

## Preparing Tilba District for Bushfires

Dear Neighbour

During the past few months, the Tilba District Chamber of Commerce has been working to implement the recommendations of a Bushfire Resilience Plan which was prepared by a bushfire expert from EcoLogical Australia to help Central Tilba village prepare for any future bushfires.

Many of those recommendations apply generally to all residents and businesses in the Tilba district, and so we have included those in this newsletter for your information.

### What should we all be doing now?

Here are some things which we should all be doing now:

○ **RFS Website**

The RFS website (<https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/plan-and-prepare>) has plenty of information which you should be referring to.

○ **Preparing your property**

You should be preparing your property. As the RFS website provides:

*A well-prepared home is more likely to survive a bush fire.*

*Even if your plan is to leave early, the more you prepare your home, the more likely it will survive a bush fire or ember attack. A well-prepared home can also be easier for you or firefighters to defend and is less likely to put your neighbours' homes at risk. A well-prepared home will also give you more protection if a fire threatens suddenly and you cannot leave.*

*Here are some basic maintenance tips to prepare your property:*

- *Clean your gutters of leaves and twigs.*
- *Install metal gutter guards.*
- *Repair damaged or missing tiles on the roof.*
- *Install fine metal mesh screens on windows and doors.*
- *Fit seals around doors and windows to eliminate gaps.*
- *Enclose the areas under the house.*
- *Repair or cover gaps in external walls.*
- *Attach a fire sprinkler system to gutters.*
- *Keep lawns short and gardens well maintained.*
- *Cut back trees and shrubs overhanging buildings.*

- Clean up fallen leaves, twigs and debris around the property.
- Have hoses long enough to reach around your house.
- If you have a pool, tank or dam, put a Static Water Supply (SWS) sign on your property entrance, so firefighters know where they can get water.
- Check and maintain adequate levels of home and contents insurance. Ensure it is up to date.

○ **RFS AIDER Program**

The RFS has a free, one-off service called the AIDER program which might apply to you to help you carry out the above works. We know that a number of people in Mystery Bay have taken advantage of this service.

More information is available here: <https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/plan-and-prepare/aider> which provides that:

*The AIDER program is designed for people who have limited domestic support available from family, relatives, friends or other services. This could include older people, people living with a disability, and people who are already receiving community assistance and services. Their property must also be on bush fire prone land (land that can support a bush fire or be subject to bush fire attack).*

○ **LPG cylinders**

EcoLogical say that you should do the following with any LPG cylinders at your property:

- LPG cylinders should be turned so that the safety valves are facing outwards from buildings or at least parallel to buildings (where buildings are close together).
- All cylinders should be cleared of surrounding wooden fencing or vegetation to a distance of at least 1m from the top of the cylinders.
- The cylinders should be secured in a vertical position with a chain or similar system.

○ **Preparing your garden as an Asset Protection Zone**

EcoLogical recommend that you do the following in your garden:

• **Trees:**

- Avoid planting large and/or sclerophyllous species (such as eucalypts).
- Ensure that if horizontal separation cannot be provided, that overhanging tree canopy is raised to at least 2m vertical separation from rooflines.
- Preference should also be given to mesic (rainforest or ornamental) species which typically have large glossy green leaves.

• **Shrubs:**

- Over time, replace organic mulch with inorganic mulch, especially within 2m of the building.
- If shrubs are located under trees, preference should be given to mesic or low flammability species over dryer native species with high oil contents.
- Avoid shrubby gardens within 2m of buildings and particularly glazed building elements (windows/doors).

- Climbers should be pruned regularly to prevent them from spreading to rooflines/walls of buildings.
- **Grass:**
  - Should be kept mown/slashed/grazed (as a guide grass should be kept to no more than 100mm in height).
- **Ember protection**

Ember attack is the most common cause of building damage or destruction from bushfires. Embers can travel well in advance of the fire front, entering the home through gaps and igniting the interior of the building. Embers can also ignite debris on roofs, in gutters and windowsills or under raised floors.

