

# Putting safety first in bushfire season

For communities supplied by powerlines that travel through high and extreme bushfire risk zones



We all love summer but high temperatures and low rainfall can lead to conditions where fires are easily ignited, spread quickly and are difficult to control.

Your electricity supply is fed by powerlines that travel through areas susceptible to bushfire and our safety commitment to you, your community, our crews, the environment and our network means we need to do things a little differently during bushfire season.

These changes may result in more outages and due to limitations on our response when bushfire weather escalates, it may take longer to restore your power.

To minimise the impact on you, we take a number of steps before the bushfire season starts to help keep the network running safely.

## How we prepare for bushfire season

We make a big investment every year to prepare our network for bushfire season. To help prioritise our prevention, maintenance and emergency activities at this time of year, we have classified our maintenance zones according to their bushfire risk, ranging from low and moderate to high and extreme.

As bushfire season approaches, our attention is most heavily focused on high and extreme bushfire risk maintenance zones. The powerlines that supply your electricity travel through at least one of these zones.

Some activities we undertake to reduce the potential for bushfire ignition include:

- clearing naturally occurring plants and trees away from poles and powerlines
- ongoing inspection and maintenance programs for powerlines, poles and equipment
- coating insulators with protective silicone
- operating the network more conservatively when the risk of bushfire is greatest
- training our crews in fire precautions for fieldwork in areas prone to bushfires

# Why outages happen more often and take longer to resolve during bushfire season

As part of our commitment to safety and reducing bushfire risk, we modify settings that monitor the electricity network to make them more sensitive during bushfire season. These changes have the greatest impact on customers in regional communities where electricity is supplied by powerlines that travel through high and extreme bushfire risk areas, often over long distances.

Most faults on the Western Power network are temporary, a bird or falling branch strikes a powerline for example, and although it affects the network momentarily there is often no permanent damage. However, about 30 per cent of faults are more significant and supply is interrupted until the cause can be found and addressed.

Our electricity network is designed with equipment to automatically detect and isolate these faults. Even though attempting to re-energise the network may create a spark, in normal conditions the risk of starting a fire in doing so is very low.

When there is a fault or other interference in bushfire season, the more sensitive settings ensure that power is interrupted faster than usual and the power will remain off instead of being automatically restored. This reduces the likelihood of starting a fire but results in more frequent outages.

For everyone's safety, we continue to operate more cautiously as bushfire weather escalates.

On a Fire Weather Day, we won't turn power back on after an outage without carefully considering any risks.



*Fallen branches often cause temporary faults on powerlines*

This includes not allowing the network to automatically attempt to turn the power back on until we have sent a crew to patrol the powerline and find the cause of the fault. Some regional powerlines are hundreds of kilometres long, so this can take some time.

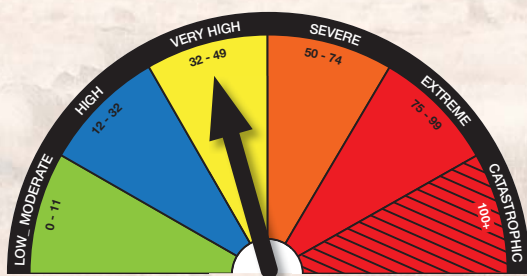
Our restoration practices to find and address the cause of outages are further restricted when Total Fire Bans and Vehicle Movement Bans are declared. In these circumstances, we usually have to wait for bushfire risk conditions to ease or the bans to be lifted before we can patrol the powerline or attempt to restore power. This means you may be without power for an extended period of time, possibly until late in the evening.

If you would like more information about how escalating fire weather affects our activities, please see the table on the following page or visit our website at [westernpower.com.au/bushfireseason](http://westernpower.com.au/bushfireseason)

## Escalating bushfire weather conditions

### Fire Danger Index

The Fire Danger Index is the scale used to measure the severity of bushfire threat. A Fire Danger Rating is based on forecast weather conditions and advises the level of bushfire threat on a particular day. As the rating increases, the threat of a bushfire increases. For more information about Fire Danger Ratings, visit [dfes.wa.gov.au/firedangerratings](http://dfes.wa.gov.au/firedangerratings)



### Fire Weather Day

A Fire Weather Day is a Western Power designation when the Fire Danger Index is forecast to be 32 or greater. If a fire starts or takes hold when the threat of a bushfire becomes Very High, it may be hard for firefighters to control. On Fire Weather Days we take additional precautions to minimise the risk of our activities generating a spark which could potentially start a fire that might be difficult to control.

