

Heavenly Hectares:

Top ten tips to be fire safe on a rural property

Phase out the fuel - it will be vital at this time that no highly flammable material is left within the 20-30m area surrounding your home. This means getting stuff out of gutters, removing long dead grass, leaf litter, 'ribboning' bark and twigs

Get yourself kitted out - if you live in a high fire risk area buy yourself some good insulated fire fighting gear - overalls, boots, jacket ...even a hard hat. If you aim to attack a fire in shorts and thongs it will probably be the last thing you do!!

Pump up the volume - get yourself an independent fire fighting pump and fire fighting hose. The surest thing that will happen in the event of a fire is that you will lose water, power or both leaving you with little to defend yourself.

Draw the line on curtains - many fires get inside a home because the fly screens, curtains and carpet all catch alight. Check out wire mesh for your windows and non-flammable curtains and coverings for your floors

Shed shockers can be killers - if you have flammable stuff stored in your shed move it at least 1m in from the wall and cover it in an insulated blanket to keep it cool. If it heats up it can blow and turn your fire into an uncontrollable monster

Go the distance - make sure that your firebreak (better known as a fire emergency vehicle access track) is clear to 4m wide AND 4m high and that there are no locked gates to impede access through property in the case of an emergency

Managing your mulch – mulch is great stuff in the garden BUT it can heighten the fire risk in extreme areas so within the 20-30m area around your home look to either spray your mulch with a commercially available fire retardant mix or replace or cover it with stone mulch – it will work just as well but will not support a fire

Plan for a safer 2011/12 – we are in the thick of it now but this is the perfect time to work out how your designs will change to make the place safer in the future - what will stay and what will go once the fire season has lifted. Look to focus on fire retardant plants and components within that 20-30m area around your home – veggies, orchards, lawn, ponds and a selection of fire retardant plants will work well but other stuff such as hay sheds, fuel tanks and long rank weeds are just plain scary!

Obey the total fire bans – crazy that I have to say this but it is amazing how many fires start because people don't think and drive across a paddock or crank up the brushcutter on an extreme fire day.

Make sure you have an active fire emergency plan – a fire roaring

over the hill should not be the prompt to think about a fire plan! Get this done early and think about what you will take if you have to leave, where you will put pets and stock in the case of an emergency and make sure your neighbors know what you have planned so if the worst happens and you are not there when a fire comes they can be of assistance.

Good luck, plan safe and stay safe

Extract from **Chris Ferreiras** up and coming book – **Heavenly Hecatres** – *designing, creating and managing a beautiful, productive and sustainable rural landscape.*

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