

FIREBLOKA

Bushfire Sprinkler Systems

Submission No.2



To whom it may concern,

My name is Kerry Cox. I am 56 and the proud owner of FIREBLOKA Bush Fire Sprinkler Systems.

This is an open letter to all the Federal and State Government bodies that are part of a combined national inquiry, charged with investigating what measures and recommendations should be implemented that will have long term and far reaching solutions to the annual bush fire 'problem' that Australia has to contend with every year.

I am taking this opportunity to contribute my views, opinions and observations to these committees because of the many years experience I have had in manufacturing, supplying and installing external sprinkler systems on buildings and homes that help to reduce the damaging effects of bush fire.

I have been in the business of protecting houses from bush fires for the last ten years and I have seen the difference these sprinkler systems have made to peoples lives and from that position, I can safely speak with a good deal of authority and knowledge on this subject.

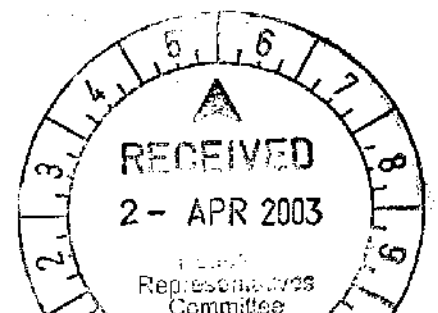
No doubt, the submissions to these inquiries will be in all our interest and I hope that all the recommendations and findings of these inquiries are acted upon by the relative bodies, in a decisive and meaningful manner.

It is important that some existing laws be changed and new ones made so that peoples lives and thousands of buildings in these rural, semi-rural and suburban areas of Australia will have a greatly increased chance of withstanding these fires each year.

My experience with bush fires and the damage they cause started when I was 17 years old, in the Army, waiting for my course to start at the School of Military Engineering at Casula, near Liverpool in Sydney, temporarily based at Puckapunyal in Victoria after my basic training at Kapooka, when I was sent to help fight bush fires near Melbourne in 1964.

This is where I saw first hand, how the ember showers that these fires produce can drop from the sky many kilometers from the main fire and start new fires and many years later, my house in Woronora, south of Sydney, was destroyed by fire in 1984 due to the embers from a fire that was almost a kilometer away that had fallen from the sky, onto my roof and setting fire to the leaves in the gutters that I should have removed.

I have had a great deal of first hand experience with the effects of bush fires and it is why I started the business I own today. Because I saw that fire fighters can only do so much and no matter how many of them are around, they can not stop the ember showers or put out every little spot fire that starts as a result of the ember attack.



It is strange that after two hundred years of bush fires, it took a bush fire to happen in our nations capitol to get the attention of the authorities, even though only 500 buildings were destroyed.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, between 1964 to the present day, over 30,000 plus buildings have been destroyed by bush fire, all of them on the city fringes and in the outer suburbs of all major cities in all states and some three hundred people have lost their lives and many hundreds more injured.

Ash Wednesday, 16th Feb 1983 at Mt Osmond in South Australia was our worst, with nine thousand one hundred houses and buildings destroyed and 9 people killed, all in one day !

On the same day in Victoria, eight fires burned out 183,000 hectares, wiped out several towns and seaside resorts, forty seven people died and two thousand one hundred and eighty six houses were destroyed.

Understandably, after the tragedy and devastation in Canberra, there has been a lot of attention focused by the various media groups on the Rural Fire Brigades inability to deal with the bush fire situations that happen EVERY summer in Australia.

With all that attention on the emergency services problems, the media and everyone else had somehow overlooked the real issue. Which is, "What the individual home owners should be required to do to protect their houses and property".

This should be the center of the inquiries attention. Focusing on individual housing and the protective measures that the occupants must be made responsible for instead of these people relying on the emergency services coming to their rescue.

The CSIRO's research into the fire and it's causes in Canberra found that the main reason why these buildings were destroyed was because of the 'Ember' attack from all the fuel that had collected on the forest floor for many many years.

The fire also burned out the electricity supply to the cities water pumping station, preventing water from getting to these houses and the emergency services who, for years have been telling the community to believe that they have the ability and capability to respond to these emergencies.

Unfortunately, there have been an increasing number of instances where the emergency services ability to respond to these emergencies has been called into question and, it looks like there will be very little improvement in the near future.

Throwing millions of dollars of tax payers money around to buy more equipment will never solve the problem, especially for the people who are living in the path of one of these fires.

My point is this:- The communities that live with the constant threat of bush fire year in and year out can no longer, blindly put their trust and faith in a system that is becoming an extremely expensive burden and liability that can't respond to the emergencies in their own back yard, let alone see them nobbled by the 'Environmentalists' at every turn !

A quote from the Australian Bureau of Statistics web site "Historically, major disasters have occurred where severe fires are less frequent and, in the future, it is likely that the frequency of burning off accumulated fuel on forest floors is likely to decrease and, as a consequence of this, the vulnerability of the population to bush fires, is likely to increase."

To reinforce my point concerning what measures have been taken to make people safe from themselves, you must look at how many deaths, horrific injuries and suffering it took on our roads before seat belts became standard fittings in all vehicles.

By law, seat belts have become a compulsory fitting in all cars, no matter how old the vehicles, to help save as many lives as possible and, it worked, not because there was an enforced slow down of all cars on all roads, but because originally, the owner of the car was targeted and forced to install them.

The same hard thinking took place when it came to preventing more drowning deaths of children in back yard pools and the security fencing that is now required, by law, to surround these pools, which works, because the building of pools in every yard was not stopped but each pool owner was also targeted and forced to install it.

These measures were taken and had to be implemented by our law makers because they knew that if these decisions were left to the individual to make these changes in their own environment, on their own accord and in their own time, nothing would ever have been done, because most people have the mentality that 'It won't happen to me'.

