Australia experiences many bushfires. These often cause great damage to property, and sometimes loss of life, as many Australians choose to live within or near bush land. It is not only the flames of a bushfire that damage and kill, but also the suffocating thick smoke and the radiant heat. Radiant heat can be so severe it can cause heat stroke.

If people live near the bush, they need to be especially alert to the potential dangers of bushfires. There are many precautions that can be taken. The diagram opposite lists some important ways people can protect their home, and themselves.

1. If living near bush, ensure there is a cleared area (fire break) between the house property and the thick natural bush, and that vegetation planted on the property is not overgrown or dried out.
2. If possible, install an in-ground sprinkling system. Ensure all outside taps, hoses and connections, as well as any internal fire extinguishers and smoke alarms, are working properly.
3. Make sure gutters are kept free of a build up of dried leaves and twigs. In the event of a fire, gutters and downpipes should be plugged up, and the gutters filled with water.
4. All openings into and under the house, including air vents, should be covered with mesh to prevent the entry of burning embers.
5. If a fire is threatening, hose down the house and yard, and turn on any sprinklers. Remove all flammable material (e.g. paint tins, gas cylinders, wood piles) from outside the house and store in the garage or inside the house. Get everyone, including pets, inside.
6. Push wet towels up against any openings around windows and under doors, and close curtains or blinds.
7. Place a ladder up to the access hole in the roof so the roof space can be checked for any spot fires from time to time.
8. Fill the bath, basins and as many containers as possible with water in case spot fires break out in the house.
9. Make sure everyone has removed synthetic clothing (which can melt) and put on long-sleeved cotton or woollen garments and sturdy footwear. Everyone should have gloves and head coverings ready to put on, as well as a wet towel to wrap over the face.

Use the above information to decide how prepared the place you live in would be in the event of a threatening bushfire. Conduct a fire watch audit (careful inspection) of your home and yard, completing the questionnaire on the following page. If necessary, include details on an attachment to this worksheet.

1. Do you live near the bush or any thick plantings of natural vegetation? If so, is there a clear break between your property boundary and this vegetation?

2. Is the vegetation in your garden: (a) neat and healthy, (b) overgrown and mostly dry (c) minimal, as your garden is mostly open space?

3. Do you have an inground sprinkling system? Is it, and all your taps, hoses, fire fighting equipment, smoke alarms etc., in good working order? Describe.

4. If you had to, how would you go about plugging your gutters and downpipes? List any items you think you would need, and whether or not your house has them.

5. List every opening into and under your house that you would seal with protective mesh (or similar) to protect it from embers. Estimate the approximate area of mesh (or similar) needed. Does your house have this quantity of material available?

6. What flammable items currently lying around your yard would be a risk during a bushfire?

7. Is someone in your family easily able to get into your house’s roof space? How?


9. Do any of the plugs to your basins and bath/s leak? Describe.

10. Use the above information to work out how prepared your house is for a bushfire threat. What steps could your family take to make your home safer?