires that burn through wild vegetation like **woodland**, **scrubland**, **grassland** or **savannahs**. These fires are unpredictable and difficult to control.

These fires are particularly common in areas that experience hot, dry weather, like **Australia**, **Greece**, **Africa** and parts of the USA, like **California**.



What causes bushfires?

There are lots of possible **bushfire causes**. They can start **naturally**, when **lightning strikes** and ignites dry plants and trees, like the golden wattle tree. But they can also be caused by people, for example, by someone **not extinguishing their campfire** properly. Sadly, sometimes fires are started by someone deliberately.

Climate change doesn't start bushfires, but it does cause them to become **larger** and **more ferocious**. That's because our warming planet is experiencing more **intense** periods of **drought**, drying out the vegetation that **fuels** the fires. All that's needed is a spark.

Are bushfires natural?

Believe it or not, bushfires are actually part of an important **natural cycle** that's been around for **hundreds of millions of years**. Flames can kill insects and **diseases** that harm trees. Low intensity fires burn dead or decaying debris on the ground which helps return **nutrients** to the soil. Fires also make space for **new shoots** to grow, and for more **sunlight** to reach the ground – creating a valuable food source and new **habitat** for animals and birds.

In places that often experience fires, some species of plants have even **adapted** to use fire for survival. For example, **bottlebrush plants** that grow in Australia produce

a hard, woody fruit containing hundreds of tiny seeds. Some plants won't release these seeds unless there is a fire.

Sometimes, people who look after wild areas will start a **controlled fire** to help manage the land. These fires are **carefully planned** and monitored to make sure that they don't put anyone at risk of danger. Controlled fires help to prevent large-scale, out-of-control bushfires by clearing **dry leaves, grasses** and **branches** that could fuel a potential fire, in a controlled way.

Traditionally, the **First Nations People** of **Australia** used fire to manage the landscape, encourage **new growth** and help them **hunt**.

Why are bushfires dangerous?

Bushfires become dangerous when they grow **out of control** and encroach on **communities**. The flames can burn through buildings, and breathing in the smoke from fires can be harmful. Windy weather conditions can fan the flames, spreading the blaze more quickly.

Thankfully, there are lots of people, like firefighters, government officials and ordinary men and women, working extremely hard to learn how to better prevent and control bushfires. And there are lots of ways in which you and your family can stay safe during a bushfire, like planning an escape route and keeping an emergency bag packed in case you need to leave in a hurry.

What can I do to help?

If you're worried about the recent bushfires in Australia, there's lots you can do to help the people and wildlife affected:

– Consider raising money for a charity. You could hold a bake sale or do a sponsored walk to drum up donations:

Wildlife Victoria and **RSPCA Victoria** are supporting wildlife in the region during the bushfires.

Save The Children Australia and **Unicef Australia** are supporting children who have been affected by the bushfires.

– Create posters that educate others about the dangers of bushfires and how to stay safe.

– Be kind to the planet – climate change can make bushfires worse, so try to live in a way that doesn't harm the environment.

– Leave shallow dishes of cool water out for thirsty wildlife. Place them in shaded spots on the ground and up in trees, where animals will be safe from predators, if you can. Be sure to use non-metal dishes, as these will absorb heat and become hot very quickly.