



Preparing to stay and defend - Robin McDonald, Rosewhite

Extract 1 of witness statement to the 2009 Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission

Narrator: Robin and her husband David live on a 380 hectare cattle farm of undulating grassy farmland in the foothills of the alpine area of north eastern Victoria.

4. Our fire plan has always been to stay and defend our property. We always believed that our home is defensible: it is a cement brick house in the centre of an open grass valley with little woodland around. We never considered for a moment that we would leave and I believe that if we had left on 7 February, our home would have been destroyed by the fires that continued to burn after the main front had passed.

5. Our fire plan consists of a number of elements:

- We have the cattle and horses graze the paddock around the house and the farm sheds intensively at the beginning of summer so that the grass is very short. This only needs to be done once, as the grass then becomes too dry to grow during the rest of summer.
- We have a 900 litre fibreglass firefighting tank mounted on a trailer, as well as a fire pump and hoses to attach to the tank. We also have a pressure pump that supplies the garden taps from the dam. Our house water supply comes from a nearby well which is pumped into a tank connected to the house.
- There is a generator in the shed which can be plugged into the pressure pump supplying water to the garden taps. We do not have the right wiring to allow us to use the generator as an alternative house power supply.
- We have two dams near the house that provide our main firefighting water supply.
- We clear the gutterings of leaves and debris and, when there is a specific fire threat, we plug the downpipes so that the gutters can be filled with water.
- I have a collection of buckets and cotton mops to be used for putting out embers.

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7. Both David and I have considerable knowledge about how to protect ourselves and our property in a fire. David has been a CFA member for 57 years, including many years as the captain of our local brigade. We have attended local CFA fire preparedness sessions, which I found to be very interesting. Also, as part of my job with the DSE I did fire preparedness training and worked in the incident control centre during the Alpine fires in 2003.

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Bushfire Education



14. At 11pm, Nigel came to wake us up saying that David's CFA pager was going off. David received a pager message from the Wodonga CFA saying that the Beechworth fire was burning in the Barwidgee creek area (about halfway between us and Beechworth). It also said that the fire had spotted in Carrolls Road, which we knew was about 10kms west of us. We turned on the internet and checked Google Maps to see exactly where it was.

15. We all got up and went outside. The fire was still behind the far hill but the red glow was now very fierce. It was still amazingly hot (about 39 degrees) and the wind was strong and gusty.

16. We quietly went about getting ready. We put on our firefighting clothing (long sleeve top and jeans) then Odette and I worked to get the house ready. We moved everything off the veranda (outdoor furniture, flammable pot plants and so on), made sure all the windows were shut, put the hoses on the taps and positioned mops and buckets full of water around the house. I also placed a ladder against the house so that David or Nigel would be able to go up and check the gutterings.

17. ...David and Nigel went down to the shed and hooked up the trailer, made sure the tank was full and that the pump was ready to go.

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