

# Warrandyte residents told to use fire bunkers only as 'a last resort'

By Bridget Fitzgerald

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**Dick Davies in his accredited fire bunker on his North Warrandyte property. Photo: Scott McNaughton**

Warrandyte residents uncertain of their ability to evacuate during a bushfire have been told to consider backyard bunkers only as a last resort.

The Warrandyte Community Association held a community meeting, Bunkers or Bunkum?, on September 19 to discuss the potentially dangerous reliance on self-built bunkers.

The meeting attracted more than 170 people and also emphasised the importance of preparing an evacuation plan.

Justin Leonard, CSIRO research leader for bushfire urban design, was a guest speaker. He presented an analysis of bushfire fatalities from the Bushfire Co-operative Research Centre's December 2012 national Life and House Loss Database, which collates information from 1901 to 2011.

Of the 825 civilian and firefighter deaths that have occurred over that time, 506 were in Victoria.

The worst year on record for bushfire fatalities in Victoria was 2009, when 173 died in Victoria's Black Saturday fires.

Mr Leonard said it was important to reflect on historical evidence and learn from the way people have died in previous bushfires to weigh up how safe it is to seek refuge in bunkers or to "stay and protect".

The Bushfire CRC's data showed that nationally 19 per cent of those who died (36 people) were killed seeking refuge in the bathroom, while 1 per cent died in bunkers.

Mr Leonard said that on Black Saturday there were two fatalities inside self-built bunkers.

Six more people were killed in cellars and workshops in or around the home, which had been considered "safe fire-protection areas" by the residents.

There were also three people killed on the way to bunkers less than 10 metres from their homes.

Mr Leonard said bunkers were only for "certain people in certain circumstances".

He said the safest option was to create an evacuation plan that allowed for varying and unexpected circumstances so that a bunker was only a last resort.

Warrandyte Community Association president Dick Davies said the group hosted the bunkers forum due to a large amount of community interest.

Mr Davies said many people wanted the security of having a bunker as there is only a single-lane road in and out of Warrandyte.

"One tree down or a car down you'd be stuffed," he said.

Mr Davies and his wife have an accredited bunker in their backyard, but he said an evacuation plan should always be the first port of call for people in fire-prone areas.

"We've said right from the start, bunkers are not plan A, they are plan B, C or D," he said.