

NSW bushfires: dozens of homes destroyed, Sydney skies darkened

Updated Fri 18 Oct 2013, 5:56am AEDT

Hundreds of homes may have been lost after New South Wales suffered one of its worst bushfire days in recent memory on Thursday.

Intense fires tore across south-eastern Australia in ferocious wind conditions and high temperatures, darkening Sydney's skies with smoke and ash.

Thousands of people have been evacuated as emergency warnings are in place for bushfires burning out of control near Lithgow and Springwood in the Blue Mountains, and Heatherbrae near Newcastle.

For the latest on the bushfire threat, follow ABC Emergency and the Rural Fire Service

Total fire bans were in place for areas including Greater Sydney, as well as the Central Ranges, North Coast and North Western districts.

Temperatures hit the mid-30s and wind gusts reached 90kph throughout the day.

"We are unclear yet as to how many properties have been lost, but it's expected by the time we finish counting, it will be at least in the hundreds," New South Wales Premier Barry O'Farrell said.

"It will take some days to see the end of these fires and I suspect if we get through that without the loss of life, we should thank God for miracles."

At one point 95 fires were being tackled across the state, with dozens out of control.