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A Qualitative Report on:

**CFA COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

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## Background

The Country Fire Authority (CFA), in common with all Australian fire services, support an approach to bushfire risk management that is based on a model of 'shared responsibility' with the community.

That is, people who live in areas prone to bushfires are encouraged to recognise the risk, prepare their properties, and have a plan about what they will do if a fire occurs.

Central to this is the '**Prepare, stay and defend or leave early**' message.

This advice is contained in policy documents and has featured in various publications, programmes, and media campaigns aimed at those who may be affected by bushfires.

The '**Prepare, stay and defend or leave early**' message was generally considered to be highly effective in the minimisation of property loss and personal injury and death for a number of years. However, the recent Black Saturday tragedy in Victoria has opened debate around the appropriateness and relevance of this advice and the extent to which it is clearly and adequately communicated.

The CFA has recognised that whether or not the 'Prepare, stay and defend or leave early' policy is maintained, the organisation needs to develop a comprehensive communications strategy that engages the community at a number of levels.

The strategy needs to...

- Educate people about the extent to which bushfires represent a risk
- Inform people about how to prepare their properties to minimise risk
- Inform and educate about the preparation and implementation of an appropriate plan
- Ensure adequate communication of timely and accurate information during incidents, so as to promote safe and appropriate response.

### *Make a Bushfire Plan*

**All people who live in a high bushfire risk area need to develop a Bushfire Survival Plan. A Bushfire Survival Plan is a well thought out plan about how you will prepare and respond to a fire in your area.**

A plan should include a set of actions to address the risk and will require you to make a series of decisions about what you will do on a high fire risk day, or should a fire threaten your home. People should develop a written plan that identifies all the actions they will undertake on high fire risk days. You are more likely to remember to do some of the things you have identified as being important if you write them down. To develop your plan you need to consider all the issues about your level of risk, actions you will undertake to prepare yourself and your home for bushfire and what you will do on high fire risk days.

**Even if your decision is to leave the area before fire threatens, you still need a well thought out plan.**

Everyone's circumstances are different so it is important that you develop a plan that suits your household. Make sure all members of your household know what the plan is and know what roles and responsibilities they have. And as circumstances change, it is important that you review your Bushfire Survival Plan before each summer fire season. The first decision must be what trigger you will use to implement your plan. Ask yourself "**On which days should I be ready to implement my plan?**"

People should implement their plan each Total Fire Ban Day or on other high fire risk days when temperatures rise, the humidity is low and there are strong northerly winds. You should decide well before summer whether you intend to leave your home on high fire risk days or stay and defend your property should a fire threaten your area.

**Your first decision is leave or stay – will you:**

- Stay and actively defend, or
- Leave early

**If your decision is to leave early, your plan needs to include:**

- When you will leave
- Where you will go
- How you will get there
- What you will take with you
- What you will do with your pets
- Who you have told about your plan

**If your decision is to stay and defend your property, your plan needs to include:**

- Where you and other family members will be
- What you will do if your children are at school when the fire starts
- Who will look after your pets
- What you will do if you have elderly relatives or young children living with you
- How you will protect your property
- How you will protect yourself
- How you will know what is going on during the fire
- What you will do to patrol your property after the fire front has passed through

A well thought out bushfire plan should address all these issues. Make sure everyone in the household knows the plan and what their roles are. And remember: stick to your plan!

## The Research Objectives

To guide the development of this strategy research is required to test/retest the attitudes and behaviours of people in bushfire prone areas.

The overall aim of the study was to explore...

**Test the beliefs, attitudes and behaviours, and intentions of people in bushfire prone areas.**



The specific objectives as we understand them were...

<p><b>Beliefs</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ To what extent are people aware of the bushfire threat in their area?</li> <li>▪ What do they believe is meant by 'Prepare, stay and defend or leave early'?</li> <li>▪ To what extent are they aware that they need to take action to protect themselves and their property?</li> <li>▪ To what extent do they understand the options available to them in the event of a bushfire threat?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Attitudes</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What are their views on the availability and quality of information on preparing for and reacting to bushfire threats?</li> <li>▪ What are their opinions on current policy settings, in particular the 'Prepare, stay and defend or leave early' policy?</li> <li>▪ What do they see as the strengths/weaknesses of this policy?</li> <li>▪ What do they see as the role of the CFA?</li> <li>▪ What are their views on the organisation overall and in their local area?</li> <li>▪ What are their views on the community fire siren?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Behaviour and Intentions</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How proactive have they been in seeking advice on preparing their property for bushfires?</li> <li>▪ How proactive have they been on seeking advice on planning for a bushfire incident?</li> <li>▪ What actions have they taken to protect their property? What do they intend to do?</li> <li>▪ To what extent have they developed a plan to react to a bushfire incident in their area?</li> <li>▪ Does this include a 'stay' plan and a 'go' plan or just one?</li> <li>▪ What is the plan and how well is it understood by all household members?</li> </ul>

