MAD Fire FAQ

Mallacoota and District Recovery Association – Info Sheet
Webinar 2 2019/20 Bushfire Snapshot | FAQ November 2020

MADRA
MALLACOOTA & DISTRICT RECOVERY ASSOCIATION

Fire Management Working Group – Webinar Series

Planning for fire management requires a shared, respectful discussion between the community and fire management agencies, DELWP, FFMVic, Parks and the Shire. The Fire Management Working Group is working on a series of Webinars to inform and educate - how we can make good decisions on managing the country and supporting our community to live safely with fire.

Orchid emerges after hot summer fires. It is the symbol of our webinar series. [credit: L Harwood]

Be Fire Ready - Remember LACES

Lookouts, Awareness, Communication

Escape routes, Safety zones

Get in Touch

- **Mallacoota.district.assoc.2020@gmail.com**
- **www.madrecovery.com**

The Webinar is available online at www.madrecovery.com or at https://youtu.be/t1woJqO53D8

HOUSES and FIRES

How Houses are Destroyed by Bushfire

Dr Justin Leonard (Research leader, Bushfire Adaptation, CSIRO)

Ember Attack – Ember attacks are responsible for over 90% of all house losses. Embers attack at openings, especially at door seals (re-entrant corners where debris accumulates). Window frames with decayed timber makes it easier for embers to take hold. There are unprotected vents on house walls that can also be a potential ember entry point (a fine mesh of 2mm or less is good for stopping embers).

Common entry points – Embers often enter at the top of garage roller doors and gutters (solid debris builds up during the fire event as well). Steel fascia on your gutters dramatically improves chances of embers not entering your roof cavity. Roof ridge capping can help prevent ember entry. Sarking typically burns through. Adding roof batting underneath ridge capping can help reduce ember entry.

Verandah shading covers such as fibreglass skylights are very combustible, even from minor gutter fires. A suitable alternative is polycarbonate (droops and sags, rather than holding flame).

Fuel loads around our houses are an issue –

a) Wood chip mulch in garden beds close up against your house can provide enough radiant heat to damage windows,

b) Decking which is typically wooden. Treated pine is one of the most combustible timbers and leaks toxins into the soil if burnt.

c) Household items stored on our decks add to fuel loads (pot plants, BBQs, furniture, door mats).

d) Sub-floor enclosures are typically covered with wood panelling.

e) External stairs are often wooden…are the treads singular or enable pockets for ember build up?

f) Rubbish wheelie bins and their proximity to a house,

MAD Fire FAQ

Mallacoota and District Recovery Association – Info Sheet
Webinar 2 2019/20 Bushfire Snapshot | FAQ November 2020

KEY TERMS

A Bushfire Prone Area – This is an area where bushfire considered to occur frequently enough to require building controls. This also effects vegetation management - the 10/30 rule (distance limits of vegetation to structure). All of Mallacoota and District is under BPA.

A Bushfire Management Overlay – This is an area where there is potential for very severe bushfire behaviour. This triggers planning controls in addition to building controls (vegetation management 10/50 rule).

[website: mapshare.vic.gov.au/vicplan/] This covers the majority of the Mallacoota area – see map for details.

Vegetation Management Rules –which apply to your own property - BPA allows the removal of trees 10m from the house and 30m for shrubs. BMO allows 10m for trees and 50m for shrubs away from house. Trees do provide shade and moisture retention, wind attenuation, radiation shielding and retards growth of surface fuels. However, trees can also cause embers (especially for certain bark types), to drop combustible debris on houses/ground.

Structural characteristics of trees – There is a CFA plant key that can help you consider plant types, their structure and which ones are best suited for bushfire prone areas.

https://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/plan-prepare/plant-selection-key

g) Cars/caravans/boats/trailers etc. Their proximity to a house is key – the vehicle needs to be at least the dimension of the vehicle away from the house to stop radiant heat/flame contact.

h) Stored tyres, building materials, timber, retaining walls…these can all burn and cause radiant heat/flames to set fire to a house. Storing materials under the structure of your house causes a massive fuel and heat load.

i) Stored propane gas bottles often heat up to the point where they flare and some rupture. If the bottle falls over, it loses its ability to vent properly and release gas, which increases the likelihood of it bursting. Securing of gas bottles therefore becomes extremely important.

j) Sheds are not ember proof and are typically lost at a rate of 3 to 1 to houses in bushfires.

Some Considerations for Houses:

A visual obscuration (such as a single appropriate tree) can block a lot of radiant heat to a house. Green, moist vegetation shields can be good near windows Consider plant and its ultimate size, as well as what you put under those plants. A good plant in isolation can act in a benign way but one with lots of bark chip under it won't have the same protection.

The roof space becomes vulnerable if embers catch fire in your gutters and track to the fascia board / framing on the roof. Try to prevent debris in gutters or consider a type of deflector such as a metal kick-face at the back of the gutter, to encourage flames to track away from roof. Timber fascias are a problem so try to replace with metal fascias if possible.

Gutter guards – it is challenging to prevent debris from collecting in gutters at all times, even during a fire event. Guards can still let some debris through – look for a fine mesh guard with apertures smaller than 2mm and attach to the gutter and roof in a way that it won't start to peel back /shrink when heated.

Fill up all gutters with water, so that debris/embers become wet. Sprinklers on the roof are not always effective as water spray is pushed by wind, meaning the spray may miss gutter areas.