

Submission No.23

16 April 2003

The Select Committee on the recent Australian Bushfires
The Secretary of the Committee
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This submission addresses terms of reference (b), (c), (e), (f) and (i).

Days after the bushfires hit Canberra a televised eyewitness account was made to the Prime Minister of Australia. A lady described to the Prime Minister how her family's house burnt to the ground and she was expecting the same thing to happen to her neighbour's house. The lady described how the solar hot water panel on the roof of her neighbour's house "exploded" showering water onto the house and preventing the destruction of that house by fire. Her description reminded me of the story of the movie "The Towering Inferno", except on a house scale rather than an office tower scale.

Based on the principle of having a ready reservoir of water available for release when fire threatens, measures that can be implemented to minimize the impact of bushfires on life and property are as follows:

- Legislate to ensure all new houses include solar hot water heating systems that have suitably sized reservoirs.
- Encourage existing houses to install solar hot water heating systems.
- Fund research into incorporating a sprinkler into household solar hot water heating systems to allow for controlled release of water when bushfires threaten. Sprinkler systems are already mandatory in office towers.

Benefits of the above measures would include the following:

- There will be a ready reservoir of water on the roof when bushfires threaten (householders will not have to hose down their roofs at the last minute).

- lower energy costs for householders and reduced green house gas emissions due to reduced consumption of fossil fuels for heating water.
- lower insurance costs for householders with solar hot water heating systems with sprinklers attached.

The costs of providing sprinkler systems to suppress fires in every room of a house are prohibitive however the costs of connecting one sprinkler outlet to the reservoir of a hot water system to protect the a house during a bushfire are not prohibitive and would be offset by lower insurance costs.

I hope this submission can be further explored by your committee.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Gemmell