

Manual for Boat Evacuation During Wild-Fire

Tamboon PeachTree Association Inc

This module was developed from experience gained at Tamboon from the boat evacuations during the January 2020 fire that posed serious threat to life and property.

Preparation

This should be commenced **at the earliest opportunity** in anticipation of fire impact.

1. Ensure all safety equipment is in good condition properly stowed on the vessel including fire-extinguishers, flares and sufficient life jackets which must be worn during an evacuation regardless of the dimension of the vessel.
2. Ensure the battery is holding charge and that there is sufficient fuel to reach safety and return and that navigation and riding lights are functioning.
3. Launch the vessel where it can be reached quickly and with safety. It is preferable to have as much of your survival gear as possible on board before launching if you need to wade through water to reach the moored boat. [see survival gear below]
4. Moor the vessel with the bow facing the direction of proposed exit and leave the keys in the ignition unless the motor has a recoil start. Make all potential evacuees aware of the boat's identity and its location. If time allows, a practice drill should be considered.
5. Identify the potential safe evacuation destination and the course to reach it. Multiple destinations should be considered because of the unpredictability of fire and the associated weather.

6. Navigation over water during a large fire event can be seriously compromised with close to zero visibility from smoke and ash. Day can turn to night quickly and navigational buoys, horizon and shore line becomes invisible. The person driving the boat should have clear goggles and one other person should have goggles to assist. Binoculars should be available to pick up navigation lights on marker buoys that cannot be seen by the naked eye. A compass should be carried to determine direction in the event of disorientation. Some mobile phone applications provide route retracing and satellite aids but atmospheric conditions common to fire weather may disrupt those functions.
7. Buckets filled with water should be positioned in easily accessible areas of the vessel for those on board to extinguish any ember attack.

Survival Gear

It is necessary to keep the amount of gear on board to a minimum but the vessel will be much more laden than usual. It is important that a central passageway be kept clear. It should be stowed as neatly as possible and used as seating. Unorganised clutter could be dangerous and cause falls and injury.

If several boats are going in convoy, it might be possible to distribute some of the load, particularly car fridges and food to improve the resource.

Identify the medical and dietary requirements of the evacuees.

1. Make certain each evacuee has their medication packed in a water tight container together with one set of layered clothing, one set water proof clothing, appropriate non-slip foot-wear, hats, a towel and toiletries. Sunscreen lotion and insect repellent should be on board. Spectacles, contact lens needs and sunglasses must be included. Masks should be worn as much as possible. It is advisable to carry water proof matches or a charged gas lighter.

2. A comprehensive first aid kit should be on board including burns creams and OP-Site wound dressings of assorted sizes and analgesics. Asthmatics should take the utmost precautions for their safety.
3. A functioning AM/FM radio should be on the vessel and as many mobile phones as possible with capacity to recharge. If a two-way radio is available to connect with agencies, that should be taken. [Tamboon and Tamboon South residents have 40 channel UHF radios and can connect with CFA and DELWP on channel 10 during fires]
4. One sleeping bag and pillow should be carried per person and two man small tents or beach igloos.
5. Ensure 20 litres of drinking water is on the vessel. Packs of plastic cups, plastic cutlery and paper plates are recommended with green rubbish bags for disposal. Toilet paper is essential.
6. One car fridge with butter, cheese and similar food with cooler bricks is recommended and the rest of the food should consist of canned food, biscuits, fruit, long life milk and non-perishable food sufficient for two – four days.
7. Plastic tarpaulins with ties should be available to weather proof the gear on board in the event of rain. Cable ties and small ratchet straps are useful.
8. If possible in the days leading up to the threat of fire, the setting up of a safe refuge in a location such as a broad ocean beach a long distance from possible dangerous radiant heat should be considered. That could be stocked with much of the survival requirements in advance with gas cooking facilities and extra food and water. A small inverter generator, placed on a rubber mat or small pallet, (to keep generator out of the sand), should be in place for lighting and the re-charging of battery powered equipment. If

that cannot be done, a small inverter generator on at least one evacuation boat would be advisable.

When the time comes to evacuate, stay calm, decide which vessel is to be the lead vessel, travel at a safe speed and keep safe separation.

The person driving each boat must be in command and the others on board comply with instructions. A second observer can assist the driver by identifying such things as marker buoys, shallows and sand-bars.

Avoid argument as this can lead to panic, indecision and heighten the danger.

This was compiled by Ron Luhrs from experience gained during three evacuations at Tamboon in January 2020