



Claire and Josh Lewis and their two girls at their Blue Mountains home, which has a "flame zone" fire rating. Photo: Wollter Peeters

## The features that will fire-proof your home

BY TIM BARLASS

**B**lue Mountains residents Josh and Claire Lewis have said to neighbours in their cul-de-sac that if there's a bushfire and they can't get out then come round to their place.

Their property has been built to the highest fire resistance standard called "flame zone", which has a better chance of protecting occupants than any other house nearby.

Their home is surrounded by national park to the south and west and is at the top of a ridge. Fire accelerates as it goes uphill.

A report prepared before they built said that, in a worst-case scenario, they might experience 100-metre flames.

Mrs Lewis said the flame zone building standard added about 20 per cent to the cost of building, but made her feel more at ease should a fire be heading their way. They family also have a fire plan. "The plan is for Josh to stay and defend the house and for myself, the

### What it would cost you

Approximate component costs varies due to BAL (bushfire attack level) required.

1. Glazing: Up to \$20,000
  2. Screening over windows, fibreglass or stainless steel: \$2000-\$3000
  3. Guttering/gutter guards: \$2000-\$3000
  4. Shuttering/over BAL 40 windows: About \$20,000 (separate BAL flame zone shutters can cost much more)
  5. Firefighting pump: \$2000
  6. Higher BAL rating water tank requirements: \$10,000
  7. Roof components: \$50,000-60,000
  8. Misc: \$5000 (smaller items at BAL 40 to BAL flame zone in non-combustible materials)
- SOURCE: Holotono Homes

kids, 7 and 4, and the dog [Diesel] to leave," Mrs Lewis said.

"Josh feels OK about that. We have put all this money into building this house. It seems right for him to be there if anything, God forbid, were to happen.

"We have always said to neighbours, 'Come to our house, it's the safest to be in if you can't leave.'"

Joe Mercieca, of Blue Eco Homes, which built the property, was a victim of the 2013 bushfires. His own house, built to the "very high risk" standard called BAL 40, was damaged but survived.

He doesn't want people to consider a flame zone home as a fire bunker.

"If there's a catastrophic fire the brigades and officials will tell you to leave," he said. "If, for some reason, you don't have time or you can't leave you could retreat back to the house as a last resort. "If you have got three houses and one of them has been built to a bush-

fire attack level and the other two aren't, and nobody could get out, I would say 'yes stay, but only as a last resort'."

Blue Mountains City Council spokeswoman Adrienne Murphy said that of 197 homes destroyed in 2013, 59 per cent had been rebuilt. Some 26 applications among 108 DAs that have been approved were from new residents to the area.

The figures were released before a conference on building in bushfire-prone areas takes place in the mountains this month.

The public expo in Springwood on September 19, organised by Blue Mountains Economic Enterprise, showcases leading technology, products and professional services necessary to build in a bushfire zone.

Architect Ian Weir will tell residents about the "self-aware, bushfire-resilient house" of the future where sensors, robotics and automation will help protect property with minimum human intervention.

### Cut the risk to your family: RFS

People in bushfire areas should prepare for the upcoming fire season by removing combustibles from around the home and making sure they have a fire plan, the Rural Fire Service advises.

Speaking on Get Ready Weekend, Rob Rogers, deputy commissioner of the RFS said: "We are concerned about the season because the Bureau of Meteorology has said we are in an El Nino event now. "It is more likely that we will get warmer and drier summer periods."

Waterbombing Hercules aircraft are already available and the DC10 comes on line based at Richmond on October 1, he said. "Inevitably we will have some problem fires somewhere where we will use the aircraft and we need to see how effective they are."

myfireplan.com.au

## Iraqi secretly sent to Christmas Island by Border Force before trial

BY CHRIS VEDELAGO, NINO BUCCI

Australian Border Force officials have secretly transported an Iraqi man to the Christmas Island detention centre despite a Melbourne magistrate granting him bail while he awaits trial on drugs charges.

The man, who has lived in Australia on a humanitarian visa since 1998, was reporting to police as part of his bail conditions when he was detained by officers from Australia's new paramilitary immigration agency. His family and lawyer were not told he had been taken to the offshore camp.

The move has prompted concern by Australia's top human rights official, Gillian Triggs, and other legal experts that the Abbott government's

policy could be circumventing due process and the right to a fair trial.

The *Sun-Herald* understands it may be the first time the government has used new immigration powers to detain a non-citizen on Christmas Island while they are awaiting trial.

Immigration and law enforcement authorities have refused to explain why the man was taken to the island shortly before he was due to appear at multiple court hearings in Melbourne. The former Shiite Iraqi refugee, who has a lengthy criminal record in Australia and extensive connections

in Melbourne's underworld, was on bail and could face a committal hearing over his alleged involvement in a

\$6 million heroin and ecstasy importation ring.

The 31-year-old was taken into custody after federal police called in

### The man was reporting to police as part of his bail conditions.

Australian Border Force officials. The Melbourne magistrate hearing his case rejected a bid by the AFP to have his bail revoked.

The man's defence solicitor had successfully argued he posed no risk of offending and should be released from remand so he could care for his wife and young child.

The family of the man was reportedly distraught after he failed to return because the man had been subject to underworld threats. A close relative of the man was gunned down in an execution-style murder earlier this year.

Immigration and Border Protection Minister Peter Dutton was given the power in December to unilaterally deport suspected and convicted criminals following sweeping changes to the Migration Act. Mr

Dutton and the Australian Border Force have used the powers to detain 366 people in the past eight months.

A Department of Immigration and Border Protection spokeswoman declined to comment on how many detainees suspected or convicted of criminal activity were being held on Christmas Island.

Australian Human Rights Commission president Gillian Triggs declined to comment on the man's case but said the commission had "significant concerns".

Australian Lawyers Alliance spokesman Greg Barris said there was no legitimate reason why a detainee could not be housed on the mainland.