A Fire Weather Day is different to a Fire Weather Warning issued by the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) when the Fire Danger Rating for an area is forecast to be Severe, Extreme or Catastrophic (a Fire Danger Index of 50 or higher).

## How you can help

When trees and branches come into contact with powerlines they can cause outages and even bushfires. Please keep trees on your property clear of powerlines all year round. For more information visit [westernpower.com.au/treesafety](http://westernpower.com.au/treesafety)

Information from the community helps us maintain a safe and reliable electricity network for everyone and can also help us to find faults faster. So if you see a fallen or damaged powerline, stay clear and **make the safe call on 13 13 51**.

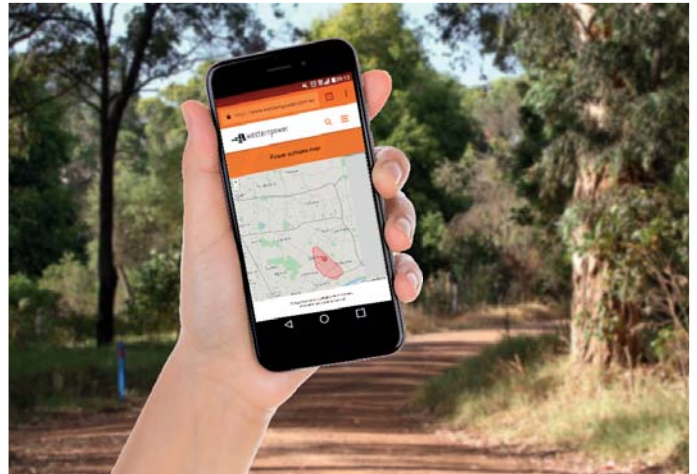
And if you do experience a power interruption during bushfire season, particularly when there is a Fire Weather Warning and Total Fire Ban in place anywhere along your powerline, please be patient. We will work as quickly as conditions allow to assess the issue, make any necessary patrols and repairs and restore power as soon as it is safe to do so.

## What we can do to help

We understand long, unexpected power outages can be really inconvenient. If you are affected by an outage lasting 12 continuous hours or more, you may be eligible for an \$80 payment under the State Government's extended outage payment scheme. For more information and eligibility requirements visit [westernpower.com.au/eops](http://westernpower.com.au/eops)

If you experience more extensive loss or damage that you believe has arisen from incorrect action by Western Power, or inappropriate operation of our equipment, you may be entitled to additional compensation.

For more information about a claim for loss or damage visit [westernpower.com.au/compensation](http://westernpower.com.au/compensation)



## How to stay in touch

If you would like up-to-date information about outages and restoration times in your area at any time, visit the power outages map on our website homepage [www.westernpower.com.au](http://www.westernpower.com.au)

**Our customer service team is always on hand to take your call.**

**Call 13 13 51** for faults, emergencies, power interruptions and restoration times.

**Call 13 10 87** for general enquiries and technical information.

For more safety tips and information on power interruptions, visit us at [westernpower.com.au](http://westernpower.com.au) You can also follow us on Twitter and Facebook.

