

Evaporative cooling systems and fire risk

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“Aircon safety warning

Every winter we're told about the dangers of heaters causing fires, but what we don't hear about are air-conditioners, which pose as much threat.

When air-conditioners are first turned on at the start of summer, following safety procedures is very important, and could save you from losing your home.

In the town of Bendigo, in three separate incidents, fires erupted and quickly took hold. All three fires occurred within weeks and according to investigators, all were triggered by the same appliance - an air-conditioner.

According to Alan Hewson, Country Fire Authority operations manager in Bendigo "Something as small as an air conditioner can destroy a whole house."

The chief culprits are rooftop evaporative cooling systems, and Hewson says that "within the air-conditioners they have large filter pads, so there is material there to burn."

Not all states keep records of fires sparked by air conditioners but those that exist show there were 43 in Victoria last year; 86 in New South Wales; and 30 in South Australia. Authorities in WA have confirmed that almost half of the 72 homes destroyed in last year's devastating Perth Hills blaze were ignited by embers being sucked into evaporative air coolers - even though the fire front was 400 metres away.

Director of Energy Safe Victoria Paul Fearon warns the main triggers are faulty components, a power outage or an aging unit.

"Across Australia there would be well over 100 fires like this over summer," Fearon said.

According to John Carpenter from JKC Air Conditioning Services "if the evaporative cooler is used by a commercial business like a kitchen, they should be serviced monthly and by law, the Australian Standard calls for that."

Carpenter recommends a yearly service for homes."

"To service an evaporative cooler it is about \$180," he said."

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