



Media release

25 January 2024

MetService launches push notifications for New Zealand's most extreme environmental conditions

From today 25 January, Kiwis will be able to subscribe to receive notifications to their mobile phone when MetService issues a Red Warning for our most severe weather or if there is an Extreme Fire Danger risk.

The partnership with Fire and Emergency New Zealand will help Kiwis be aware of and ready for our most extreme conditions. All that is required is to have the free MetService NZ Weather app installed on your mobile phone and the location specific notifications enabled.

MetService Head of Weather Communication, Lisa Murray says, "Getting notifications directly into the hands, or pockets, of those likely to be impacted is the most direct way we can warn people."

Fire and Emergency Wildfire Specialist Rory Renwick concurs, "We encourage everyone to download the app, enable notifications and heed the advice when notifications are received. It may be best to postpone a fire or any activity which could cause sparks, – always check further on checkitsalright.nz. It's also a good prompt to prepare your property should a wildfire occur."

"The MetService app is a trusted source of information which close to a million people have downloaded to their phones. Weather conditions are one of the main factors that impact fire risk. This makes it the perfect place for our extreme fire danger notifications," adds Rory Renwick.

"With climate change and more extreme weather events, this tool is really helping us better prepare Aotearoa New Zealand for a more extreme wildfire and weather environment," warns Lisa Murray.

The location specific push notification for Extreme Fire Danger will be triggered when Fire and Emergency Fire Weather System calculates the fire danger to be at its highest level (extreme – where fire intensities and spread rates are likely to make a wildfire extremely dangerous). These are sent in the morning and provide that day's timeframe for when fire danger is extreme and spark-causing activities, including lighting fires, should be avoided.

MetService will trigger notifications when Red Warnings for severe weather are issued for specific locations. These warnings are for the most significant and impactful heavy rain and/or strong winds (like those brought by ex-tropical cyclones) or heavy snow, covering an area of more than 1000 square kilometres (equivalent of a box around Lake Taupo).

Severe Thunderstorm Warnings are considered Red Warnings, though they cover a smaller and more localised area, their life-threatening impacts (flooding from downpours, hail and strong winds and lighting) make them very dangerous events.

“When a severe thunderstorm has been detected on one of our weather radars a Red Warning notification will be triggered. Warning time is therefore much shorter than with other types of Red Warning weather, but a heads up will likely be signalled earlier in the day by a Severe Thunderstorm Watch issued by our forecasters,” says Lisa Murray.

The notifications have been sometime in the making and follow a successful testing phase with members of the public to ensure ease of use and no false alerting. When people enable notifications, they'll be prompted to set notifications for their home location and/or enable current location notifications which will provide alerts if they are in the warning area when a notification is issued.

“Fire danger awareness has become much stronger since we started running the fire season information on MetService’s website – notifications were a natural next step,” says Rory Renwick.

“It is close to a year since the devastating Auckland Anniversary flooding, followed closely by Cyclone Gabrielle. These notifications are one of the steps we’re taking to warn more kiwis of dangerous weather,” says Lisa Murray.

ENDS

For more information or to request an interview please contact:

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Fire and Emergency NZ contact: Fire and Emergency media team, mobile 027 591 8837 or email media@fireandemergency.nz

NOTES TO EDITORS

How can I get these notifications:

1. Download the free MetService [NZ Weather app](#) from the app store (Android or iOS)

2. If you already have the app downloaded it will prompt, you with a "What's new" screen.
3. Enable notifications for MetService severe weather Red Warnings and/or FENZ Extreme Fire Danger
4. Set your home and/or current location.

Fire stats

- When the fire risk is extreme fire intensities and spread rates are likely to make a fire extremely dangerous. Parts of the country that have more severe fire weather can have an average of around 30 days of extreme fire danger per year, most parts of NZ have an average of less than 10 per year and some wetter parts rarely if ever get extreme fire danger.
- On average there is approximately 4500 wildfires annually which burn approximately 7500 ha. Human activity typically accounts for 98% of the cause for wildfires. Fire weather is defined by meteorologists as; conditions brought about by very dry vegetation, low relative humidity, and wind.

