

Winter preparation for summer bushfire safety

© Joan Webster

Author of *The Complete Bushfire Safety Book* (Random House 2000)

Essential Bushfire Safety Tips (CSIRO 2008)

Wishing you safe summers

The time to prepare for summer bushfire safety is not when you see this:



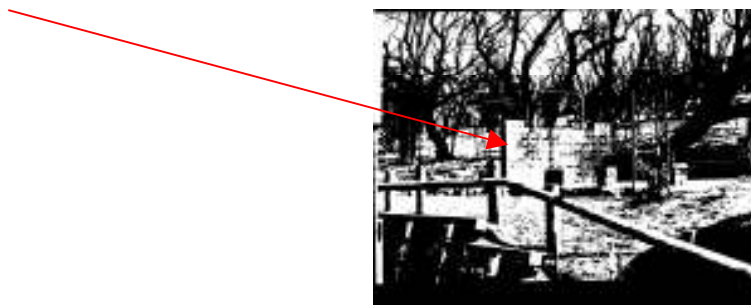
The time to prepare for summer bushfire safety is in the winter. Now.

Winter is the time to:

- Inspect the house and grounds.
- Make and mend.
- Start thinking about your bushfire safety plan.

Walk round your property and take note of spots where it is more windy than others.

If you find any narrow space that pulls wind through, such as between house and fence, block it with a solid gate, fence or fire-retardant plant. Hedges and walls can be wind and spark inhibitors to help prevent cladding from drying, windows from cracking, and as shields to shelter people from radiant heat. Build a radiant heat shield - a masonry wall about 2 metres high and wide, ideally 6-10 metres from an exit door.



A barbecue backing as a radiant heat shield

Inspect the garden for clutter and flammability. In an un-cluttered garden, flames have to thin out; radiant heat has to die down. The less dense the vegetation, the less intense any fire in it. you won't have so many embers trying to get into your house.

Flames and radiant heat from a flaming forest can't harm your house if it's set well back from it 30-300 metres depending on density of bush. If it is close to the bush, clear the undergrowth for that distance.

Bushfire can't ignite cladding if it's not being hugged by shrubs. Transplant them away from walls and windows

The danger doesn't come from trees - it comes from the flaring of 'fine fuel'. A tree can only ignite from undergrowth or long grass burning beneath it. Like logs in the barbecue or hearth, it needs kindling.

Replace highly flammable plants with fire retardant plants.

The benefits of deciduous European trees are amazing. Even at height of the Black Saturday bushfires, with ignited houses blazing into utter destruction, trees such as oak, poplar, plane, elm, elder, willow, liquid amber and beech did not burn. I noted this at Marysville, Kinglake, Strathewen, Flowerdale, Humevale, and Bendigo. Such trees around a house can act as a protective barrier and, as a last resort, provide a safe retreat for shelterers exiting an ignited house.



1. Crossways Inn Motel, Marysville, 2009. Elder, oak, willow, beech, helped its survival.
2. 'Dalrymple' guest house Falls Rd Marysville 2009 - liquid amber sapling survived.
3. Parkers Rd., Humevale 2009 - lone deciduous European tree survived.
4. Narbethong-Marysville Rd., 2009. Farmhouse deciduous European trees survived.
(*The Complete Bushfire Safety Book* has a comprehensive list of fire retardant plants)

To keep bushfire out of the house, make and mend, paint and fill.

Houses are rarely destroyed because approaching flames burn the cladding. Ignitions almost always start inside, from ember penetration. Most houses then burn from the inside outwards, frequently starting in the roof/ceiling space, with frame and cladding burning last.

Clean out the roof void! If you don't have an inspection trapdoor, make one. Insulate above and below rafters. This is an extremely vital bushfire-protection job.



- Embers can't penetrate roofs if you secure loose iron and fill nail holes. Or if you have continuous metal sheeting and/or roof sprinklers. (Low flow sprinklers. And enough water to run them.)
- Sparks and embers can't penetrate cracks and vents if you fill cracks with fire resistant mastic and cover vents with metal flywire. And insulate the wall cavity.
- Burning debris can't ignite cladding if you give it a low non-flammable surround.
- Embers from a bushfire can't ignite under the house if it's a concrete slab. Or if you enclose a raised sub-floor with metal fly-wire and insulate beneath floor joists.
- Neither radiant heat nor embers can crack windows if they're shuttered or screened with metal fly-wire.

