



3.5 EXTREME HEAT AND FIRE RISK POLICY

Policy statement:

Interchange Inner East is committed to minimising the potential risk of harm to participants in programs during extreme heat or fire risk conditions.

The obligation to minimise the risk of harm to the people we support is a primary responsibility further outlined in Interchange Inner East's policy on Duty of Care.

Extreme Heat

In accordance with the duty of care we owe our clients and Interchange's Duty of Care Policy, staff will ensure clients are protected from the effects of exposure to the sun and extreme heat, utilizing shade, sunscreen, protective clothing, and frequent fluids.

We also expect the cooperation of parents with the provision of appropriate clothing, hats, sunscreen (both applied and provided) and water bottles.

Medical and behavioural information will be included in the individual client profiles advising staff and volunteers of health/behavioural issues specifically related to the effects of high temperatures on individuals-e.g. the triggering of seizures. Any adverse effects, due to heat exposure, experienced while in Interchange's care should be reported to the Program Manager or Coordinator to ensure the provision of appropriate care.

Any adverse effects suffered through exposure to the sun or extreme heat will be reported in accordance with Interchange's Incident reporting procedure and where necessary, appropriate first-aid or medical attention sought in consultation with families.

In severe heat, outdoor activities, including camps with high exposure risks, may be cancelled, rescheduled or replaced with alternative activities. Where possible, prior notice will be provided however, Interchange Management may alter a planned activity without notice for safety reasons.

If parents wish to cancel a planned activity, due to extreme heat, they should discuss the cancellation with the Program Coordinator and strive to provide appropriate notice in accordance with our Cancellation Policy.

Extreme heat and vulnerable persons

Children and young people with disabilities are often more susceptible to temperature extremes and health effects due to their complex health issues, these may include the inability to regulate their body temperature effectively. Conditions such as epilepsy, asthma, and diabetes may also increase the risks associated with extreme heat, requiring greater vigilance. Some medications can increase vulnerability to sunburn. Staff and volunteers should be alert to any health issues associated with heat and sun exposure for the participants in their care.

Heat wave conditions may also have a cumulative effect on the health and wellbeing of people with disabilities and require vigilance in relation to avoiding dehydration and other symptoms of heat exposure.

Heat exposure: Symptoms of heat exposure includes:

Confusion, agitation or distress

Profuse sweating

Dehydration

Faintness

Extreme tiredness

Headache

Other effects include: nausea, vomiting, hyperventilation, skin numbness, muscle cramps, rapid heartbeat, flushed skin appearance

*For IIE participants exposure to extreme heat may result in unpredictable and extreme behaviour changes.

Extreme Heat Procedure:

In the days leading up to recreation activities and camps, the program manager and program coordinators are required to monitor temperature forecasts and fire danger ratings and complete the following:

3.5c Extreme Heat Risk Management Checklist/Procedure

If the forecast temperature is 30-36° degrees or above

The location, time and duration of the activity needs to be assessed in accordance with this policy and 3.5 Risk Management Extreme Heat Checklist/Procedure.

If the forecast temperature is 36° and above

Wherever possible, the activity should be conducted indoors.

Camps /activities need to be modified to ensure that participants are protected during peak heat periods. Travel time is to be limited. Additional drink breaks and rest periods scheduled into the day to ensure the participants are well hydrated and comfortable.

If this is not possible or practical, the event/activity will be rescheduled or cancelled.

Cancellation:

Interchange Management and Coordinators may need to cancel at short notice for heat and fire safety reasons. Parents are requested to consider their child's ability to cope with extreme heat, their individual vulnerabilities, as they know best how their child will cope with different conditions.

Emergency response during extreme heat

Vehicle breakdown: In the case of a vehicle breakdown staff should make every effort to limp the vehicle into the shade, and immediately call On Call and the RACV. Begin to cool the vehicle and the clients e.g. opening windows, wetting faces, removing clothing. Staff and On Call/ Program Manager are to make a judgment as to the need for emergency assistance/000 to remove clients from potential danger. If on a freeway or busy roadside, remain in the vehicle until assistance arrives.

