

Vinyl Council of Australia
MEDIA RELEASE
7 MAY 2009

Vinyl house beats the odds

A two year old house constructed with vinyl weatherboard, vinyl windows, fascia boards, vinyl fencing and made with wood-plastic composite (WPC) decking at the front and back, survived the Black Saturday fires which devastated Marysville, Victoria on 9 February 2009.

Sitting on a cleared, sloping block, the house was left virtually unscathed while many neighbouring properties were lost.

Local builder Mr Rowan Steele, of Ro-N-Co Construction, and builder of the house, spent considerable time researching building materials for fire performance, low maintenance and energy efficiency.

He has been meticulous in experimenting with and selecting the materials he now builds with and was particularly impressed with the performance of the vinyl products and how they withstood the extreme conditions of the Black Saturday fires.

Rowan has made a submission to the Royal Commission into the Victorian bushfires, and has invited the Commissioners to visit the house.

Rowan believes a fire-ball passed across the block along the right-hand side of the undefended house closest to the vegetation, dissolving several layers of paint on the timber posts of the rear deck. The ModWood WPC decking at the front and back remained undamaged with only minor scorch marks from embers and a door mat which burned briefly before being extinguished by a neighbour.

The vinyl weatherboards and window frames escaped any significant damage and protected the house from ember attack to the interior.

Not one to cut corners, Rowan intentionally constructed the house a respectable distance from vegetation and chose fire-retardant materials, including vinyl. He incorporated several energy efficiency principles such as good insulation and keeping the house airtight using double-glazed windows.

"A lot of my research was based on the 2003 Canberra bushfires," Rowan said.

"Vinyl's fast to put up and the upkeep is easy. It's also great in helping to insulate and maintain the heat both inside and out. The added bonus, of course, is you don't have to paint it."

He also favours ModWood WPC products made from recycled wood and plastic because of their low, ongoing maintenance as a decking material.

Rowan is currently working on a series of residential projects in the area. He is keen to use more ModWood, vinyl windows and potentially a relatively new polymer wall construction product, Dincel, in the reconstruction at Marysville but stresses he's diverse in his approach and will build using different materials.

As a consequence of the tragic fires in Victoria, Standards Australia recently fast-tracked a revision to the national standard for construction in bushfire prone areas. AS 3959-2009 is aimed at vigorously improving the assessment of bushfire risk and construction of new houses. It assesses properties on a scale of one to six according to their level of bushfire risk.

Certain vinyl products are allowed for construction within the new Standard, including steel-reinforced vinyl windows up to specified radiant heat risk levels.

A combination of factors ultimately saved the vinyl weatherboard house. Good planning prior to construction, distance from trees, vinyl weatherboards and double-glazed window frames with no air gaps, vinyl handrails, vinyl eaves sheeting and the consistent use of fire retardant materials such as vinyl products both inside and out.

Rowan says he will continue to work enthusiastically with appropriate materials while he works to rebuild in Marysville and will do everything he can to encourage safer, better prepared sites with durable, easy to use materials.

Interim Standard designated as AS 3959(Int)-2009 (Victoria) asserts the following:

- Steel reinforced PVC windows are allowed up to Bushfire Attack Level (BAL) - 29
- Vent pipes made from PVC are permitted up to BAL 19
- PVC is allowed in decking up to BAL 12.5
- PVC siding permitted to BAL 19 for walls 400 mm or more from the ground (but not below 400mm)
- No requirements specified for downpipes
- uPVC gutters allowed up to BAL-29
- Where any material, element of construction or system satisfies the test criteria of AS 1530.8.1, for any Bushfire Attack Level (BAL—12.5 to BAL—FZ) it shall satisfy the requirements of that Bushfire Attack Level





Picture Captions: Rowan intentionally constructed the house a respectable distance from vegetation and chose fire-retardant materials, including vinyl. He incorporated several energy efficiency principles such as good insulation and keeping the house airtight using double-glazed windows.

The Vinyl Council of Australia is working to advance the sustainability of the vinyl, or PVC, industry in Australia. Its members are drawn across the supply chain of the vinyl industry.

For further information contact:

Public and Environmental Affairs Manager, Neva Law on 03 9368 4857 and 0405 772 700