# Disaster Legal Help Victoria safety tips – 2020 bushfire response

This tip sheet provides guidance for volunteers of Disaster Legal Help Victoria (DLHV) for staying safe whilst working within bushfire zones.

If you are on leave from your employment whilst volunteering with DLHV, please ensure you follow these safety tips.

If you are volunteering for DLHV whilst not on leave from your employer, ensure you follow the safety procedures and guidance of your employer relevant to working in bushfire zones. If you are unsure of those procedures or instructions, please contact your employer before commencing your volunteer assignment with DLHV. Please review and follow these recommended safety tips that complement your employer’s safety procedures.

## Key safety messages

* If there are any circumstance where you feel unsafe either physically or psychologically, please remove yourself from the unsafe situation immediately.
* Report any safety concerns, incidents or near misses to your employer and the DLHV co-ordinator diasterlegalhelp@vla.vic.gov.au.
* Contact your employer’s Employee Assistance Program for emotional and psychological support.
* If travelling to recovery or community centres, take a fully charged mobile phone with you, and your charger. Have your contact and emergency numbers pre-programmed into your phone. If you are not on leave from your employer whilst volunteering for DLHV, inform your manager of your day’s activities and update them if there are any changes.

## Bushfire safety

* Download the [VicEmergency app](http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/plan-prepare/vicemergency-app/) to your mobile devices and bookmark the site to your portable computer device (eg surface pro, lap top etc).
* In the event of a **Code Red** day being issued volunteers should not travel into a high-risk bushfire area, as this is the highest fire danger rating based on weather conditions.
* Set the locations that you are travelling to and through and monitor the VicEmergency App for warnings, road closures and health information.
* Become familiar with and follow all the warnings on the VicEmergency App to keep yourself safe.
	+ Use multiple sources to stay informed:
		- VicEmergency hotline number 1800 226 226
		- [www.emergency.vic.gov.au](http://www.emergency.vic.gov.au)
		- Facebook or Twitter (#vicfires)
		- Tune in to ABC local radio, designated commercial and community radio stations, or Sky News TV
		- [www.vicroads.vic.gov.au](http://www.vicroads.vic.gov.au) or call 13 11 70 for road closures
* Review health warnings on the VicEmergency App and enact your health plan if advised to do so.
* You should take a **bushfire survival kit** with you in your car, to protect against radiant heat and smoke if you are caught in or near a bushfire area. As a minimum the kit should contain:
	+ A 100 per cent pure wool blanket to protect against radiant heat
	+ A P2 face mask (which should be firmly fitted if used)
	+ Car first aid kit
	+ High visibility vest (lime green is the most visible)
	+ Water (three litres per day per person).
* Other recommended bushfire kit items are:
	+ Fire goggles
	+ Flashlight and spare batteries
	+ Safety triangle
	+ Wind up radio.

Check with your employer if they have these kits. If not many of these items may be sourced from stationery providers, Bunnings, Amazon, and MakoFire online stores. If on leave with your employer, check with the Disaster Legal Help Co-ordinator about whether a kit can be sourced through Victoria Legal Aid.

### If you are caught in a bushfire in your car

* Call triple zero (000)
* Park off the road in a clear area away from trees, scrub and tall grass
* Face the front of your car towards the fire
* Stay in the front seat of your car towards the fire
* Stay in the car below the windows to protect yourself from radiant heat
* Turn off the engine and turn on headlights and hazard lights
* Close windows and air vents
* Cover yourself with a woollen blanket
* Drink plenty of water
* Cover your mouth with a damp cloth/wear P2 mask
* Stay down until the sound of the fire has passed, carefully leave the car (it will be hot).

## Safe driving and fatigue

If you are driving a car to and from location as part of volunteering with Disaster Legal Hep Victoria, you must ensure that you have a current and appropriate drivers’ licence and that your vehicle is safe before you drive.

Vehicle should have an [ANCAP rating](http://www.howsafeisyourcar.com.au/) of at least five stars, with front, side and curtain airbags and stability control, as well as a cargo barrier if it is a wagon.

You should check that your vehicle is:

* in safe and roadworthy condition, free of defects and modifications
* currently registered for use on the open road, and fully serviced in accordance with the manufacturer’s specifications
* comprehensively insured for any damage and liability arising out of the use of the vehicle for DLHV activities
* tyres are inflated with adequate tread
* you have adequate fuel for the trip
* lights and indicators are working
* radiator fluid and windscreen fluid is full.

### When travelling longer distances

* ensure you have had seven–eight hours sleep the night before
* take breaks every two hours
* share driving where possible
* take a powernap in a designated rest area if feeling fatigued (yawning, eyes blurring, sore eyes, blinking frequently).
* Drive to the conditions, being cautious of smoke, native animals at dawn and dusk, and other hazardous weather conditions.
* Use headlights when visibility is poor.

## Working in offsite locations (eg community centres)

* Upon arrival let someone know you are there.
* In the event of an emergency, follow the directions of the emergency wardens (red/yellow hats) or first responders (fire services/police/ambulance etc).