



# CHITTERING BUSHFIRE READY NEWSLETTER

#005 MARCH 2023



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## Dear residents and fellow firefighters

A big thank you to all those Chittering residents, volunteer and career firefighters that assisted with the Muchea Fire on February 25th.

Your assistance on the Saturday and then the week following was much appreciated as we fought the fire under control and then spent many days blacking out, mopping up and patrolling.



# The Weather

Whilst we have not had the super-hot temperatures over summer in Chittering we have still had hot drying conditions into autumn, in fact the Bureau of Meteorology has forecast a drier autumn.

Long term forecasts look like there will be no early break to our High Threat Season (HTS).

La Nina is nearing its end in the Pacific Ocean, with conditions likely to be neutral (neither El Nino nor La Nina) during autumn leading to summer like conditions in Chittering. The Indian Ocean Dipole is neutral and has little influence on Australia's climate during the northern wet season, which extends through until April.

So it looks like a prolonged high threat fire season which means we must keep the maintenance up for a while yet. Sadly if the dry season is longer, the burning season will be shorter.

Plan your winter work program so you're ready to go when the weather breaks and you don't end up caught short when the burning season returns.

Lower West 28-day Rainfall Forecast

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		14	15 med	16 med	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
26	27	28	29	30	31	Apr 1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10					

Chance of rainfall within district			
nil < 25%	low 25% to 50%	med 50% to 75%	high ≥ 75%

**Farmers online rain predictions: March 14 onwards to April 10th 2023**

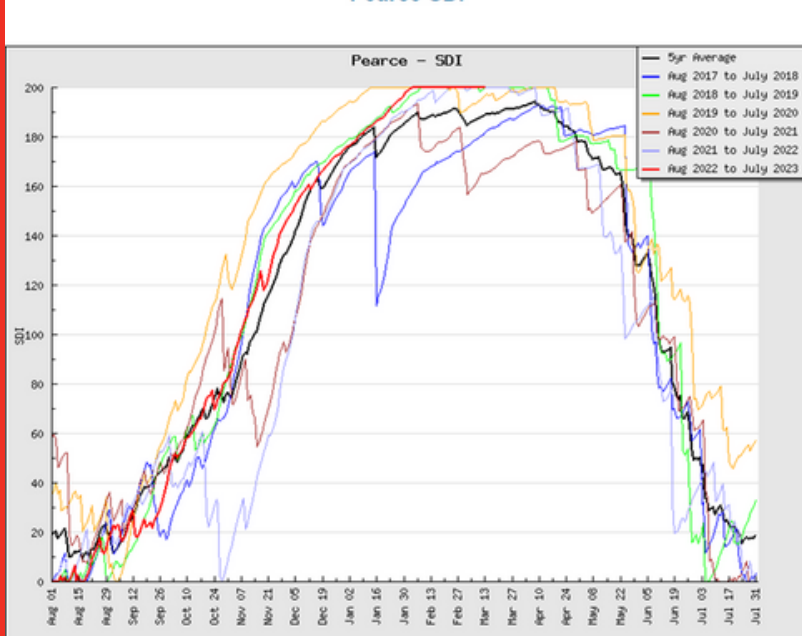
## Ongoing Maintenance

We continue to have large numbers of vehicles at the landfill dropping off trees, branches, sticks and leaves which is great to see. That fuel laying around your property, blowing into drains, up against buildings and over your firebreaks is a large contributor to the bushfire hazard this time of year.

It's been a tough summer for the eucalypts which have been stressed, shedding bark and dropping branches and leaves periodically over summer and some are now starting to flower.

This is great for the bee keepers with their hobby hives and the honey produced from these flowers is awesome however the flowers will eventually fall and most of them end up in your gutters, where they will sit and at first rain turn into muddy mess blocking your gutters and downpipes, so it's ongoing maintenance in this area.

Pearce SDI



**Currently the soil dryness index shows this years red line is as dry as it can get**



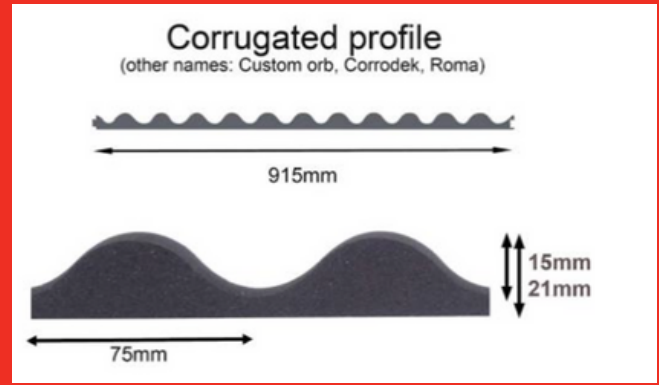
# Planning Ahead

As with everything, having a plan keeps us on track to achieve our goal, you don't know what went wrong if you can't check the plan.