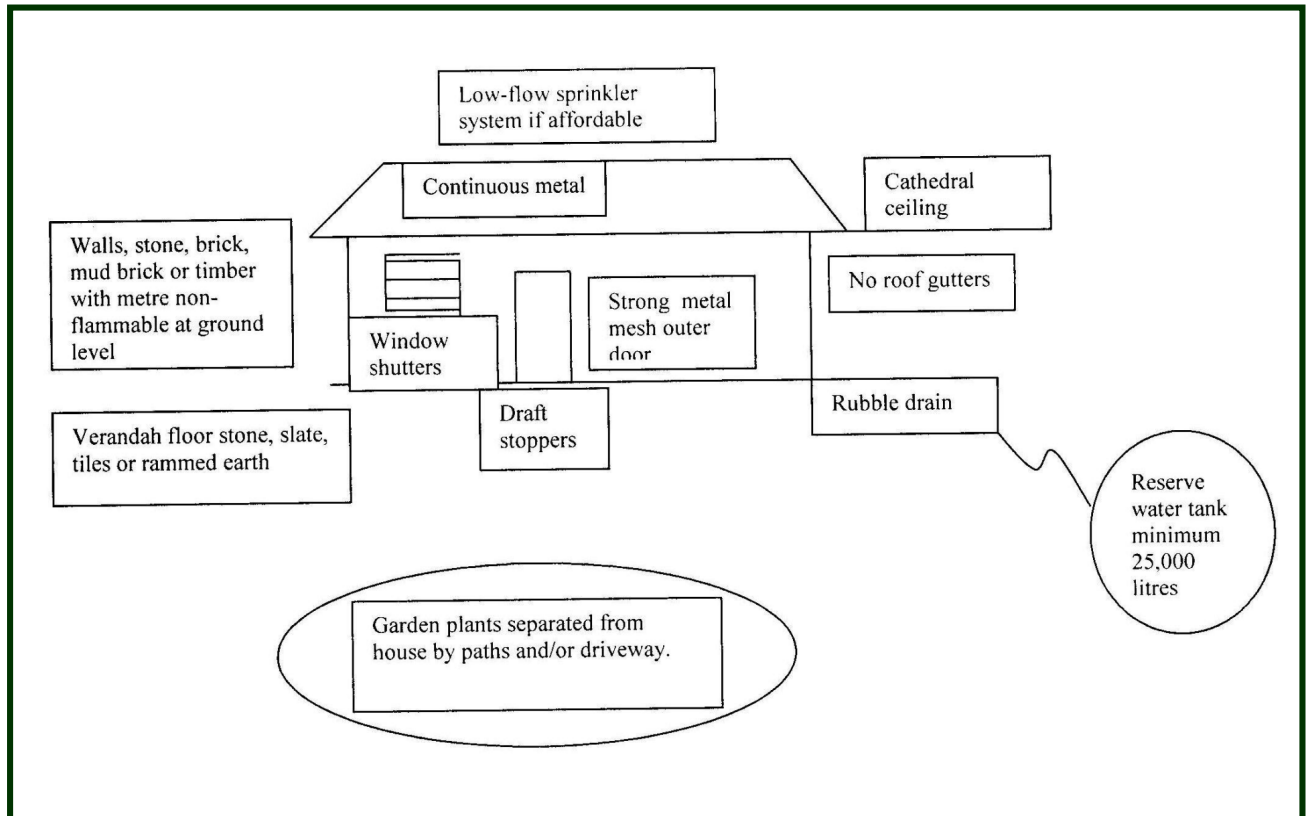
Insulate with mineral wool, fibreglass batts or aluminium foil laminate.

Inside the house, embers can't ignite floors if they're slate, tile or brick and they have a hard job starting on quality lino. They can't ignite curtains if they're pure wool (even heavy quality sun-block is resistant).

(*The Complete Bushfire Safety Book* details and explains every aspect)

Your home can be a haven.

A house that will resist ember attack does not need to be complicated. A single story house with no ceiling space, no skylights, no subfloor space, non-flammable surround for a metre from ground level, with fully protected windows (and un-cluttered garden) is a house that will be easily defensible and a safe refuge.



Sirens and bunkers and magic evacuation carpets, are not going to do save you from a bushfire. What is going to save you and your home is the ordinary, boring, no drama, jobs around the house - and knowing what to do.

Learn thoroughly how to react safely to a bushfire threat.

Your bushfire safety plan needs to be based on more than hearsay and headlines. It needs to be thorough, based on proven knowledge.

Many, many people saved their lives and their homes on Black Saturday, 2009. What did they know that others did not? It wasn't good luck. It was good planning and preparation:

- A 77 year old Kinglake man, unaided, saved his house. A 97 year old Callignee man saved his life with a pure wool blanket. They knew what to do.
- The homes of every member of one Kinglake Community Fireguard group survived. Their fire plans were based on thorough knowledge.
- A family out of Buxton/Taggerty, who saved themselves and their home credited this to their use of *The Complete Bushfire Safety Book*.



Kinglake, 2009. The sign says:
‘This house was actively defended’

Saved

Neighbours

Destroyed

Sedgwick St., Marysville 2009



Destroyed

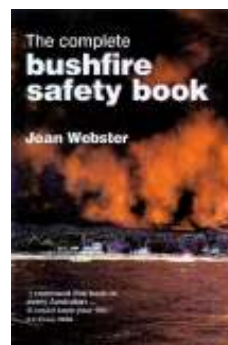


Survived

‘Why did others experience the same event without loss?’

What did some know that others did not?

Buy, borrow, or beg *The Complete Bushfire Safety Book* or its condensed ready reference, *Essential Bushfire Safety Tips*, for every aspect of understanding how to be safe during a bushfire threat - the killer and survival factors.



‘I commend this book to every Australian. It could save your life’. Phil Cheney, Principal Research Scientist, CSIRO.

‘There is no doubt that anyone who reads this book, and gives due weight to the information it contains, will survive their next bushfire.’ *The Fireman Journal* (CFA).

‘This book takes the fear out of summer’ - Householder, Wombat forest.

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