



Newsletter

KALAMUNDA BUSHFIRE READY GROUPS



Hi Everybody,

With the present forecast it looks like we are all well into winter with rain for the next week. We hope that you found the previous Burn SMART information in the last newsletter was useful, something you can use as spring approaches and there are drier days. As we have seen winter comes at times with high winds and driving rain, as we promote community resilience, preparations should already have been put into place to ensure your home is safer from these bursts of nature.

Like bush fire readiness and ember attacks etc, water can cause a lot of damage and the home is the prime target and protecting that is a priority. There are several similarities in preparing for winter storm damage and for summer bush fire attacks.

So, some dot points in preparation for the ongoing winter onslaught and at the same time this will lessen your preparations in spring for the summer bush fire season.

- **Gutters and Valleys:**

With deciduous trees now dropping their leaves many of them finding their way into your gutters or maybe there are still gum leaves left over from summer, these can cause water to overflow into your eaves or brick cavity causing mould to form and possible damp spots in the inner plastered walls. Blocked valleys will cause the water to overflow the valleys straight into your roof cavities. Usually the first you know about it is a change of colour in your ceiling plaster followed by mould (tiled roofs are more susceptible to rapid ingress). If a valley is blocked replace the water ingress with embers and you have just let the fire into the ceiling and once there it is hard to put out. So these two are very important as they can cause untold damage to your home (just remember deciduous tree leaves tend to break down a lot quicker than gum leaves and can be used as a mulch in the garden).

- **Overhanging tree branches:**

As we have all seen the enormous damage that can be caused by trees and tree branches falling on the roof, best to trim back those low overhanging branches which are very close to your roof, during the bushfire season. These can transfer the fire from the ground across and onto your roof, remember any small gap over 2mm in size an ember can penetrate. There may be more requirements from the City of Kalamunda regarding trees, so make sure you carefully read the 2020/2021 Fire Hazard Reduction Notice which should be available with your rates notice.



- **Bushes and climbing plants against the house wall or within 2 metres of the wall:**

This you need to watch closely and trim back bushes so that they are below the roof line and clear of gutters to a maximum height of 2 metres. , climbing plants also have the habit of retaining dead leaves and branches and may look very green but when you pull that back there may be a lot of dead growth closer to the branches which will allow flames on the ground to ladder up to the eaves and roof, so make sure you check these out and clear out all the dead growth. Any trees close to the house or inside the 20 metre APZ especially if they are 5+ metres in height need to be under pruned to a height of 2 metres this will prevent flames laddering up via low overhanging branches.

- **Keeping your Asset Protection Zone clear:** The asset protection zone is an area surrounding your home/granny flat extending out from the house for 20 metres all round, it's this area that you need to ensure that ground fuel such as leaves, twigs etc does not build up as come summer it will be a big job to remove. Falling embers can easily light this up and threaten your home, as with many hills home owners they have pathways and cultivated gardens/lawns, this in itself is a good firebreak and lessens the chance of fire on the ground threatening your residence. Also accumulation of deciduous leaves on the ground may block ground drains and cause unnecessary flooding.

- **Gas Bottles:** If you have gas bottles fitted then these need to be checked to make sure they are not going to threaten your home when impacted upon by a fire. With older homes special attention needs to be made, they should have a solid non-flammable base, ideally and if your home is relatively new they would be sited on the side of the house furthest away from where the fire is likely to come from.

they must be sited so that the blow out valve with the red disc is pointing away from the house and it's recommended that both bottles are chained to the wall so they can't be knocked over but if necessary, can be released quickly if required. We have come across several situations where a number of gas bottles are carried inside their own compound next to the house,



PREPARING FOR STORMS

if so make sure you have an appropriate hazard sign on the door so that fire personnel are aware & can protect this area initially.

- **Firewood:** It's unfortunate that we have seen many homes where residents who use wood heaters have the wood pile stacked against the house or garage wall, if you have ever seen a wood pile burning (Dry Jarrah normally) it will burn for hours with intense heat so please avoid doing this, many residents have a dedicated small wood shed clear of the house. A fire inspector will pick up on wood piles up against residence walls, also its advised that if they are standalone piles a small firebreak should be created around the stack to ensure a ground fire does not get into the wood pile.
- **Decking:** This usually means the house is on a sloping block and rear decking is in place to take in the views and relax, decking is also handy for storing equipment under it including lawnmower, chainsaw and all the other tools carried along with the fuels, a big no, store your fuels in a shed clear of the house, as it is asking for trouble,
- **Door Mats:** Do you have doormats of a flammable nature, most of them are, most mats are just that at the door and if an ember lands there then you could end up with your front door impacted upon and spreading to the rest of the house, we have seen this happen. So, prior to leaving your home (Assuming you are leaving early) throw the door mat onto the lawn or path clear of the house.
- **Garage Doors:** Have you electric doors fitted and how long is it since you switched over to manual and tried to open them manually, give this a try as lubrication might be required and at the same time get to know how to change to manual. Power could be lost at the same time as the fire warning comes through.

