

## More homes threatened as hopes for rain recede

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Fires were threatening more homes in Blue Mountains villages on Saturday as western Sydney faced blisteringly hot weather forecasts and residents from devastated towns came to terms with the loss of more than 200 houses.

As blazes raged for a third day, fires near Springwood and the Bells Line of Road were set to emergency status early on Saturday, but later downgraded to watch and act. Houses came under threat in Bell, Dargan, Berambing and Bilpin.

Rural Fire Service deputy commissioner Rob Rogers told residents in the villages on Saturday afternoon that it was too late to leave their properties and they should take shelter as the firefront approached.

"This fire is by no means contained. It's got absolutely kilometres and kilometres of fire front," he said.

The greater Sydney region was rated a very high fire danger and the Rural Fire Service has imposed a total fire ban until further notice.

Nepean health service said Springwood Hospital was evacuated on Saturday "in advance of predicted worsening weather conditions over the coming days", with 26 patients moved to Nepean Hospital until at least Wednesday.

Earlier forecasts of widespread rain as early as Monday have been pushed back to later in the week.

Temperatures are expected to remain in the 30s in Sydney's west, with predictions of 35 degrees at Penrith on Sunday, 38 degrees on Monday and 36 degrees on Tuesday.

"I expect continued difficult and challenging days as we move into the new week. I expect much of NSW to see high fire dangers on a number of days," RFS commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons said.