

I submit that any enquiry into extreme weather conditions must consider the environment of a house,. My house in Weston, ACT was designed as a rectangle facing the wrong way, back in 1976.It had most of its large windows facing West and East. We had some very hot weather in summer 1977 and we realised we had to ameliorate conditions or fry. We could not pick up the house and face it North because it was built on a concrete slab. We did a number of things over the years, starting with planting a grape vine along the west, planting shade trees on the West and East sides. We had an extension built running along an East West axis with total windows facing north, well curtained. Over the years since we have added pelmets, thicker curtains, more roof insulation, wall insulation, 6 kws of solar panels on the North facing roof, double glazing to most of the house. In really hot periods we use a roll of Coolaroo to shade the West. We clean out the gutters regularly and mulch and wet the gardens in hot spells. We have a water tank but I do need to buy a generator to power this in spells when the mains power is cut - which often happens in extremely hot spells. We have arrangements with friends about saving each others houses in fire conditions, especially if someone is away from Canberra. We have managed to persuade two neighbours to install metal garden fences - the third is more concerned about neatness so we have one wooden fence.

As a result of this , we feel we could handle a bushfire better than our neighbours who seem to not be concerned about extreme heat - they just turn their aircon up a few notches. When it reaches 37 degrees outside , if we close windows and curtains on the west, our internal temperature is rarely above 27 to 28 degrees, and we do not contemplate installing air conditioners.

I think the serious problem governments face is sheer apathy on the part of most citizens in a bushfire are. In the 2003 bushfires we were overseas, but our friend Boris came round to clean out the gutters and hose areas near the house.

To have any real effect you somehow have to get through to residents just how much they can do, without relying on the fire brigade, police etc and mechanical or powered means - when the 2003 bushfires hit, there was no power for 36 hours.

Good luck with it all.

Fred Hart