



## The Carson family bushfire scenario

**The situation:** The area around the Carson property was very dry – despite a good growth season in spring, there had been very little rain over summer. The properties in the area normally had well-maintained gardens, but the lawns and small paddocks had become very dry. It was now late January, the end of holidays, and people were getting ready for the new work and school year.

Over the past two weeks, while the Carsons had been on a beach holiday, a small fire in the bush on the far side of the lake had been extinguished before much damage had been done. The CFA was carefully monitoring the area.

Upon returning home on Monday, the Fire Danger Rating was Very High. Chris Carson checked the house and grounds to make sure that the preparations the family had made earlier, such as clearing away dry material and cleaning the gutters, were still effective. He also checked the portable water pump and the knapsacks in the garage. In accordance with the family's fire plan, Aroha and Jeni were regularly visiting the CFA website to check on the weather and fire incident reports for the area. By Friday the danger had dropped back to High after a change in the weather. Everyone relaxed again. Chris took Jeni water-skiing at the lake on Saturday.

On Sunday the temperatures rose quickly again and a hot north wind increased. Aroha reported that the Fire Danger Rating had been upgraded to Very High again. The family talked about getting a few things ready for leaving early if the rating reached Severe, but the thought of packing up again after just unpacking from the holiday was cause for reluctance. Chris worried about more dislocation and was determined to keep everyone calm. Although it was very hot and the wind was picking up, he heard the radio weather report forecast, which predicted a cool change was on its way. Sunday evening stayed hot and muggy.

The next morning Aroha checked her computer and the rating had been upgraded to Severe. A dry north wind was blowing and temperatures were forecast to be in the high 30s. At 9.00 am the phone rang. It was a neighbour in the Community Fire Guard Group calling to tell Lana that a small fire had started at the far side of the lake.

**Crisis 1:** How will the family respond to this situation, taking into account what is in their Bushfire Survival Plan? What are their options? Have they acted in accordance with their plan so far?

The trigger to leave early had arrived. In keeping with their fire plan, Lana immediately activated the Leave Early arrangements. She called Jeni in from the stable and told the children to get changed into their protective clothes and to get their personal bags and relocation kit ready. They then had to get the animals organised while Lana went to help Aroha get ready and collect all the important items they had nominated, including family documents.

# Bushfire Education



After checking the water pump, Chris came into the kitchen. He listened to the latest weather update, which said that a cool change was still coming. 'Good', he thought. 'We will be OK.' He walked out onto the deck and already he thought he could feel a slight cool breeze on his neck.

Lana came up from the granny flat to see Chris on the deck. The smoke from the lake fire was rolling up the ridge and was getting thicker. 'What are you doing, Chris? We've got to get going!' she called.

'We shouldn't panic Lana,' he said. 'A change is on its way. So, let's keep calm. We'll be fine. You and the kids and Aroha can get going as planned. The CFA will get that fire under control. I will put the roof sprinklers on to wet the house down and can sit it out until the change comes in.'

As soon as she was changed, Jeni ran back to the stable to let her horse loose in house paddock. Graeme collected the two cats and put them in their carry-boxes before going to get the dog from his kennel.

Chris called everyone into the kitchen to discuss the plan of action. He explained that as there was a Severe Fire Danger Rating, Lana, the children and Aroha would leave early as planned. With a change coming and the fire still on the other side of the lake, Chris would call neighbours Jim and Peter to help out if he needed to defend their brick house against any spot fires with knapsacks and hoses from the dam.

**Crisis 2:** How will the family respond to this situation, taking into account what is in their Bushfire Survival Plan? What are their options? Have they acted in accordance with their plan so far?

'No, Chris,' said Lana, keeping her voice calm. 'We made the decision to leave when it got to Severe – but now that there is a fire nearby, we should all stay together and go now.'

'Yes, Dad!' cried Jeni. 'You shouldn't stay, it's getting worse. Please, Dad! We're all packed.'

