

Expert calls for 'fire-line' to future-proof against bushfire disaster

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Credit: University of South Australia

As fires continue to burn across Australia, damage estimates are now in the billions. More than 8.4 million hectares have been burnt, almost 2000 homes have been destroyed, and 26 people have lost their lives.

Such immense devastation means policymakers are under pressure to identify strategies that will future-proof communities before they start rebuilding beyond the 2020 bushfires.

UniSA sustainability expert, Dr. Sukhbir Sandhu says Australia should consider the establishment of a 'fire-line'—a [bushfire](#) demarcation line—to identify [high-risk areas](#) not recommended human habitation.

In the same vein as Goyder's Line of rainfall (created in South Australia 1865 to map areas

liable to drought and therefore unsuitable for planting crops), Dr. Sandhu says a fire-line would help people clearly recognise areas that are suitable, or not suitable, for living.

"The frequency and intensity of bushfires in Australia have changed dramatically over the past decade—our fire season is longer, the fires are more brutal, and the fallout is extensive," Dr. Sandhu says. "Accordingly, Australia's responses to the fires must change too.

"As people look to rebuild their homes, schools and communities, we need to be asking the question—is it really safe to do so in these areas?"

"The current bushfires have destroyed the livelihoods of far too many people to be remedied by standard recovery and rebuilding strategies. And, as fires continue to burn into residential areas, governments must consider something more ground-breaking in recovery.

"It's time for policymakers to take a strong stand where it is safe for communities to rebuild, and a fire demarcation line could help achieve this."

Dr. Sandhu says that policymakers have the basic tools to start such an initiative which, in conjunction with CFS aerial footage, [satellite imagery](#), and well-developed insurance company models (that not only identify areas susceptible to bushfires, but [coastal flooding](#) as a result of rising sea levels) would provide clear information for a new fire-line.

She says that areas adjacent to fire-lines should also be built to compulsory bushfire-resilient construction guidelines.

"We have the technology to create homes with bushfire resistant materials, and to enable houses with certain structural properties to serve as fire bunkers. But to date, there are no clear policies that support or promote these technologies for use in

vulnerable areas," Dr. Sandhu says.

"This is not about quick fixes; we need long-term, sustainable strategies to address the undeniable effects of climate change."

Provided by University of South Australia

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