## Research Methodology

A series of 13 focus group discussions was conducted with the general community and 5 with past and present CFA members in Cockatoo, Mount Macedon, Cann River, Beech Forest and Woodside between 18th August 2009 and 26th August 2009. The structure of the sessions was as follows...

Location		Group Structure	Total
Urban Interface Area	Cockatoo	▪ Community members	2 groups
		▪ Past and present CFA volunteers	1 group
	Mount Macedon	▪ Community members	2 groups
Heavily Vegetated Area	Beech Forest	▪ Community members	2 groups
		▪ Past and present CFA volunteers	1 group
	Cann River	▪ Community members	2 groups
Rural and Farming Area	Woodside	▪ Community members	2 groups
		▪ Past and present CFA volunteers	1 group
	Merricks North	▪ Community members	1 group
<b>TOTAL:</b>			<b>14 groups</b>



## The Detailed Findings

### **Constraint**

Focus group discussions evolve creative ideas and generate hypotheses. They are not intended to be a precise and definitive index of what happens in the marketplace. This report should be interpreted with that constraint in mind.

Throughout the report, verbatim comments drawn from the research have been included to reflect the way research participants talked about the particular issues.

## Attitudes to Living in the Bush

The residents we spoke to across the state invariably enjoy the natural beauty and more relaxed and community-focussed way of life they attribute to living in the bush.

Differences of area can influence people's preparedness and perception of the bush fire season and can have a practical and emotional effect on residents.

### Vegetation

Some of the locations we visited were in densely vegetated bushland. This inevitably has an impact upon perceptions and attitudes around bushfires. Whilst we chose to focus away from the issues of back-burning, perhaps not surprisingly, this topic was heavily referenced and the subject in some places was one of great importance.

*"We live near 400km of bush. If we had a big fire, no matter how prepared, we would be incinerated"*

In areas of dense vegetation, there was a feeling of fear, frustration and utter helplessness at their situation. Concerns around the amount of fuel in their area lead to expectations and inevitability of extreme bushfires. This feeling was compounded by issues of access for those living in an area where there was only one road in/out of their home to safer areas.

Because of this, there was a feeling that they were on their own. Particularly in the more isolated regions (Cann River, Beech Forest), they can feel like they have been left to deal with the bushfire season alone, making them distrustful of authorities in the city.

*"We had a discussion and it was made clear to us that we will get fair warning on the radio, but if you decide to stay, you are on your own"*

The vegetation is also a concern for those living on heavily tree lined roads. Roads represent concern because of the potential for one road in or out of town to be blocked; and because there is a commonly held view that no-one seems to clear them of fuel build up.

*"Our road out to the Princes Highway along with the Princes Highway - left to Cann River or right to Orbost - is a death-trap because of the fuel load along all sides and for kilometres behind"*

### Tourism

Tourism was an issue which was spontaneously raised in most regions. The target is variously concerned about, irritated by and keen to protect tourist for their importance to the local economy. Many feel that tourists need to be specifically targeted for bushfire education and warning.

*"We didn't have a lot of tourists on the road in the past, now there are loads of them. They generate a lot of money in Victoria. On hot days they are still on the roads, they have no idea that half the district has left and the rest are at home defending"*

## Topography

The roads, mountains, forests all have an impact on making a bushfire survival plan – whether staying or leaving.

- Those leaving have to assess the relative safety of the roads, the route and the distance to get to their destination.
- Densely forested or mountainous areas impact upon leaving plans, with people having to take into account the lay of the land.
- Residents living in very remote areas with only one or two neighbouring properties expect to have to save themselves – they are more likely to have been told 'you are on your own'.