As we are all aware the large majority of homes lost in a bush fire are through ember attack, embers driven by strong winds can penetrate a gap larger than 2mm, so let's look at some long term plans to prepare our homes against this particular threat. In previous newsletters and the burn smart at home training and videos that are available from the Shire of Chittering or your local bush fire brigades we have talked about the day to day build-up of excessive fuel on the ground and removal of same from your property. Let's start at the top and work our way down

**Evaporative air-conditioners:** These are one of the biggest threats to homes during a bushfire, the recommendation by DFES is to shut down the fan and leave the water circulating, however many residents have older models that don't have this feature, we have also come across residents that no longer use this type of air-conditioner and have just left them on the roof, you don't need a fan going to suck in an ember, the cardboard filters will easily burn if an ember finds its way in. So best thing to do is remove it. If you still use an evaporative air-conditioner, then it's advisable to have screens fitted this will reduce the possibility of embers entering the system. Those residents that have had them fitted the cost has been between \$700 and \$800.

**Gutters:** How often do you have to climb a ladder and clean those gutters or have a contractor in to do it for you at cost, if you have a large number of trees dropping a lot of leaves onto the house then it may be worthwhile fitting some gutter guard, the cheap plastic type is very good at collecting leaves and causing the gutters to overflow. One of the most effective is the stainless steel or aluminium that sits across the gutter so leaves move across the roof and the gutter and end up on the ground instead of collecting in the gutters and blocking your downpipes.



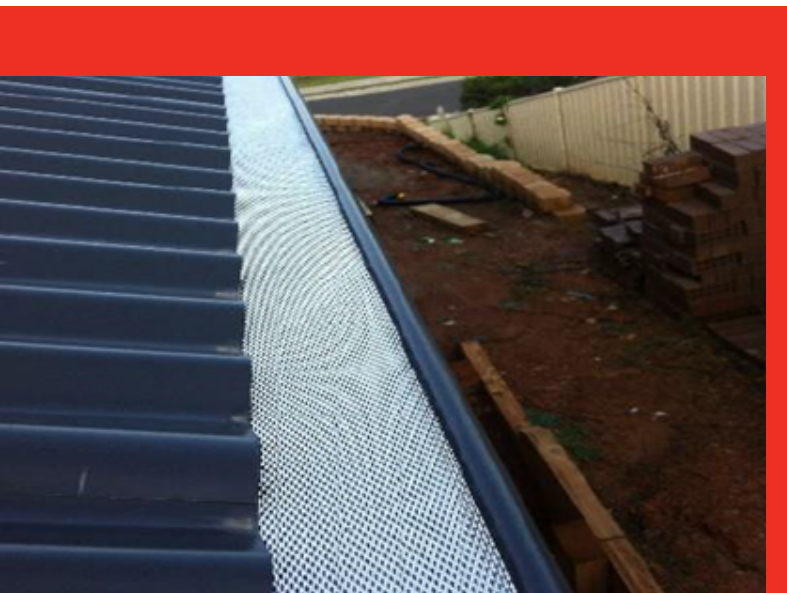
**Eaves:** Many houses have open eaves usually fitted with Colourbond roofing, the sheets usually cross the outer most beam and terminate in an overhang, due to the corrugations this leaves gaps into the roof cavity, there is a product on the market that can be inserted to seal these gaps as per the photo. Some homes we have seen have overhanging flat roofs leaving a gap around the entire house, these have been closed off with either a timber insert or wire to prevent possums and rats entering, if you haven't any protection like this mesh with less than 2mm would still allow air circulation in the cavity. If the gap is small enough, we have seen no more gaps used and high expansion foam.

**Windows and Doors:** Check around your window frames and doors for any gaps that may allow an ember in, a more expensive alternate is shutters, these are very effective and provides your home with that extra security as well. Not bad for a late morning sleep in either!

**Decking:** Can be a problem especially close to the ground, leaves will accumulate underneath and is perfect target for an ember entering, this type of decking could have a wooden barrier or mesh wire around to prevent this type of accumulation and stop the embers as well. If you have high decking say on a slope and use it for storage, just make sure you don't store fuels and corrosives in that space, remember your house is above.

