

ExploreSafe Framework v2.0: summary

For someone who will not read the full document.

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What this is

ExploreSafe helps people turn safety information into decisions before, during and after a bushwalk. Its seven principles connect preparation with noticing change, retaining options, responding to problems and learning afterwards.

Version 2.0 adds practical positions and identifies their status. It distinguishes what a named authority publishes from recurring practice and from ExploreSafe's own recommendations.

It is not a national standard and does not speak for any agency. No agency endorsement is claimed. Current local restrictions, warnings and emergency directions take precedence.

Why it exists

The September 2026 corpus brings together selected safety material across all eight Australian jurisdictions and national bodies. Shared themes include preparing for the route, carrying supplies, leaving plans and being able to summon help. The detail varies: quantities, equipment, group advice and reporting arrangements often have different audiences or settings.

A walker still has to combine that information into a plan and adapt it when conditions change. ExploreSafe is intended to help with that task. It does not need to prove that agencies have said nothing about a topic to offer a useful method.

Targeted primary-source checks on 24 September corrected omissions and overstatements in the earlier draft and its evidence account. The corpus is a useful record, but agreement with it is not proof that a claim is current or true.

The seven principles

Principle	The question
1. Choose the right adventure	Does this walk suit everyone involved today?
2. Understand the environment	What could affect us here, and what local information do we need?
3. Prepare your capabilities	Can we do what this walk requires and use what we carry?
4. Build redundancy	What will we do if something essential fails or the walk takes longer?
5. Monitor changing conditions	What has changed compared with our plan?
6. Make decisions early	What should we change while workable options remain?
7. Respond effectively when things go wrong	How will we get appropriate help and make sure our trusted contact knows the outcome?

Before You Go → On the Trail → After the Walk → Preparation for your next walk

How positions are labelled

Label	Meaning
Published position	The named authority publishes the stated advice within its scope. That does not make it a national position.
Established practice	A recurring message in identified sources, without claiming universal adoption or demonstrated effectiveness.
Recommendation	ExploreSafe has selected or extended the advice, number, scope or trigger. It remains the author's judgement.

A position can contain both a published element and an author choice; the framework and annex distinguish them. The complete core kit, the communication arrangement and the numerical planning triggers are recommendations, even where published examples inform them.

Key positions in brief

Topic	Position and status
Choosing the walk	Use the land manager's grade and route description. Grades can describe required experience, but actual group capability and current conditions still need assessment. Published grading information plus ExploreSafe's recommendation for combining those checks.
Walking alone	Walking alone increases risk because immediate assistance, alarm-raising and shared decisions are unavailable if something goes wrong. ExploreSafe recommends company on remote, difficult and off-track walks, with the stated precautions if walking solo. This is a mechanism, not a quantified comparison.
Group size	ExploreSafe recommends at least three beyond easy access, and a general ceiling of 16 with fewer where needed. Neither is a tested optimum. Lower local limits prevail; having three people is not an instruction to split up when someone is hurt.
Fire	ExploreSafe recommends avoiding bushfire-risk areas where practicable at High, not starting there at Extreme, and not being there at Catastrophic. Lower ratings do not establish safety. Follow stricter agency advice, closures and warnings; check Total Fire Ban access and cooking rules separately. This national walking table is a recommendation informed by published advice.
Heat	ExploreSafe's prompts are to adapt around 30°C, avoid long, exposed or remote walks in the mid 30s, and avoid exposed or remote walking in the high 30s or a severe/extreme heatwave warning. Adjust down for the people and conditions. These are recommendations, not safe thresholds; stricter local advice and earlier signs of danger prevail.
Remote	ExploreSafe uses about an hour until help can reach you, or substantial communication/access/evacuation delay, as a planning trigger. It is not a rescue estimate. If timing is uncertain, prepare for substantial delay.