The Appendix contains the full suite of building treatment recommendations made by EcoLogical. While the higher cost items will provide a higher level of protection, it is recognised that many of these will be beyond the financial capability of many residents/business owners.

Consequently, EcoLogical recommend that property owners focus on implementing the primarily lower cost ember protection options highlighted in yellow within the list. Materials may be cheaper if purchased in bulk if residents/businesses can coordinate these purchases.

- **Thermal gels**

EcoLogical have advised that a further property protection measure is the use of a thermal gel product for the purpose of additional bushfire protection, when applied immediately prior to the onset of bushfire attack. These products can reduce the transfer of radiant heat to vulnerable building elements and mitigate ignitions from ember attack.

Thermal gel products such as 'Barricade'  
<https://www.barricadegelaustralia.com/product-page/barricade-ii-gel>  
 can be stored in drums until required. They are applied to the outside of a building using a garden hose attachment and can provide protection from radiant heat for 7- 24 hours. Misting the coating with additional water spray can extend the protection times.

The cost of Barricade is \$945 for a home kit that has a shelf life of at least 7 years provided that the containers are agitated a few times a year and before use.

The only two downsides of these types of products are that they are an active fire protection system that needs to be applied or potentially refreshed close to the expected time of bushfire impact and clean up can be a messy task. Provided that buildings are well maintained, thermal gels should not impact the painted surface.

- **Firefighting and sprinkler systems**

Many local property owners have installed firefighting pumps and hoses and/or sprinkler systems to be activated to assist in protecting their properties if they are threatened by

bush fire. These systems can reduce the transfer of radiant heat to vulnerable building elements and mitigate ignitions from ember attack.

## **Do you want to form a communication network with your neighbours?**

You may find it helpful to form a communication network and support group with your immediate neighbours in all directions from your property (if you haven't done so already).

That system should be an appropriate communication system that is accessible to all depending on the different technological skills of your neighbour group. For example, it could take the form of a telephone tree (like they have at Dignams Creek) or communication by email, group text or WhatsApp.

You should download the Hazards Near Me app for immediate notification of incidents in your watch zone and use the communication network to:

- Share this newsletter with your neighbours and friends, as not everyone is on the Tilba Community email list which we used to distribute this.
- Share information or provide support in the case of a bush fire.
- Establish a neighbourhood community fire plan.
- Communicate your individual fire plan (stay or evacuate) with your group and send an update if you decide to change it.
- Let your neighbours (or someone in the group) know if you are going away and your property is unoccupied for a length of time.
- Deal with other issues such as pets, chooks and livestock.

## Appendix – Building Treatment Recommendations\*

\* Items highlighted in yellow are higher priority measures primarily relating to ember protection.

Element	Lower cost	Medium cost	Higher cost <sup>1</sup>
Flooring	Ensure that any subfloor area remains free of combustible materials	Cover the underside of any exposed timber flooring with sarking <b>OR</b>  Cover underside of any exposed bearers/joists below floors with bushfire compliant mesh <sup>2</sup> <b>OR</b>  Enclose subfloor with non-combustible material or bushfire compliant mesh <sup>2</sup> .	Replace flooring and supports with non-combustible material or bushfire resisting timber (if subfloor not fully enclosed as outlined to the left) <sup>3</sup> .
Walls/fascia	Seal all small gaps around the building with appropriate joining strips or a fire-rated flexible silicon-based sealant or bushfire compliant mesh <sup>2</sup> .	Paint walls/fascia with fire-retardant paint product.  Install sarking <sup>4</sup> behind weatherboards/external cladding when being replaced for maintenance/other reasons.	Install a sprinkler/drenching system (ground based or concealed if heritage is a concern).  Install sarking <sup>4</sup> behind weatherboards/external cladding when they otherwise would not have been replaced.  Replace wall cladding/fascia with non-combustible material or bushfire resisting timbers.
Doors/windows	Install weather strips, draught excluders or draught seals at the base of all side-hung external doors.  Replace or overclad door frames <400 mm above ground or other level surface (e.g.	Replace external doors with non-combustible <b>OR</b> solid timber doors with a minimum thickness of 35 mm.  Install bushfire compliant mesh screens to all openable windows <sup>2</sup> .	Replace glass with Grade A safety glass or toughened glass, especially if within 400mm of ground or other level surface (e.g. a deck/patio).