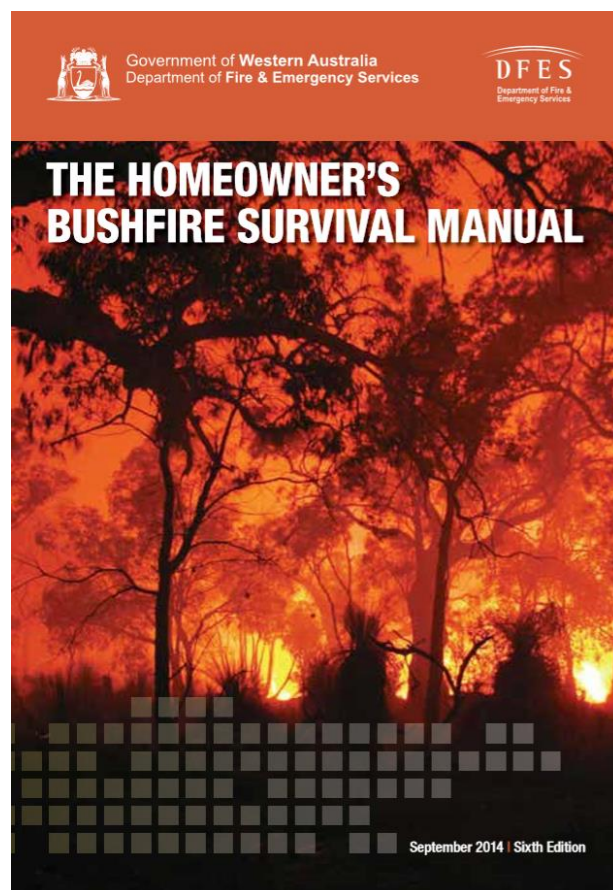
LONGER TERM PROJECTS TO CONSIDER:

- **Eaves:**

If you have open eaves with your Colorbond roof coming down where the eaves are open between each corrugation, an ember can easily be drawn into these gaps and into the roof cavity. It is a long and tedious task, but you could seal these gaps and greatly reduce the risk of embers entering the home in this manner, as we said it is a long term task. We have seen many residents where this has been undertaken.

- **Windows:**

The radiant heat generated as a fire front passes will heat up the windows to the point where they break and let the fire into the house. It may be worth considering the use of shutters, they are expensive to fit but in my case we fitted them on the east and southwest side of the house the two sides most at risk first, then the others later when finances permitted. We have seen some members that have fitted sprays on their verandas' set to spray on the window areas and surrounds, something else you may want to consider.



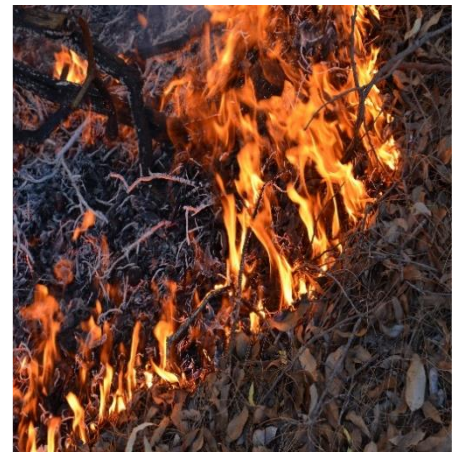
- **Evaporative Air Conditioners:** We have talked about these many times in the past, many homes have been lost through ingestion of embers through the evaporative air conditioner. For example, the Roleystone /Kelmscott fire the majority of homes lost was through the evaporative air conditioners catching on fire and dropping through the ceiling into the house. You no doubt are aware that the filters that carry water through them are made of a cardboard like material which when it dries out is highly inflammable, this is where you need to know the capability of your unit if it is relatively new you should have the ability to turn off the fan and just leave the water circulating through the filters, if this can't be achieved you may have to place a sprinkler next to the unit and keep the filters wet or physically wet them down with the hose. Consider obtaining screens for your unit, these can be a little expensive to fit but will reduce the chance of embers being sucked in, the screens have openings of just under 2 mm. Cost ranges anywhere between \$600 and \$700. Many new air conditioners come with screens fitted.



So, some food for thought if you have the time between showers.

Last year and this year we have worked closely with the City of Kalamunda and at the moment jointly planning promoting bushfire readiness in the City of Kalamunda for the coming season.

We are hoping to have at least one Burn SMART demonstration, a couple of street meets, also the City has indicated they would like to come along and sit in on a couple of Bush Fire Ready meetings, so is there any group that would like to put their hand up? We envisaged maybe getting two or more groups together and 2 or 3 City of Kalamunda personnel coming hopefully one being a Ranger, this way if you have any issues with verges or reserves it can be put to the right people. So please let us know either by e-mail or telephone below as to whether you would be happy to host one of these meetings.



So, keep working when weather permits to keep the build-up of ground fuel down to the acceptable levels. It has been 10 months since the "Hot Toddlies" entertained the fire brigade at our station with the "Bushfire Suite" it was a small cultural break and something special for Father's Day last year.



So, until August stay safe and remember we are here to assist if you have any queries and will probably start making ourselves available for property walk throughs in September.

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