

Frequently asked questions: January 2026 Victorian Bushfires

15 January 2026

A state of disaster has been declared by the Victorian Government in response to the January 2026 bushfires.

What do I need to know?

If your life or someone else's life is in danger, or to report a fire anywhere in Australia, please call triple zero (000) immediately.

Stay informed about bushfire dangers by visiting the [Victorian Government's VicEmergency Incidents and Warnings page](#). You can call the VicEmergency Hotline by calling (1800 226 226)

For the latest updates, including a [map](#) of all warnings, please visit [ABC Emergency](#).

Anyone in Australia who has been impacted by the bushfire and needs further support can contact the organisations below.

- Australian Red Cross - phone (1800 733 276) or visit the [Red Cross website](#)
- Lifeline Australia - phone (13 11 14) or visit the [Lifeline website](#)
- 1800 RESPECT - phone (1800 737 732) or visit the [1800 RESPECT website](#).

What financial assistance is available?

- Financial assistance may be available for PALM scheme employers affected by the Victorian bushfires.
- Please check the below linked information for eligibility, as some assistance packages are only available to Australian citizens, permanent residents, and specific visa holders.
 - **National:** The Australian Government has activated financial assistance in response to Victorian bushfires. To determine eligibility, please visit (servicesaustralia.gov.au/vic-bushfires-jan-2026).
 - **Victoria:** The Victorian Government has activated financial assistance for people affected by Victorian bushfires. To determine eligibility, please visit (vic.gov.au/january-2026-victorian-bushfires).
- At the time of publishing, PALM scheme workers do not appear to meet the eligibility requirements for Australian Government assistance, however, may be eligible for assistance from the Victorian Government.

How do employers and workers report if they have been impacted by this event?

For critical and urgent issues, please call the PALM scheme support service line on (1800 51 51 31). For non-critical matters, please submit an incident report via AE Portal (portal.palmscheme.gov.au/). Further information for notifying a force majeure event is available on the [PALM scheme website](#).

How should employers support workers in Australia who have been impacted by this event?

PALM scheme employers must continue to support the ongoing safety, welfare and wellbeing of impacted PALM scheme workers, until such time as they can return to work or their accommodation. This includes providing appropriate alternative accommodation if required.

If a worker needs to be relocated to a new work location, do I need written approval from the department to change the approved recruitment?

No. Where the circumstances that require the relocation of workers is urgent and unforeseen, you must inform the department no later than 24 hours after the workers are relocated. Under normal circumstances, changes to approved recruitments or offer of employments must not be made unless the department has given written approval.

If the employer needs to move workers to new accommodation, does the accommodation move require prior approval by the department?

Workers may be moved to alternative accommodation without DEWR's prior written approval in urgent circumstances, such as where the approved accommodation has become unsafe due to fire, flooding, or any other circumstance that may deem the property inhabitable due to damage or safety concerns.

If Workers require immediate relocation due to the circumstances noted above, employers must:

- contact the department immediately after relocating the Workers, and no later than 24 hours after the Workers have been relocated; and
- seek the department's written approval by submitting an Accommodation Plan within 3 calendar days after relocating the Workers if the accommodation is not already approved by Us.

Do employers have to provide \$200 net pay each week if workers are unable to work?

Employers must continue to ensure the worker receives a minimum of \$200 each week, provided that the worker agrees to the pay advance. This is to ensure the worker has enough money to meet their basic needs until they can return to work. Note that debt cannot be carried over to a new placement if workers depart and subsequently return to Australia.

What are an employer's obligations for long-term workers?

PALM scheme employers must continue to provide full-time hours to all long-term workers.

If your business operations are affected by the impact of the Victorian bushfires and you cannot usefully employ your workers, you may be able to enact standdown provisions in accordance with the PALM scheme guidelines, *Fair Work Act*, or relevant Fair Work instrument as applicable.

If standdowns reduce long-term worker hours to less than 20 hours per week, employers must:

- ensure workers receive the minimum net pay guarantee of \$200 after tax and deductions
- cover the cost of worker accommodation and transport.

In these circumstances PALM scheme employers must also notify the department. Further information on standdowns is available on:

- the Fair Work Ombudsman website (fairwork.gov.au/pay-and-wages/stand-downs)
- the PALM scheme website (palmscheme.gov.au/resources/standdowns-palm-scheme).

What are an employer's obligations for short-term workers?

PALM scheme employers must continue to meet the minimum hours requirements for all short-term workers.

Employers must offer short-term workers a minimum of 120 hours of work reconciled over 4 weeks.

If employers cannot offer workers a minimum 120 hours of work, they **must**:

- pay the equivalent amount of at least 120 hours over 4 weeks during the worker's placement and

Where workers are offered less than 20 hours per week, employers **must**:

- ensure workers receive the minimum net pay guarantee of \$200 after tax and deductions
- cover the cost of worker accommodation and transport.

