

## August 2017: Brown Hill bushfire risk for residents living on bush blocks north of the freeway

Associate Professor Kevin Tolhurst AM — Brown Hill fire risk assessment for residents living on bush blocks north of the freeway. Video 3 in the series. Interviewer: Alice, a neighbourhood cluster contact for the Brown Hill Community FireAware Network.

**\*\* NOTE:** In the video it is mentioned that Janson Rd and Stringybark Drive have only one entry and exit point onto Springs Rd. Since the video was made in 2017, Janson Rd has extended over the hill and enters Hillview Rd. Hillview Rd however also feeds into Springs Rd. The extended Janson Rd now has many smaller urban housing estates feeding into it.

The new estate housing changes the risk profile from bush blocks to close-packed urban housing, the same as Coorabin and Apple Orchard. So, it combines the worst of both scenarios — direct fire front and ember exposure (bush blocks), to house-to-house ignition risk of estate density. Egress is also compromised further. This note is added by the Brown Hill FireAware Network, March 2026"

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### [Alice — interviewer]

Many people in Brown Hill live on lovely bush blocks north of the freeway. the residential blocks along Janson Road and Stringybark Drive consist of small acreages — between two and five acres — and are lifestyle blocks. **\*\* There are approximately 50 households along these two roads, with only one entry and exit point onto Springs Road.** The majority of the blocks are well-established, 20 to 30 years old, with some newer housing along Stringybark Drive. Other bush blocks are located along Springs Road and Hillview Road. Kevin, could you provide your evaluation of the bushfire risk to households living on bush blocks north of the freeway — such as those on Janson Road and Stringybark Drive?

### [Kevin Tolhurst]

The main **difference between these bush blocks and the older established part of Brown Hill** is that here, the **houses are well separated** — so the chance of house-to-house ignition is relatively minimal. But instead, what we have here is a situation where **fire is able to move freely** through this landscape.

Again, the potential is there for a fire coming from the north, west or north-west to reach the forested area to our west, and as that fire crests the hills it will **throw embers and start spot fires**. You could potentially have **hundreds of ignitions starting within a few minutes** across this area. The potential for fire impact here is quite high.

**\*\* Along with that, access and egress would be seriously compromised.** There are only a few roads in and out. At the moment we already have large, established trees along Springs Road and Stringybark Drive. The chance of a tree coming across the road, or a powerline coming down, would **severely compromise your ability to get in or out** of the area once fire has reached here.

So, the **importance of planning here is even more vital** — because you have fewer options. The likelihood of firefighting equipment getting in here is even less likely than in a more built-up area. **People need to be much more self-reliant.**

Given the potential for **large numbers of spot fires starting across this area**, it would be really important to have your **house and your land well prepared** in advance of the fire. Because in a fire event there will already be more than enough things to deal with on the day.

You have an additional consideration here as well: under conditions that might be just **High or Extreme fire weather** — not only Catastrophic — you could still have quite a **significant fire in this location**. Because of the grass and the forest and the trees throughout this area, there is fuel continuity across the landscape that can carry fire through largely uninterrupted by the few roads and houses. **You are actually right in a bushfire** it's a very different environment we are dealing with.

*So, what are some things people need to think carefully about?* Firstly, **know what you are actually going to do — and your family's role in that**. Secondly, blocks like these are more likely to have larger animals — horses, livestock — as well as dogs and pets. Very few people are able to leave animals behind knowing they will be exposed to a fire. You have to **plan what you're going to do with the animals**.

You also need to **plan how you're going to defend your house** in the event that it's not a major fire, but a fire has started perhaps a kilometre away and **your house is likely to be impacted**. You have a very short period of time where you can actually take action. **Unless you're well prepared well in advance of the fire season, you're not going to have enough time** to do the preparation of removing things like doormats, or shifting your wood heap, or blocking or cleaning your gutters out. Those things have to be done regularly and well in advance.

**Everyone in the family has to know what they're expected to do**. That sounds simple — you can talk about it — but talking about it is really not enough. You need to document what you're planning to do and practice it. What **you'll find when you try to practice it is that it won't work** the first time. You'll find things, the stumbling blocks, you hadn't actually thought of.

Another thing that happens in serious fire situations: you end up in darkness, **it can become completely dark in the middle of the day** - because of the smoke and the soot in the air - things become quite dark. Unless you're well prepared for that, which is quite scary in itself – it is difficult to find your way around, finding where your torches are — there is a lot to manage. **Thinking you're going to work all of this out an hour before the fire hits is simply a pipe dream it's not going to happen**.

**Being involved in your local community, talking** about these things, looking at websites with useful resources — including community sites like the Brown Hill FireAware Network pages and fire agency websites — getting yourself **as well educated and informed as possible is key**. Knowing that no two events will be the same, opens up the possibility that when you are in that situation, and that will be horrendous enough at the time, **you already know some of the things that ARE expected which makes the unexpected things a little easier to deal with**.

*[End of transcript]*

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