



People Policy and Employment Conditions

QUICK GUIDE

January 2020

Natural Disasters or Emergencies –Leave Arrangements and Support Provisions

Definitions

The [Australian Emergency Management Arrangements Handbook 2019](#) defines a **disaster** as a serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society at any scale due to hazardous events interacting with conditions of exposure, vulnerability and capacity, leading to one or more of the following: human, material, economic or environmental losses and impacts.

An **emergency** is defined as an event, actual or imminent, which endangers or threatens to endanger life, property or the environment and which requires a significant and coordinated response.

How might Defence people be impacted by natural disasters?

Personnel may be personally impacted by natural disasters in a number of ways including:

- temporary closure of workplaces and schools
- inability to attend work due to road closures
- managing home and contents before, during and after the disaster
- personal loss including damages to property
- personal illness or injury
- evacuation
- participation with a voluntary or emergency services organisation or ADF Reserve activities
- recall from leave and/or direction to assist with Defence operations associated with natural disaster relief.



Bureau of Meteorology emergency warnings

Bureau of Meteorology and State and Territory emergency warnings are used to identify emergency ratings for bushfires, tropical cyclones, severe weather, tsunamis and major floods.

In the event of a declared **catastrophic (or Code Red) bushfire emergency**, State and Territory emergency management agencies will recommend evacuation of identified localities as the best option for survival - these may include workplaces, employee properties or access to these.

Major flooding involves significant inundation which results in road and property closures. Flood warnings are issued by the [Bureau of Meteorology](#). Flooding is rated on a scale from minor to major. In the event of major flooding, extensive land areas are inundated, properties and towns are likely to be isolated and major traffic routes likely to be closed. Evacuation of people from flood affected areas may be required.

Access to Leave - APS

Access to miscellaneous leave provisions may be granted to Defence personnel in the event of a natural disaster affecting their workplace or home taking into account the specific circumstances of the warning issued.

Refer to the APS People Policy - Miscellaneous Leave for further detail of each defined leave type and purpose - [Pages - Miscellaneous Leave](#)

All leave absences are to be recorded on PSS or a PA052 leave application form and approved by the appropriate delegate.

These arrangements should apply until the responsible state or territory emergency management authority declares that the emergency or disaster warning has passed.

Where an employee is already on pre-approved leave during a disaster or emergency, then the employee remains absent from work on that pre-approved leave.

Where there is no declared emergency or evacuation recommendation an employee would generally be expected to cover their absence from the workplace by use of flex, time off in lieu, annual leave, long service leave (noting minimum use of seven calendar days) or miscellaneous leave for private purposes without pay.

Leave provisions – APS

Table 1: Leave provisions for APS

| Reason for leave | Period of leave and leave type | Rate of pay / count as service | Evidence | Decision-maker |
|--|--|--|--|---|
| To enable an employee to be absent from a workplace is under threat of danger or damage (including threat of bushfire). | Miscellaneous leave - Exceptional circumstances. Period of leave is at discretion of decision- maker | Full pay / counts as service | None specified – delegate discretion | Local Base Support Manger/ Senior ADF Officer |
| To assist an employee to cope with a disaster where the employee's home or its contents are destroyed or significantly damaged or where a pending disaster is likely to result in the employee's home or its contents being destroyed or significantly damaged. | Miscellaneous leave – Affected by disaster. Up to three days per occasion may be granted. | Full pay / counts as service | None specified – delegate discretion | Supervisor |
| | Miscellaneous leave – Affected by disaster (additional). Approval of leave, including rate of pay, beyond three days per occasion is discretionary. | For absences in excess of three days per occurrence, the rate of pay may be full pay, half-pay or without pay. Paid leave counts as service. Delegate discretion for unpaid leave. | None specified – delegate discretion | Executive Level 2 / Colonel (E) and above |
| To enable an employee to be absent due to special circumstances where the employee is required to give immediate attention to a situation that is either an emergency and/or likely to result in unreasonable hardship or financial loss to the employee if left unattended. | Miscellaneous leave - Special Purposes Leave may be granted where it does not exceed: one day/shift on any occasion; or more than two days/shifts each calendar year, on a non-cumulative basis. | Full pay / counts as service | None specified – delegate discretion | Supervisor |
| To enable an employee to be absent due to extraordinary or exceptional circumstances recognised by Defence. | Miscellaneous leave - Exceptional circumstances. Period of leave is at discretion of decision- maker | Leave may be granted at the rate of full pay, half-pay or without pay. Paid leave counts as service. Delegate discretion for unpaid leave. | None specified – delegate discretion | Senior Executive band 2 / Major-General (E) and above |
| To enable an employee to participate in an emergency service response as a member of a recognised emergency management or community service organisation. | Miscellaneous leave for community participation. Up to 20 days per year will be approved at full pay. | 20 days of leave at full pay will be granted per emergency service activity. | The employee is to provide evidence that they have engaged in an eligible emergency service or community activity if they are applying for paid leave. | Supervisor |
| | Miscellaneous leave for community participation (over 20 days). Additional leave is at delegate discretion. | Additional leave is at the delegate's discretion and may be at full pay, half pay or unpaid. | | EL2 (E) and above |

