

Two-pronged approach prepares for bushfire threat

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The best thing homeowners can do to prepare for a bushfire is to decide what they intend to do and commit to that decision. Image: HighExposure

WA researchers have proposed a global measure for bushfire preparedness based on whether homeowners plan to evacuate or defend their property.

The research team compiled a list of 118 actions people can do to

prepare for a fire and asked experts to prioritise them according to the goals of the homeowner.

The result was a standard measure of bushfire preparedness for three scenarios including a person wanting to evacuate their home as soon as they hear about a bushfire.

The other scenarios included a person wanting to stay and actively defend the property and a person wanting to give their home the best chance of surviving but without anyone being there to defend it.

UWA psychologist Patrick Dunlop, who led the research, says the actions are a mix of physical and psychological things people can do.

"So cutting the lawn or clearing out the gutters is a very discrete activity that you can either have done or not done," he says.

"But [others are] more psychological...like preparing yourself mentally for the day when the fire hits and making sure all family members are aware of a bushfire plan.

"It's a little bit more difficult to say 'yes, I'm 100 per cent mentally prepared for something' but certainly you could make the case that you had thought about it."

The scientists also surveyed residents of bushfire-prone areas to see what their intentions were in the event of a fire and what actions they had already taken.

Doubling up found amongst residents

They found that there was a lot of overlap in the actions people took, regardless of whether they wanted to evacuate, stay and defend or give

their home the best chance of survival without them being there.

"It is interesting to note that the people that are planning to stay and defend throughout have actually done quite a lot of the evacuation actions," Dr Dunlop says.

As well as being useful to researchers, there is also a practitioner's version of the preparedness measure that Dr Dunlop hopes can help fire authorities to assess how ready a homeowner is for a fire.

He says the best thing homeowners can do to prepare for a [bushfire](#) is to decide what they intend to do and commit to that decision.

"I think one of the worst things people can do is change their minds at the last minute or have different people in the house with different [plans]," he says.

More information: "Preparing ... for what? Developing multi-dimensional measures of community wildfire preparedness for researchers, practitioners and households." *International Journal of Wildland Fire* 23(6) 887-896 [DOI: 10.1071/WF13141](https://doi.org/10.1071/WF13141)

Are you bushfire ready? Click here to get your "Prepare. Act. Survive." guide for the next bushfire season: areyouready.wa.gov.au/

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