<sup>1</sup> All higher cost and some medium cost recommendations will require approval from Council and if uncertain, contact ESC to confirm approval requirements. For older buildings, where original fabric, structural elements, historical details or building form is removed or obscured, a Statement of Heritage Impact and mitigation measures is also likely to be required.

<sup>2</sup> Corrosion-resistant steel, bronze or aluminium mesh with maximum aperture ≤2 mm.

<sup>3</sup> Bushfire resisting timber species: *Eucalyptus sieberi* (Silvertop Ash), *E. pilularis* (Blackbutt), *E. camaldulensis* (River Red Gum), *E. sideroxylon* (Red Ironbark), *Corymbia maculata* (Spotted Gum), *Syncarpia glomulifera* (Turpentine) and *Intsia bijuga* (Merbau).

<sup>4</sup> Sarking to be non-combustible **OR** meet requirements of AS/NZS 4200.1, installed on outside of frame and have a flammability index ≤5 under AS 1530.2.

	deck/patio) with bushfire resisting timber or metal.	Install metal bushfire compliant screens to entire window surface particularly on windows directly exposed to surrounding bushfire hazards.	Install fire shutters to all glazed doors/windows.
Vents/eaves/weepholes	Screen any masonry weepholes with 'Weepa' style product – retrofit product that just pushes into weepholes is available from Bunnings.  Cover wall vents, eave vents and gables with bushfire compliant mesh either externally or internally (especially if heritage is a concern) and seal gaps around the edge of these screens with bushfire rated sealant.		
Roofs	Seal around roofing and roof penetrations with fire-rated sealant.  Seal ridge capping and roof/wall junction with mineral wool.	Install sarking <sup>4</sup> beneath existing roofing when it is being replaced for maintenance or other reasons.	Install a sprinkler/drenching system (ground based or concealed if heritage is a concern).  Replace any overhead glazing with Grade A safety glass and/or shield with bushfire compliant mesh <sup>2</sup> or compliant bushfire shutter <sup>5</sup> .  Install sarking beneath existing roofing when it otherwise would not have been replaced.
Gutters and downpipes	Ensure gutters are kept free of debris especially during Bush Fire Danger Period - (1 September – 31 March annually unless otherwise gazetted).	Install non-combustible leaf/gutter guards with suitable gutter flushing system to ensure maintenance.	
Decking and verandas	Apply fire-retardant paint treatment to existing decks/verandas.	Replace with bushfire-resisting timber.	Replace with non-combustible material.
General	If not already in place, install smoke detectors – preferably hard-wired.  Maintain APZ within property with particular attention to:  ○ Removing/pruning vegetation close to windows and glass doors;  ○ Trimming overhanging branches; and		Install a drenching/sprinkler system particularly on walls within 6m of other buildings (ground based or concealed if heritage is a concern).

<sup>5</sup> See AS 3959-2018 'Construction of buildings in bushfire-prone areas' for further information on compliant shutters.

	<p>o Maintaining lawn/pasture at <math>\leq 100</math> mm.</p> <p>Ensure LPG cylinder safety valves so they face away from buildings and combustible materials.</p> <p>Ensure large LPG cylinders are clear of combustible material/vegetation for a minimum of 5m both vertically and horizontally (including overhanging vegetation from neighbouring property).</p>		
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