'I know, darling,' said Chris. 'But we've made all the right preparations. You kids and Grandma go with Mum, and I will stay and look after any spot fires until the change comes through.'

'But that's crazy, Chris. There's fire on its way. In this wind it will come right up the ridge if it gets across the lake. Jim and Peter will be looking after their own places and you can't defend on your own. You could have an asthma attack and...! You promised you'd go if it got to Extreme and it's Extreme NOW! We stay together! It will be dark soon...let's go, now!' she cried angrily.

Instantly, Chris realised he was making a mistake. 'OK, OK Lana,' he said. 'You're right. If we all go, we'll all be safe. The house might survive with the sprinklers on. If the change comes and there's no fire, what's the loss? OK, let's get the close-down jobs done. Graeme you come with me and the pets in the ute. Jeni, you go with Mum and Grandma.'

'I've piled some rugs by the front door,' said Jeni.

'I'll go and set the roof sprinkler to run,' said Chris.

# Bushfire Education



Just then Aroha called from downstairs to say that Pete from the Community Fire Guard Group called to warn that the lake fire had 'taken off ' and that 'embers had taken the fire across the corner of the lake into the base of the ridge and it was heading our way'.

Lana quickly went around the house, closing the doors and windows. Graeme put his bag in the boot of the car and tied the dog to the bumper of the ute. Lana helped her mother to the car and stowed her bag in the back. Aroha sat in the front seat listening to the local radio for more news of the fire. Just as Jeni arrived at the car with an armful of blankets, Graeme shouted that a spot fire from an ember attack had begun in the grass at the edge of the paddock, less than a hundred metres away. Jeni dropped the blanket and called to her Dad to get the knapsack.

**Crisis 3:** How will the family respond to this situation, taking into account what is in their Bushfire Survival Plan? What are their options? Have they acted in accordance with their plan so far?

'No time to worry about that!' shouted Chris. 'Get into the car!'

Lana, Jeni and Aroha started heading up the driveway in the car.

Meanwhile, Graeme untied the dog and tried to lift him onto the back of the ute, but the dog was unsettled by the smoke and the agitated family. He struggled and, in a second, he had wriggled free and scooted off to the shed. 'Hey!' shouted Graeme, and sprinted off after him.

**Crisis 4:** How will the family respond to this situation, taking into account what is in their Bushfire Survival Plan? What are their options? Have they acted in accordance with their plan so far?

'No, Graeme! Get back to the ute!' called Chris. 'Just leave the dog, son. He'll have to fend for himself. There's no time to lose!' he cried.

In tears, Graeme jumped into the ute and Chris screeched up the gravel driveway. In no time, they had caught up to the car and they arrived at the open gate in convoy.

Lana stuck her head out of the window. 'Which way?' she cried.

Chris thought they could turn right and drive to the town and the school sports fields, where they would be safe. They would also be able to follow the progress of the fire and get back to their home as soon as possible. But as they looked in that direction, all they could see was thick black smoke rolling down the road.

'What do you think, Lana?' asked Chris.

'Don't be crazy!' cried Aroha from the car. 'We'll never survive that! We'll have to go in the other direction!'

**Crisis 5:** How will the family respond to this situation, taking into account what is in their Bushfire Survival Plan? What are their options? Have they acted in accordance with their plan so far?

# Bushfire Education



As the family paused at the gate, a speeding car burst out of the smoke. It screeched to a halt in front of the Carson family. Chris recognised the soot-streaked face of their neighbour Jim. 'There's no way you'll get through there,' he shouted. 'I'm off to help fight it from the other side. You coming, Chris?'

Chris turned to look at his wife, his eyebrows raised. 'I could be useful...perhaps I should go,' he said.

**Crisis 6:** How will the family respond to this situation, taking into account what is in their Bushfire Survival Plan? What are their options? Have they acted in accordance with their plan so far?

'Remember the backup plan?' said Lana. 'We've got to get to Bruce's.' And with that, she swung the wheel to the left and sped off away from the smoke.