



## Bushfire scenario: the McIntosh family face a bushfire

**The situation:** The area around the McIntosh farm was very dry, and despite a good growth season in spring, there had been very little rain for over three months of summer. Over the past two weeks, two small fires in the pine plantation behind the farm had been extinguished before much damage had been done, and the CFA were carefully monitoring the area. On Wednesday, the Fire Danger Rating had risen to Severe, and Angus McIntosh had stayed at home for the past two days. He had checked the house and the farm to make sure that the preparations he had made earlier, such as clearing away dry material and cleaning the gutters on the house, were still effective. In accordance with the family's fire plan, Sylvie was regularly visiting the CFA website to check on the Fire Danger Rating. On Friday, the danger had dropped to Very High with a change in the weather, but the family decided they would pack up their vehicles when and if the rating reached Severe again.

On Sunday, the temperatures rose quickly and the hot wind increased. Sylvie reported at 11.00 am that the Fire Danger Rating had risen to Severe. The two children went to their rooms to get their personal bags ready, while Margaret began to check the relocation kit. Angus was at the far end of the farm checking the boundary fences. The next time Sylvie turned her computer on the rating had risen to Extreme. At almost the same time the phone rang. It was a neighbour in the Community Fire Guard ringing to tell Sylvie that another fire had started at the far side of the pine plantation. The wind would force the fire towards their farm.

**Crisis 1:** Taking into account what is in their bushfire survival plan, how will the family respond to this situation? What are their options? Have they acted in accordance with their plan so far?

Margaret called Angus on his mobile, and he headed home immediately, telling her that they would talk about leaving as soon as he got back. She called to Sara and Donald to get changed into their protective clothes and then went to help Sylvie change.

As soon as she was changed, Sara saddled her horse. She led the other two horses into the home paddock and let them loose. Leaving the gate open, she rode into the next paddock to round up the sheep and bring them into the home paddock too. She wished that she had done this earlier in the week, but her father had said it was not necessary. Donald collected the two cats and put them in their carry-boxes before going to get the dog from his kennel.

By this time there was smoke from the fire rolling over the property. Margaret was staggered at how quickly the fire had spread. Angus arrived and called the family together in the kitchen. Everyone was there except Sara, who was still moving the sheep. Angus said that they had made the decision to leave and quickly went through the list of jobs detailing who was to do what. Sylvie called the Community Fire Guard, who were monitoring two-way radio calls. She learnt that the fire was much bigger than they had thought and that a number of CFA teams were fighting it. Margaret went around closing the doors and windows, while Donald put his bag in the boot of the car and tied the dog to the bumper of the ute. Angus ran out to fetch Sara, telling her to leave the rest of the sheep and just leave the gate open. He returned and began fastening a heavy tarpaulin over the tray of the ute. Margaret helped her mother to the car and stowed her bag in the back. Sylvie sat in the front

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seat listening to the local radio for news of the fire. Just as Sara arrived at the car, Donald shouted that there was a fire – a spot fire from an ember attack had begun in the grass at the edge of the home paddock 100 metres away.

**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 time to worry about that!', shouted Angus. 'Get in the car!' Margaret, Sara and Sylvie started off down the drive in the car. Meanwhile, Donald untied the dog and tried to lift him onto the back of the ute, but the dog was unsettled by the smoke, flames and the agitated family. He struggled in the grasp of the young boy and, in a second, had wriggled free and scooted off to the barn. 'Hey!', shouted Donald, and he sprinted off after him.

**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?

Sharply, Angus called Donald back to the ute. 'Just leave the dog he'll find the dam. There's no time to lose!', he cried. Donald jumped into the ute, and Angus spun the wheels in the gravel drive. In a moment they had caught up to the girls in the car, and they arrived at the open gate in convoy. Margaret stuck her head out of the window. 'Which way?', she cried. They had planned to turn right and drive to the footy oval in town, where they would be safe and where they could 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. 'I think we'll be all right', said Angus. 'Don't be crazy!', cried Sylvie from the car. 'We'll never survive that!'

**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?

As the family paused at the gateway, a car burst out of the smoke, travelling at speed. It screeched to a halt in front of the McIntosh family. Angus recognised the soot-streaked face of a neighbour. 'There's no way you'll get through there', he shouted. 'I'm off to help fight it from the other side. You coming?' Angus turned to look at his wife, his eyebrows raised. 'Perhaps I should go', he said.

**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?

'Remember the plan', said Margaret. 'We've got to get to Bruce's.' And with that, she swung the wheel to the left and sped off in the direction of the Melbourne highway.