

Ash Wednesday 1983

South Australia and Victoria experienced a hot and dry summer in 1983. Small fires broke out across the two states. The bushfires spread to the New South Wales and Victorian borders on 1 February 1983. Fires continued to break out and flare across South Australia and Victoria. By 16 February, the bushfires had caused devastation to lives, forest and buildings. The date of 16 February was then declared as 'Ash Wednesday'. By the early morning on 16 February there were 104 fires already burning in Victoria, most controlled and contained. In South Australia major fires were burning by noon in the Adelaide Hills and around Mount Gambier. The Victorian fires formed several complexes: The Western District near Warnnambool, The East Trentham - Macedon Ranges, The Otways, The Upper Beaconsfield - Cockatoo and The Warburton complexes. The Ash Wednesday fires caused the burning of more than 520,000 hectares; destruction of more than 3700 buildings; destruction of 2400 homes and the loss of 75 lives, the estimated insured cost was \$1489 million for Victoria and \$307 million for South Australia (2011 estimated normalised cost).

Want to find out more about this event? Go to the [Disaster Information](#) page.

Looking for research? A list is available, using the search term Ash Wednesday, on the [Research](#) page.

Other resources are also available to library members by searching the [Australian Emergency Management Library](#) catalogue including the following books and journal articles.

Books

Mundie E 1983, Cockatoo Ash Wednesday 1983: the people's story, Hyland House, Melbourne.

Gibbons, D & Paul, M 1990, Community development after the Macedon and Mt. Macedon bushfires on Ash Wednesday - 16 February 1983, Broadmeadows TAFE, Broadmeadows.

O'Conner P & B 1993, Out of the ashes: the Ash Wednesday bushfires in the south east of SA, 16th February, 1983, Mt Gambier, SA.

Australian Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) 1983, Preliminary report on the Ash Wednesday fires - 16 February 1983, BOM, Melbourne.

Victorian Country Fire Authority (CFA) 1983, Report on Ash Wednesday, CFA, Melbourne.

Journal articles

Bell, A 1985, 'How bushfires set houses alight: lessons from Ash Wednesday', *Ecos*, no. 43, pp. 3-7.

Johns, L 1984, 'Lessons for the future : Ash Wednesday 1983', Volunteer, vol. 22, pp. 22-24.

McFarlane, A 1987, 'Firefighters and the psychological effects of the Ash Wednesday Bushfires: implications for disaster planners and emergency services', The Macedon Digest, vol. 2, no. 1, p. 2.

Pinches, A 1983, 'Ash Wednesday: reviews, reports and recriminations', The Australian Municipal Journal, November, pp. 147-149.



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The remains of a house at Mount Macedon following the Ash Wednesday bushfires.