Health emergency: In the event of a participant appearing to be severely affected by extreme heat, and are unresponsive to heat first aid e.g. hydration, cooling, staff are to call **000**.

Fire Risk Procedure:

In the days leading up to the provision of In-home respite, recreation activities and camps, the program manager and program coordinators are required to monitor temperature forecasts and fire danger ratings and complete the following:

3.5b Fire Season Safety Management Checklist/Procedure

The Program Manager or designated Coordinator will complete the **IIE Fire Season Safety Management Checklist**. This checklist monitors that all steps of the safety management are completed and the checklist provided to the Executive Officer or their delegate.

Fire Season-1st Nov -30th April

During the fire season, all staff are to take responsibility for ensuring fire danger safety awareness as part of their duty of care. Respite staff are not to change planned locations without prior consultation with Program Coordinators/On call. Staff are to monitor emergency communication frequently.

All activities to be conducted in fire risk areas will be assessed for safety by Interchange management in accordance with Fire Danger Ratings provided through fire risk Information services, and in accordance with the DHS Emergency Preparedness Policy 2014. Interchange will strive to give 24 hours' notice of cancellations and alternative planned activities. Interchange reserves the right to cancel, at short notice, due to safety considerations particularly in the case of a Code Red, Extreme or under certain conditions, Severe, declaration. Interchange will endeavour to refund any costs associated with cancelled activities however, some venue booking costs may not be recoverable.

All camp sites used for overnight stays will be assessed for suitability regarding extreme heat/ fire safety and evacuation prior to the scheduled camp. The assessment will be conducted by the Program Co-ordinator or their designated agent and recorded on the Interchange Camp Site Assessment Form.

Families who receive home-based respite and reside in high bushfire risk areas, should be adequately prepared for the fire season, keep informed of fire risk ratings and prioritise personal safety. 'Where directed to evacuate by Victoria Police or other designated Control agency because of an emergency in the area, clients, staff and services are required to comply with the notice if safe to do so.' DHS –Emergency Preparedness Policy pg.15. For the safety of Respite Support staff, Interchange management reserves the right to cancel booked shifts for in-home respite in high fire risk areas on Code Red days.

In addition all Camp Leaders will complete a **3.5d Fire/ Emergency Checklist** on arrival at the site to identify the exits, fire extinguishers, evacuation assembly areas and evacuation plan.

All camp leaders to keep informed of weather conditions and summer fire ratings for the duration of camp, utilizing public radio broadcasts on the **CFA Website www.cfa.vic.gov.au, 774 AM, the D.S.E information number 136186 and the Victorian Bushfire Information line 1800 240 667**. Camp leaders should contact Interchange On-call and the Vic. Bushfire Information line if they have concerns regarding fire safety. The Fire Information and Emergency Services numbers are attached to the IIE vehicle keys.

Coordinators and Respite staff should check the fire danger rating for the day/location and ensure they do not go to locations which are considered a fire risk –i.e. Severe; Extreme or Code Red (Catastrophic). All staff are to monitor and carefully consider SMS emergency information messages to their mobiles.

Recreation and Holiday Program Coordinators, in consultation with the Program Manager, will select locations for activities and camps based on the fire danger rating for the location /day. A list of 'vulnerable' or 'high risk' locations, has been provided by the Department of Environment and Primary Industries (3.6d Fire Risk Areas).

References /resources

Victorian Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004

Interchange Inner East Occupational Health and Safety Policy

Interchange Inner East Duty of Care Policy

3.5a Interchange Inner East Camp Site Assessment

3.5b Interchange Inner East Fire Season Safety Management Checklist

3.5c Interchange Inner East Extreme Heat Risk Management Checklist

3.5d Interchange Inner East Camp Site Fire/ Emergency Checklist

DHS Emergency Preparedness Clients and Services Policy Summer 2014

Health and Human Services Code Red Day Operational Protocol 2013

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