**Sprinkler System:** This needs a lot of thought as if you are contemplating fitting roof and eave sprinklers you need to have your own reliable water source (Large tank, bore, dam or swimming pool) you need a reliable pump not electric unless you have high capacity portable generator, diesel or petrol engine. Make sure you have a proper high capacity fire pump i.e. large pump bell to give you a good output. It would be best to consult with the experts who fit these as there are solenoid activated systems that you can control remotely.

So do your homework, there is no guarantee after spending thousands of dollars on a system that your house won't burn down, if your house is hit by the head fire the radiant heat 1,000 kw/sqm plus can evaporate the water and your home may not survive. The other thing to consider is your age and health, can you handle the intense high temperatures and physical activity in running around putting out spot fires for a number hours, Best to start everything up and plan to leave early.



# Water Tanks

If you are contemplating putting in a water tank to give yourself an extra independent water supply, as this is an expensive item you need to do some research before purchasing and installing one. During the Wooroloo Fire it was obvious that many residents opted for a Polyurethane tank, they are inexpensive and serve the same purpose of retaining water for consumption, however in terms of a Bush Fire they are not so resilient, many melted down tanks were observed.

**Researchers from CSIRO and Monash University have conducted extensive testing on the performance of water tanks in bush fires. They found:**

**1/ Stainless Steel Tanks did not burn or split when fully exposed to fire for over 30 minutes, they became slightly scorched but there was no structural damage and only minor water loss.**

**2/ Aquaplate (Colorbond) Tanks maintained structural integrity in a fire but when the temperature reached over 65 degrees, the thin plastic lining on the inside of the tank began to delaminate, causing slight water loss.**

**3/ Polyethylene (plastic) Tank quickly split and collapsed in a fire, emptying themselves and melting down.**

1



2



3



## Setting Up Water Tanks in Bushfire Prone Areas:

There are a range of factors to consider when setting up a water tank in a bushfire prone area. For Example:

- You need a metal tank that will keep it's structural integrity during a bushfire
- What type of tank stainless which is by far superior but more expensive, Colorbond or Poly?
- There needs to be a clear space around the tank site so that there is nothing that could burn and so the local fire trucks can get good access to their tank outlet
- Your draw off outlet needs to be fitted with the correct hose connections for the local fire trucks. All the Chittering trucks and most of our metro neighbours use 50mm male Camlock fitting.
- Exposed PVC pipes and fittings will melt in a fire so make sure your valves and pipe fittings are made from metal to ensure they can withstand high temperatures.
- Do not rely on an electric pump as power will most likely be cut off in a bushfire. It is best to have diesel or petrol driven pumps and your generator needs more than 1.5kva capacity to drive your electric pump.
- The generator and pump should be able to pump a minimum of 400 litres per minute and must be built with shielding from high temperatures.
- You can install a dedicated water tank for firefighting purposes only or you could install a combination water tank where water can be stored for both firefighting and domestic use.
- A minimum of 10,000 litres is needed to be available for firefighting purposes in The Shire of Chittering so combination tanks usually store more than 20,000 litres of water. Bear in mind that if you are in the path of the fire front a lot more water will be required, if you have a swimming pool you could make that your primary source with the tank as your back up or vice versa.
- Check the Shire of Chittering website or talk to our Planners or Bushfire Risk Officer for advice as this may vary depending on the location, type and size of your property



# What's News

This year has seen a below average number of turnouts for our brigades but still lots of hours on the fire ground with some rather large time consuming jobs.

We finished 2022 with a grass and scrub fire resulting from a single vehicle car accident Chittering Rd x GNH x Hart Drive and we were still mopping up the first week into 2023. On January 9 we had lightning strikes all around the Shire and only small pockets of rain but we were lucky to only have one resulting fire that being in Chardonnay drive Lower Chittering, fortunately it was spotted by the owner and with neighbourly assistance were able to stomp it out before brigades arrived. Chittering Brigade members assisted Toodyay in the Avon Valley for a couple of days early Feb to contain several fires along the train line around Cobblers Pool and Harders Chitty road.

During the early months of this year brigades have responded to pit / drum fires, thankfully neighbours or passes by have seen them and called 000 so we have been able to get there quickly and explain "NO FIRES" this time of year. If people need information on prohibited burn times please contact The Shire of Chittering or your local brigade.

The Muchea Fire on Feb 25 was only a small area but as the winter creek line area was heavily vegetated with natives including paperbarks, Eucalypts, Banksia's and Grass Trees there was some spectacular flame heights and smoke plumes, we were very fortunate to have a quick positive response with minimal loss.