Topic	Position and status
Water	ExploreSafe's initial carrying allowances are 1 litre up to about two hours, 2 litres for longer/harder day walks, or 1 litre per walking hour between reliable sources in hot weather, the tropics, or exposed and remote settings. Use the more demanding allowance and any higher local minimum, then add reserves for the route and delay. These quantities do not guarantee sufficiency and are not drinking prescriptions.
Water sources	Verify availability and drinking quality. ExploreSafe recommends treating collected water unless identified as potable, following local and method-specific instructions. A filter or tablet does not make every unsafe source usable.
Capability and equipment	ExploreSafe recommends navigation that survives phone failure, an independent backup for longer/remote/less marked routes, first aid capability scaled to delay, and the combined core kit wherever a problem could leave you exposed or out after dark. Individual items have published precedents; the complete package and its trigger are author choices.
Trip plans	Leave a trusted contact a plan and an agreed action time. Confirm how any registration or monitoring arrangement works. Earlier concern overrides the agreed time. Without an agreed time, ExploreSafe recommends acting a few hours after expected return, sooner for any other concern, and not waiting overnight for someone due before dark. The arrangement is a recommendation informed by published practice.
During the walk	Follow track and access instructions. ExploreSafe recommends watching for changes in people and decisions, agreeing turn-back criteria, and allowing anyone to raise a concern. These prompts are not diagnoses. Daylight planning is a recurring published practice; build in a delay margin.
Emergency contact	Call 000 for a serious or urgent emergency and request the service needed: police for an urgent search, ambulance for a medical emergency, fire for fire. Explain the location and access difficulty and follow instructions. Non-urgent missing-person concerns use the relevant police channel.
Communication devices	ExploreSafe recommends off-network emergency communication where mobile coverage is unreliable, with a registered PLB as an independent distress backup. Two-way satellite devices and supported phone SOS also have emergency roles. The preference for independence is a recommendation, not proof of a device hierarchy.
Beacon use	AMSA says registration is free and no longer expires from 4 November 2024; keep details current. Its activation threshold is grave and imminent danger when two-way communication is unavailable. Follow deployment instructions, stay safely with a deliberately activated beacon and follow responder directions. The annex separates published instructions from the combined procedure.
If lost	Stop. ExploreSafe allows only a short, certain and safe retrace; otherwise stay put. After requesting rescue, remain at the reported location if safe and follow directions. Signal, be visible and keep the group together. Published agency steps differ; this combination is not a unanimous national protocol.
Return	Confirm you are back and complete required check-out arrangements. This is a recurring published practice.

The full framework gives the core kit, definitions and practical qualifications; the annex records each of the 29 positions separately.

Where ExploreSafe makes a choice

The framework's contribution is the connection between decisions: how to translate route information into preparation, notice that a plan no longer fits, and act while useful options remain.

Some choices deliberately go beyond what a source states: applying a minimum group size to an access boundary; defining remote by a practical response-time trigger; combining gear into a consequence-based kit; and asking groups to agree reconsideration criteria. Those choices remain visible and open to challenge.

A bounded retrace is not wholly novel—Victoria Police includes a short-retrace step—but ExploreSafe chooses the conditions limiting it. Likewise, agencies already publish headlamp advice, walk-specific gear lists and some group-decision guidance. The revised framework does not justify its recommendations by denying those precedents.

What remains uncertain

The files and targeted checks do not establish that ExploreSafe's numerical rules or combined procedures reduce incidents. They also do not establish that no relevant research exists. Two original papers have now been checked for the lost-person/search passage. Broader research review, expert scenario review and testing with walkers would be needed for stronger claims about the framework.

A current webpage is evidence of what its publisher says, not automatic proof of effectiveness. Conflicting agency resources need their audience, location, purpose and dates compared. Explicit replacement or effective-date statements can settle currency; a newer-looking page alone cannot. Unresolved conflicts are recorded in the annex.

Useful next questions for agencies include how to make route-specific advice easier to find, how contacts should act when walkers are overdue, and how guidance should explain the emergency and routine roles of different communication devices. These are opportunities for clarification, not claims that nothing has been published.

The full framework now includes a narrowly sourced research paragraph on lost-person behaviour and search outcomes. The annex distinguishes observed findings from ExploreSafe's stay-put reasoning; the rejected argument for retracing remains excluded.

Status and contact

Version 2.0 preserves the seven principles and fictional worked example while correcting claims, labels and operational qualifications. The evidence annex contains the targeted verification register, the disposition of all 49 review findings and unresolved questions. The original corpus, contested register and adversarial findings remain unchanged historical records.

Maintained by Darren Edwards, ExploreSafe. Review annually and when relied-on sources change.

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