In the United States of America there is a law in many states that makes all home owners install a 'Green Lane' in their house in case of an internal fire as well as the compulsory fitting of smoke alarms, a direct response to the number of deaths that were attributed to people getting confused and trapped in the heat and smoke filled areas of a burning house and not getting to an exit in time.

The 'Green Lane' is a series of internal fire sprinklers installed inside the house in a passageway with a designated safe exit that at either end.

The 'Green Lane' when operating, is wet and cool, helping reducing panic and giving the occupant a greatly increased chance of surviving because they have got a definite way out of the house and this effectively reduces the time that the people are exposed to the smoke and heat that is responsible for all fire deaths.

By law, it is now required that all existing homes in many states in America be fitted with this system and no new building plans are approved unless there is provision on the submitted plans for this 'Green Lane' sprinkler system.

The same thinking and logic must now be applied by our law makers be they Federal, State or local Councils, for laws to be introduced that makes sure these individuals who live in bush fire prone areas install measures for their own bush fire protection, instead of being encouraged to believe, 'The fire fighters are only a phone call away'.

For too long now the people who can make these changes have avoided addressing the bushfire 'problem' by saying, "It is up to the individual house owner to make their own arrangements for their own protection as this is a personal choice they have to make, because the rural fire brigade will take care of the fire".

People are willing let everyone else do for them what they should do for themselves, in particular, the people who live with the ever present threat from bush fire especially if they choose to live in areas where they know there has been a history of bush fire.

With our ever increasing population and the price of housing and land in the city making it harder for the average home buyer to afford so the only other alternative is to look further afield.

People are encouraged by these lower prices to move further away from the city into these new housing estates which are spreading into these semi-rural areas and the road access to these areas improves and personal transport being more dependable than ever, the ability for people to settle further away from the city is very attractive.

As a consequence, Councils and conservationist's have made sure that these new housing estates are designed to have as much of the natural vegetation left standing to help preserve as much of the 'Natural Environment' as possible, but with these 'requirements' comes the inherent dangers of the bush fires and the damage that they do.

With more housing developments being built further out of the city, the fire fighting authorities ability to respond effectively has declined and their ability to respond to all situations has been drastically reduced.

Mr Carr, Premier of New South Wales, said that he will spend \$160,000,000.00 buying fire trucks and infrastructure for the Rural Fire Brigade to combat any future fires.

Why spend that much money on a system that is going to cost a lot more to run and maintain when it would cost less than \$20,000,000.00 to fit an external sprinkler system to every building that is located in a bush fire prone area in N.S.W ?

Bush fires have already cost the N.S.W tax payers \$100,000,000.00 to fight and extinguish all the fires in that state in 2001/02 with over \$75,000,000.00 in insurance claims and 106 buildings destroyed.

Councils today must act and make sure that any buildings that are going to be built in these bush fire prone areas must have a bush fire protection system included in the plans before the approval to build is given and, offer rebates to those who install a bush fire protection measure plus give a reduction in the bush fire levy that all home owners in these areas are required to pay that is supposed to support the emergency services.

Insurance companies can also help their clients by offering the people who have these systems installed, a substantial reduction in the premiums they pay as these systems dramatically lower the risk of being burned out by these bush fires, reducing the pay out figures these insurance companies would otherwise have to meet.

The expense of adding a sprinkler system to all new housing by the home owner will be small but the total and direct savings for the community as a whole would far outweigh the argument for spending millions of tax payers dollars on a Rural Fire Fighting system that is not as cost effective as it was, or is unable to respond quickly.

Aside from the damage done by these fires, the nations economic base is severely undermined each bushfire season by the thousands of volunteer fire fighters who down tools in their respective jobs and businesses to fight these fires and the costs incurred by their employers, the support base that is put in place to feed them, to gas their trucks, accomodate and fly the interstate fire fighters to help others in need is often overlooked.

Thinking and believing that the existing system is effective and responsive is very dangerous and foolhardy, not only by the general public but by the people who have the job of administrating these authorities as well.

It is always a tragedy to see these fires take what they like each year and the shattered lives that are left behind and changed for ever and as always, there is a lot of blame and accusations and recriminations after these fire have come and gone, but pointing fingers and jumping up and down does not give anyone the answers in how to deal with protecting buildings and houses from the destruction these fires cause.

With the tragic end of the innocence in Canberra, the real thinking and meaningful, productive decissions and recomendations must to be made by the members of these inquiries that will actively and decisevly address the bush fire 'problem' that we all face and have faced for the last two hundred years.

Research by the relative emergency services into how much of their resources and equipment it would take to prevent one house from being burned to the ground by a bush fire found that it would take two fire trucks and crew to fulfill this task.

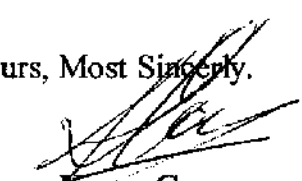
So, by having an external sprinkler system on a building, it is equal to, if not better, than having two fire trucks permanently parked next to a house for the next twenty years.

In closing, I must say that I have seen the most amazing changes to peoples lives and their outlook after I have installed a bush fire sprinkler system on their houses, they feel and are, safer, confident, independant, reassured, in control and relieved that they are able to fight these fires on their own terms and know that they stand a better chance of surviving, rather than stand by and helplessly watch their history, treasures and life burn in front of their eyes while waiting for the rural fire fighters to arrive.

All of these people who have now got an external bush fire sprinkler system on their houses have said that it is the best spent dollar, ever !

People, while you can, seize this opportunity to make a real difference and be part of history.

Yours, Most Sincerely,



Kerry Cox

FIREBLOKA, Bush Fire Sprinkler Systems.