

Bushfire Management Plan – Mount Kent Observatory



University of
Southern
Queensland

1 Scope

The purpose of this Bushfire Management Plan is to ensure risk to persons and facilities due to bushfire is minimised.

The plan is subordinate to the Emergency Procedures Manual and applies to all staff, students and contractors attending Mount Kent Observatory.

2 Site Information

UniSQ's Mount Kent Observatory (Mt Kent), located at a dark-sky site outside of Toowoomba in southern Queensland, is a key facility for both national and international space science research. Mount Kent Observatory is Queensland's only professional research observatory for astronomy teaching and research training. The world-class facility includes an array of state-of-the-art telescopes and technology, bringing UniSQ researchers and students to the forefront of ongoing planet discovery work.

Mt Kent is a remote, 1.9 hectare site used for teaching and research activity on an ad-hoc basis. Adjacent to farmland, the site is located 30 minutes South of the Toowoomba Campus and is accessed via New England Highway and Cudmores Rd (*Figure 1- Site Location*). The site includes two primary buildings of approximately 120 m², and 180 m² respectively, along with 10-15 4m high telescope domes.

The bushfire category area for Mt Kent has been identified by the Toowoomba Regional Council Planning Scheme as "Medium Fire Risk". The most likely direction of bushfire attack is from the east, as bushfires may potentially approach from downslope and burn up the range. Areas of high fire risk occur along the Range in areas of dense native vegetation. Severe fire weather conditions would be typically associated with hot strong easterly winds in this area.

Response times for Emergency Services will be delayed due to its remote location.

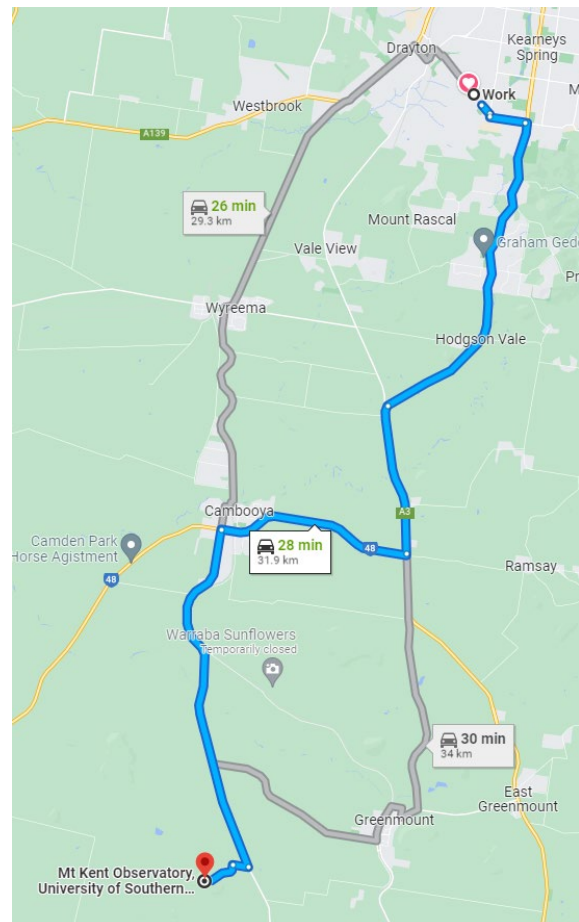


Figure 1 – Site Location

3 Procedures

3.1 Smoke Free Site

In accordance with the University's Smoke-Free Procedure, smoking is not permitted at or around the site.

3.2 Risk

A Safety Risk Assessment has been completed on the site which notes the residual risk of harm as a result bushfire as **medium**. This is due to its proximity to an area that could be at risk of a dangerous fire, the site remoteness, and lack of water infrastructure.

There is a risk to life, property and the environment should a bushfire break out in the vicinity of the site. Bushfires are dynamic and conditions can change very quickly.

3.3 Controls

Controls for the risk include site maintenance and management. Due to the location of the site and accessibility, the major control will be **closure of the site** when any of the following situations are met:

1. fire danger rating is "Catastrophic",
2. the site is subject to a bushfire warning of "Watch and Act", or "Emergency Warning", or;
3. an active fire front exists within a 25km radius of the site.