## Join a Brigade

If you are interested in joining Chittering Fire Services our volunteer firefighters learn to operate a wide array of equipment, vehicles and appliances used in fire suppression operations. Equipment used includes charged hose lines, portable pumps, tankers and communications. Induction training is available for all new volunteers.

If you're not interested in fighting fires but are interested in operations, join our Incident Support Brigade. This brigade supports the incident management team and crews in operations, welfare, communications, recruitment and administration of an incident. The Shire of Chittering strongly supports the recruitment of both male and female volunteers representing a wide diversity of ages, cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

Volunteering is a great way to meet new people that are prepared to share their knowledge on fire behaviour and become more familiar with the surroundings in your area.

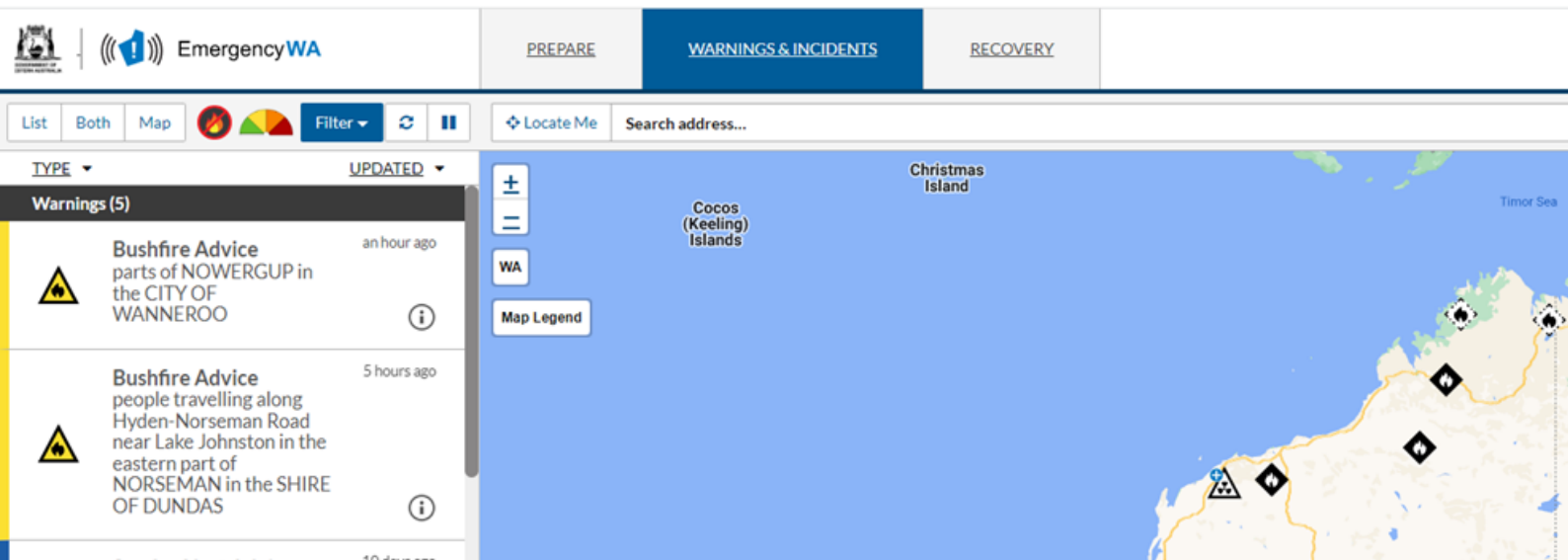
[www.chittering.wa.gov.au/joinabrigade](http://www.chittering.wa.gov.au/joinabrigade)



# THE POWER OF COMMUNICATION

All members of our Perth Countryside Community should understand the importance of the DFES “Emergency WA” website as it is a critical source of emergency incident information, the link to the site is here :

<https://www.emergency.wa.gov.au/>



If you need guidance with your property bushfire risk your Shire of Chittering Bushfire Risk Officer is available to have a property walk through. There is no charge for this service and it will help you prepare your property to be Bushfire Ready. Simply call or email Graham and let me know on the below contact details if you would like to lock in a time for me to visit.

Alternatively, you can contact your local volunteer bush fire brigade Captains to discuss local issues or if you would like to join their brigade.

**Stay safe and enjoy the autumn season**  
**Kind Regards Graham and the Bush Fire Ready Team**

Graham Furlong

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