What to do if there is an Extreme Fire Danger notification?

- Don't light any fires or do things that can create sparks and cause fires - for example, mowing lawns, driving through long grass or welding until the fire risk has reduced.
- Go over what you will do in the event of a wildfire making sure others in your household/place of work are aware of the plan and what their role is. Carry out any preparedness activities as part of that plan. Wildfires move fast and can occur without warning. Give yourself the best chance of reducing the impacts from a wildfire by being ready.

How can I prepare for Extreme Fire Danger ahead of time?

People living on or near open land areas are encouraged to reduce their fire risk by:

- Keeping the vegetation short and green around their houses.
- Trimming the trees away from buildings.
- Ensure you have a means to escape your property in the event of a fire.
- Make sure your RAPID or rural address number is visible at the entrance.
- Make sure your accessway is wide enough (4 metres by 4 metres) for emergency service vehicles to drive up.
- Removing dead vegetation including back mulch and straw from near buildings
- Clean the gutters so hot embers can't lodge in the leaves and other debris.
- Make sure any stock are moved into places of lower risk in the event of a wildfire.
- Make sure any farm equipment being used is in good condition and fitted with a fire extinguisher.
- growing low flammability plants.
- Having a wildfire emergency household plan www.fireandemergency.nz/when-wildfire-threatens

- Always check the local fire danger before you light a fire or do anything outdoors that could create a spark.
- Use the 'Can I light a fire?' tool, at checkitsalright.nz. You can also contact Fire and Emergency for advice. Fire permits are free.
- If you have had a fire in the last few weeks, check to make sure it is properly extinguished. Cool with water and stir around to make sure the ash is cold.
- Always visit checkitsalright.nz before lighting any fires or doing activities which could cause sparks, you can also find advice to fire prepare you property.

Red Warning severe weather stats

- Since MetService introduced Red Warnings (it's highest warning level) in May 2019 there have been a total of 14 broadscale Red Warning weather events (one event may be made up of a number of Red Warnings for different areas over several days).
- 2 have been for strong wind, 1 has been for a combination of strong wind and heavy rain and 11 have been for heavy rain. There have been many localised severe thunderstorm warnings.
- Broadscale Red Warnings are issued in consultation with regional councils, while thunderstorm warnings are issued when the thunderstorm is detected on our radar.
- They are reserved for only the most extreme weather events, such the severe weather resulting from ex-tropical cyclones, where significant impact and disruption is expected.
- Red Warning icons will always be displayed as a triangle.

What do I do if there is a Red Warning?

- Take **immediate action** to protect people, animals, and property from the impact of the weather.
- People should also be prepared to follow the advice of official authorities and emergency services.

How can I prepare for approaching severe weather?

It depends on the type of weather, but the following activities can be done in in preparation.

- Prepare a grab/evacuation bag.
- Keep up to date with MetService weather forecasts.
- Heavy rain: clear gutters, and pathways, raise important things off ground level.
- Strong wind: secure trampolines and loose objects outdoors.
- Heavy snow: postpone outdoor activities, protect livestock.
- Severe thunderstorms: same approach for heavy rain and strong winds, stay inside or shelter for cover (not under a tall tree).

For more advice:

- [Storms and severe weather » National Emergency Management Agency \(civildefence.govt.nz\)](#)
 - [Snowstorms » National Emergency Management Agency \(civildefence.govt.nz\)](#)
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About MetService

MetService is New Zealand's National Meteorological Service. A team of 60 trained operational meteorologists, qualified to the World Meteorological Organization training standards, provide New Zealand's forecasts and official Severe Weather Watches and Warnings service.

As a State-Owned Enterprise, MetService's core purpose is to protect the safety of life and property in New Zealand, while operating as a commercial business.

www.metservice.com

About Fire and Emergency New Zealand

Fire and Emergency is New Zealand's national fire and emergency first responder. With a dedicated team of over 14,700 staff and volunteers across the motu, Fire and Emergency is in almost every community. We maintain a constant state of readiness to fulfil our purpose to protect and preserve lives, property, and the environment.

www.fireandemergency.nz