Site evacuation is to occur immediately if any of the above conditions are met.

Any University activity on the site should be supported by a current field trip safety risk assessment that addresses bushfire risk and controls.

Elements to consider when undertaking the risk assessment:

- Evaluate the bushfire risk and warning in the area, considering factors like weather conditions, fuel load, and historical fire data. Continue to monitor the risk whilst on site.
- Identify the types and extent of potential fire hazards within and around the facility.
- Monitor local weather conditions and bushfire alerts and establish a system for receiving warnings from local authorities.
- Fire briefing for visitors on arrival at the site (based on this Plan).
- Smoking on the facility grounds is prohibited and should not occur in its proximity.
- A person should be designated to remotely monitor fire conditions and be in contact with site occupants.

Other Controls

Emergency Contact Information

An up-to-date list of relevant emergency contact numbers for local fire services, law enforcement, and medical services will be available on site. Emergency evacuation routes and assembly point signage will be displayed on site.

Fire Weather Information

Queensland Fire Danger Ratings (*Figure 2 - Fire Danger Ratings*) are published on the Bureau of Meteorology website and can be accessed at <http://www.bom.gov.au/qld/forecasts/fire-danger-ratings.shtml>.

Mt Kent is located within the **Darling Downs and Granite Belt** weather district.

Fire Danger Rating	Site Specific Action
Moderate	Active monitoring
High	Active monitoring
Extreme	Active monitoring / reconsider need to be on site
Catastrophic	Closure of site / evacuate

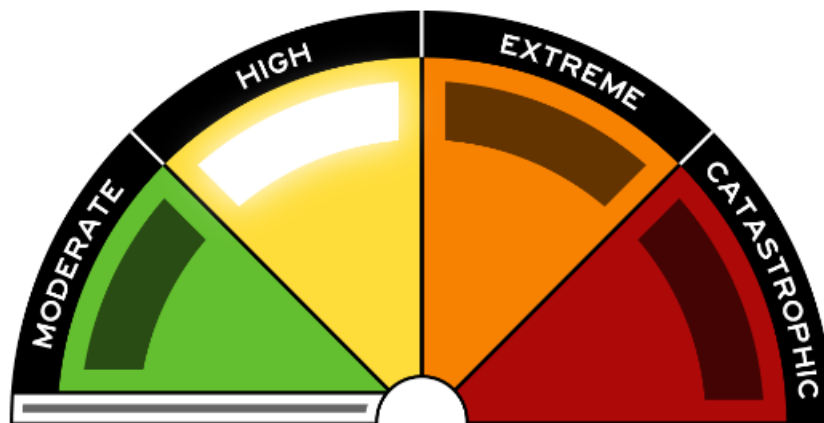


Figure 2 - Fire Danger Ratings

Bushfire Warnings

All site users should be familiar with the official Bushfire Warning system (*Figure 3- Bushfire Warning System*). When there's a bushfire in the area, it's up to all users to take notice, stay informed, make decisions and act. Current bushfire warnings and incidents can be found at <https://www.qfes.qld.gov.au/Current-Incidents> .

Bushfire Season

Typically, in Southern Queensland, the bushfire season begins in spring, lasting through until end of summer (September – February). However, from time to time the season may be extended, with bushfire threats existing either earlier or later in the season.



Figure 3- Bushfire Warning System

3.4 Site Management

Firebreaks and vegetation on site will be maintained by Facilities Management to reduce fuel load.

Firefighting equipment, such as fire extinguishers, will be available on site and be maintained by Facilities Management. Staff, students and contractors are not to fight fires unless evacuation from the facility is impossible or they have appropriate training, the fire is small and is safely and easily contained and they are not alone.

Staff/students are not to stay in the area to preserve equipment and or facilities if there is a fire.

4 Emergency Plan Information

Responsible Officer	Director (Estate Services)
Accountable Officer	Executive Director (Facilities Management)
Subordinate Schedules	Mt Kent Manual (produced by Institute for Advanced Engineering and Space Sciences)
Effective Date	01/08/2024
Review Date	12-months from Effective Date