**In many areas and for many people there may be a preference to leave early but they feel they need to prepare to “stay and defend” because of restrictions in being able to leave if a bushfire has already started.**



## Community Profile

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### Overview

Rarely have we come across a topic which is as heated, politicised and paradoxical as to how to prepare and act for bushfire, and who is responsible.

It is a murky and inherently problematic area.

Whilst many in the community (not all) accept the notion of personal responsibility in preparing for bushfires, it is a qualified agreement at best.

... Yes we all need to be responsible, but the government/local council/CFA/the "greenies" and "city folk" need to play their part too. We sensed amongst many that perceived failures of any or all of these various entities to (first) get their house in order is a significant distraction and fuels the widespread inertia which was common throughout the groups.

*"The Greenies. They should shut up"*

*"You can't do this... you don't do that. We live here. They just make the laws"*

*"The government needs to allocate councils in these areas money for CFA"*

*"I'm horrified to think that if there's a fire in Macedon that we have to get out down Macedon Road. It's full of dead wood... that road has to be cleared. Whose role is that? The council, DSE or VicRoads? And CFA should be pushing for that to happen."*

### A Typology Bushfire Preparedness

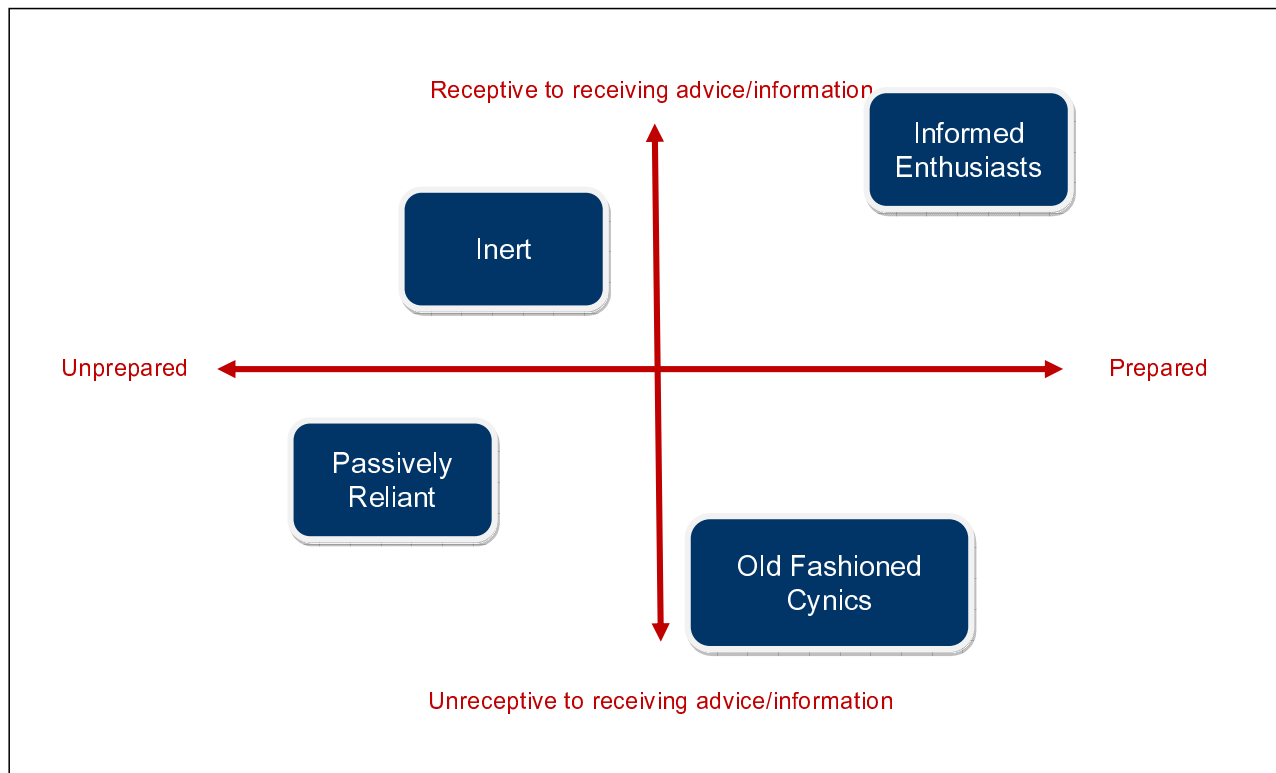
There is no one consistent set of attitudes or behaviours. Nor are there consistencies in different regions.