School closures and carer responsibilities

Employees who have a requirement to provide care of their immediate family or household member due to an unexpected emergency (for example where a school or child care centre closure is a consequence of their location in a locality subject to an emergency warning) may be granted *miscellaneous leave – exceptional circumstances* at the rate of full pay, half pay or without pay up to a maximum of two days absence per occurrence.

Employees are also entitled to take personal/carers leave to care for or support an immediate family member or household member affected by an unexpected emergency. Use of flexible work arrangements may also be considered (see "Flexible Working Arrangements").

Emergency or community service

Employees who volunteer for an emergency management activity in response to a declared natural disaster and wish to access *miscellaneous leave – emergency service or community activity* are required to provide documentation to support their participation and also verify the nature of the organisation they are volunteering with. In most instances they will be working for a recognised emergency service or organisation which has a role under an emergency management plan prepared by a Commonwealth State or Territory government for coping with emergencies and/or disasters. It includes fire fighting, civil defence and rescue bodies which secure the safety of people, animals and/or property in a natural disaster or emergency. As directed by the Prime Minister, 20 days of paid miscellaneous leave will be granted to employees who volunteer for an emergency management response activity and additional leave may be granted upon request.

No eligible request for leave to participate in emergency service activities is to be refused without the agreement of the APS Commissioner. Where an employee's absence would significantly impact a work area's ability to provide a service to the public, supervisors should try to negotiate an outcome that is mutually acceptable.

Flexible Working Arrangements

Flexible work arrangements may assist in a variety of circumstances including where workplaces are unavailable due to being directly affected by a natural disaster and/or are inaccessible due to road closures or it would be too dangerous for an employee or member to travel to work. They may also be beneficial following the period of immediate emergency when affected personnel are returning to work and managing their personal circumstances following their absence due to the disaster.

Flexible work arrangements such as working part-time hours, working from home and working from an alternative location could all be considered when making decisions regarding personnel who are absent from the workplace as a result of a natural disaster.

Employee Assistance Program – APS

The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a confidential and professional counselling service for APS employees to deal with problems that may impact on their working life. The EAP is also available when an APS employee is affected by a natural disaster.

Phone: 1300 OUR EAP or 1300 687 327 (available 24 hrs/day from anywhere in Australia for the cost of a local call)

Website: Additional information and resource articles are available from the EAP page on People Connect.

Access to Leave – ADF

Leave Provisions - ADF

Where possible, Australian Defence Force (ADF) members affected by a natural disaster are to make contact with their administrative unit in the first instance.

Table 2: ADF types of leave that would apply

| Situation | Leave type |
|--|--|
| A member leaves work to care for a child as a result of a school/childcare facility being closed in a fire situation | Carers Leave: Short absence from duty (where no other leave is available) |
| A member: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> returns to or stays at home to protect their property and/or family evacuate their property | Short absence from duty |
| A member is sent home or directed to absent themselves from work due to the workplace being in danger (short term) | On duty: ordinary pay (no leave required) |
| A member is directed to absent themselves from work due to the workplace having being damaged (longer term) | On duty: ordinary pay (no leave required) NB: an alternative work arrangement would be the first solution in this event. |
| Members who participate in activities as part of an ADF contingent (fire fighting, evacuation, medical treatment) | These members are considered to be on duty and no form of leave needs to be taken. |
| In the event a member's house is damaged/destroyed. | The member is to make arrangements with their Commanding Officer for the appropriate leave to be taken. Additional support and advice is available through Defence Community Organisation by email to defencefamilyhelpline@defence.gov.au or by calling 1800 624 608. |

ADF members who have been released to participate in volunteer services as part of the Country Fire Service or Emergency Services are to be granted short absence from duty by their Commanding Officer.

Support and procedural information – ADF members and families

Support and procedural information for members and their families is available through the National Welfare Coordination Centre and the Defence Community Organisation.

Defence Family Helpline - 1800 624 608

The National Welfare Coordination Centre: 1800 801 026 Defence Community Organisation: www.defence.gov.au/dco

Disaster assistance

Defence personnel wishing to provide assistance or who require assistance as a result of a natural disaster are encouraged to visit the [Emergency and Disaster assistance](#) link under Disaster assistance web pages on the www.australia.gov.au website.