### Total Fire Ban

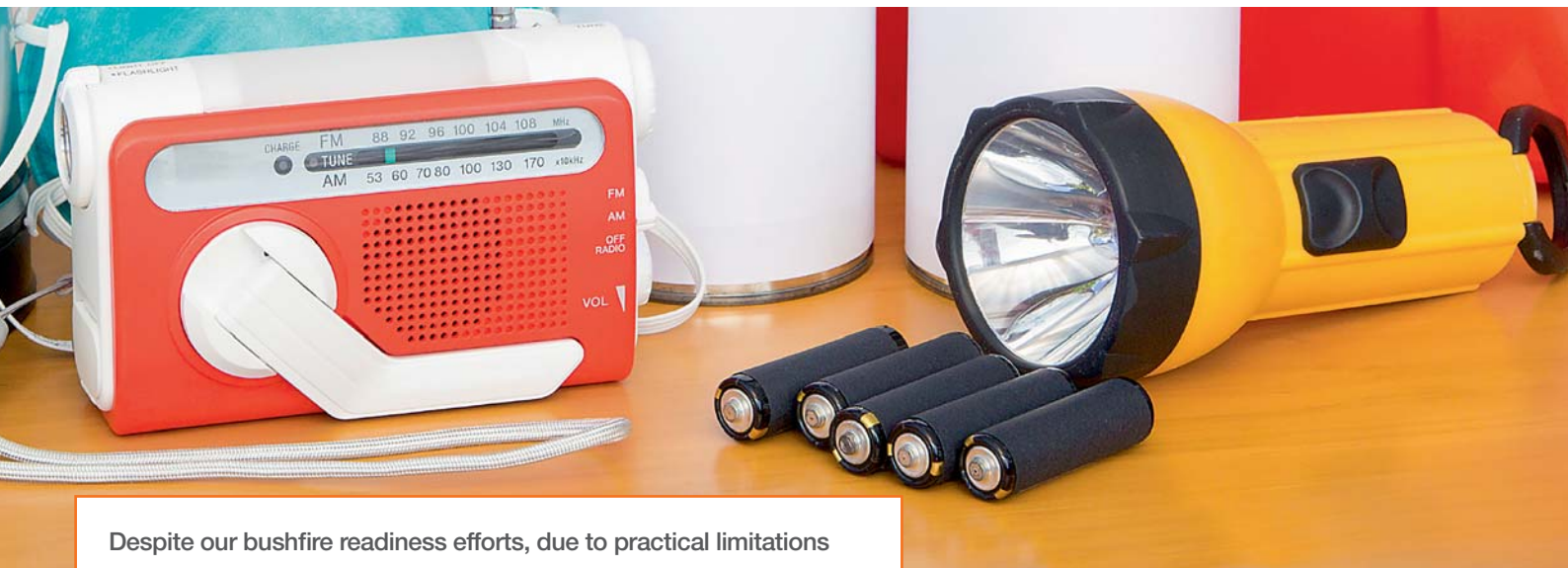
A Total Fire Ban is declared on days when fires are most likely to threaten lives and property. In Western Australia, Total Fire Bans are declared by the Department of Fire and Emergency Services following consultation with local governments based on a range of criteria including forecast weather provided by BOM, bushfire activity and availability of emergency resources.

In addition to prohibiting lighting any fires in the open air, a Total Fire Ban also extends to any other activities that may start a fire. It is generally issued from midnight to midnight but may be revoked if the forecast weather does not eventuate or if weather conditions ease.

### Vehicle Movement Ban

Vehicle Movement Bans are issued by local governments and place an even stronger restriction on Western Power's activities. Local governments will impose the ban when their Bushfire Control Officer is concerned that the use of engines, vehicles, plant or machinery (including mobile generators) is likely to cause a fire or contribute to the spread of a bushfire. Vehicle Movement Bans may be imposed for any length of time but are generally imposed for the 'heat of the day' and may be extended or revoked by the local government should weather conditions change. A Total Fire Ban may be in place at the same time as a Vehicle Movement Ban but not necessarily.

# How you can prepare



Despite our bushfire readiness efforts, due to practical limitations as bushfire weather escalates you may still lose power for extended periods of time during bushfire season. Without power, you may not be able to operate cordless phones, automatic doors, water pumps and other electrical devices so it is important to have a backup plan.

Ways to stay aware and prepare:

- ✓ If you care for someone who is sick or elderly, operate a business or you rely on electrical pumps for water, we recommend you maintain your own emergency electricity and water supply.
- ✓ If you have a generator, keep it fuelled and ready to operate.
- ✓ If you have automatic garage doors or gates, learn how to operate them manually before an outage occurs.
- ✓ Keep your mobile phone and other important devices charged up. Remember, you can recharge many devices in your car.
- ✓ Keep a torch and radio in an accessible place and have spare batteries on hand.
- ✓ If you don't have a surge protector, during an outage unplug sensitive appliances such as computers, TVs and sound systems to protect them when power is restored.
- ✓ Stay informed by checking for Fire Danger Ratings, Fire Weather Warnings and Total Fire Bans at [dfes.wa.gov.au](http://dfes.wa.gov.au)
- ✓ If you see a fallen powerline, stay clear and make the safe call to Western Power's 24/7 emergency line on 13 13 51.
- ✓ For up-to-date information about outages, visit the power outages map on our website [www.westernpower.com.au](http://www.westernpower.com.au)



These tips will help you prepare for a power outage and should not replace your bushfire survival plan.

For more information on preparing and surviving a bushfire, visit [areyouready.wa.gov.au](http://areyouready.wa.gov.au)