Instead what we saw were differing attitudes and behaviours of individuals which can be roughly broken down to four typologies. We saw some of each type, in each area where the research was conducted. In order of their apparent level of preparation, the four typologies were...

- Informed Enthusiasts
- Old-Fashioned Cynics
- Inert
- Passively Reliant

We believe that further qualitative research should be conducted to further understand and measure these types, however the following is provided as a hypothesis in the interim.

The types can be compared both in terms of their level of preparedness and their receptiveness to receiving information as follows:



**Informed Enthusiasts...** are a minority. They are the fireguard members, the organisers of phone trees, committed and engaged and pragmatically grounded.

"When we first moved up into the area, when we were weighing up to move to Woodend or not, we weighed up the potential danger of bushfire... And immediately moved in. We took advantage of anything the CFA was offering in terms of community meetings. We attended everything. We were there early... we stayed late to ask questions"

"My life is my responsibility. My wife's life and the two girls we share responsibility for each other. I shouldn't be expecting and I don't expect anyone - CFA, ambulance personnel, doctors, police... anyone to take the responsibility for my life"

They tend to have some fire experience, and having survived this have realised the need for being better prepared in the future. They tend to be moderate in their views, neither pro nor anti-green, non political, supportive of the CFA, but also open to receiving advice from others.

"I've lost a house before in a bushfire and I don't think people realise how difficult it is to lose everything you own. I think we need a phone tree to keep in touch with all our neighbours and make sure everyone knows if a fire is coming"

"The plan of leaving isn't just leaving... you've got to pack up. Now that my son's eleven, he's well-educated in what is considered important in our house... what we're going to take with us"

"I assisted with tanker and crew in Warrandyte 1963. Dealt with several fires on my own property in Gembrook 1967/1969. Passed through Cockatoo as the fire approached the town on Ash Wednesday and proceeded to Gembrook to defend my property from ember attack which diverted after the wind change at around 10pm."

"I feel as though given the stress of the situation I need something to look at so my plan is very detailed"

They included men and women of differing ages, but tended to be older.

Their preparations were extensive. These included being well equipped with required fire fighting and survival paraphernalia, but also in terms of the breadth and depth of their practical and emotional preparedness.

"[What do you define as a bushfire plan?] Being prepared in advance to provide a plan and action list of preparations and resources needed to asses the developing situation and to deal with responses. Obviously this needs to be actively followed during the event."

Interestingly, their plan nowadays was often to go. And they appear the most likely to do so safely and without panic. They have items packed ahead of the season, lists prepared, and various avenues for escape. They are invariably in touch their neighbours and belong to fire trees.

"My fire plan is absolutely imprinted in my head... I feel that it will happen automatically."

They tend to listen to ABC radio. Some are closely connected to CFA but interestingly, many were not.

They are the most likely to have written, up to date, well rehearsed plan – some of these can be seen in the appendix.

**Old Fashioned Cynics...** are also present in many areas, but we saw a great many in the Cann River area. They were almost always men and are characterised by a dogged determination to stay and defend. They defer to no one, believing primarily in their own skill and judgement, as something of a birth right for having been farmers/loggers/country people for many generations. Most have some experience with bush fires, or burning off, and tend to the see the latter as a good point of reference for being emotionally prepared. They are highly parochial and suspicious. It makes them an extremely difficult target audience to reach via communications.

"People in the country have given up with bureaucracy... you just have to do the best you can"

"Our mentality as country people is a lot better than I think down in the city where it seems to be 'let the government take care of it'. We take care of our own"

They are invariably well equipped in terms of fire-fighting equipment – having pumps, generators, hoses, and seemingly the practical nous to know how to use them and how to respond to a garden-variety bushfire. Some have or are planning to build bunkers.

"I think everyone is over-reacting because Black Saturday was such a big disaster. I look to the people who have experienced a bushfire because in the old days they could look at the smoke and know where it was going and if they had to react or not. 99% of the time the fire won't be like the one at Kinglake"

But they have the potential to bring themselves and others in their care or influence into peril. They can have partners and children who would prefer to leave, but who we suspect defer to the judgement of this head-of-household figure. It is perhaps the women of these households who should be specifically targeted with practical information on how they and their children can and should safely depart early even if their partner chooses to stay.

Some will be connected with CFA; some CFA volunteers we would put in this category.

"My husband used to be part of the CFA, but not since they made the training restrictions stricter"

They will often listen to the ABC and believe in the importance of warnings. They may attend CFA meetings, but we suspect that this is to socialise or to find an outlet for venting their many frustrations relating to greenies, the build up of fuel, people in the city making decisions, tourists.... all of whom in the mind of these cynics are those that really need educating... rather than to learn.

"We're not the problem, the tourists are."

They tend not have written plans and reject the suggestion of the importance of doing so. They will invariably see education as being for others, not for them.

They are unlikely to be regular users of websites or indeed computers. Some do not have a mobile phone.

**The Inert...** seem to be the majority in most areas. They are generally under prepared but receptive to doing more. They welcome the role of the CFA to provide this information. Most have a plan of sorts but it is not written down, only vaguely discussed and lacking in real detail which is likely to help them in the face of imminent fire danger.

"I've got very rough plans. You do it for years and years then become blasé... now you don't"

"We chose to live here... we have to be responsible"

"We rarely talk to each other about our survival plans. It might get brought up in passing"

For most their intention is to leave. But they are often unsure of how or when to do so safely. They are also likely to be unprepared for how long it will take them to leave. Some have taken the step of packing a box of belongings before a fire, but many have not. Some seem to think that there will be time to pack a trailer full of items and drive out with this in tow!

"You need some sort of idea about what you're going to do"

"Oh for goodness sake... if you leave early enough you'll be quite safe"

*"It's not written down, but you know what you are going to do"*

They can intend to go to community/CFA meetings, and certainly some have done so from time to time, but they have failed to follow this up with the sort of action and preparedness we saw from the Informed Enthusiasts.

**Passively Reliant...** are those who are the most naive and in many ways the most likely to face peril. They tend not to have a plan of any kind. When pushed it is their intention to leave, but they fail to grasp the importance or meaning of leaving early. Most do not have any real bushfire experience, but surprisingly some do. It would seem that having literally run for their lives in the past has not even been enough to shake them into action to prepare a plan. They have a laissez-faire approach; being either fatalistic or simply believing that someone will or should tell them when to leave and where to go.

They are characterised by a belief that somebody else should do something to protect them.

*"I'm new... maybe I haven't spoken to enough people, but the town as a whole doesn't seem to have a plan... I would like to see a town action plan"*

*"There is a lack of leadership"*

*"There's no structure for people in their own house to tell them what to do"*

They have little real understanding for the impracticality for the authorities to do this, much to the frustration of the others in the group who invariably point this out!

*"My plan is to leave, but this year I'm not sure I'll actually do that. I'll need definite knowledge from the CFA"*

Most do not listen to the ABC, except in days of extreme local threat. Certainly they do not attend community meetings or form phone trees. They may not even read the newspapers or watch commercial news.

It is difficult to ascertain if their inhibitors to receiving and acting on advice are based on fear, naivety or laziness. We suspect that they will be most receptive to information received passively and in brief, dot-pointed, action-focussed manner.

## Perceptions of the CFA

Our research revealed that across the board, people make the distinction between two very different CFAs - the over-arching, bureaucratic organisation in Melbourne; and the local volunteers or “guys on the ground”. Attitudes vary strongly and consistently between these two entities, and it would seem that the CFA brand is fragmenting into the “local/volunteer” and “head office/paid”.

*“They have two levels... the local structure and the bureaucracy who do their best.”*

### The CFA – Local Level

When asked about the CFA, most people automatically think about the local level, the volunteers – many of whom are their family, friends and neighbours – who give up their time to protect their community. Across all locations, perceptions of “this” CFA are overwhelmingly positive. The CFA volunteers are highly respected for their bravery and generosity with their time, and are seen as a vital part of regional and rural communities.

*“We’d be lost without them.”*

*“You know that when the siren goes off, no matter what time it is, the CFA will be there. I don’t know if you can bag anybody who volunteers and puts their life on the line.”*

*“I love the CFA. I have memories of the Mount Macedon bushfires, where we were held up in Woodend. And the CFA were fantastic.”*

*“They’re brave fellows... men and women going out there.”*

*“They saved lives and they did more than fight fires... and at the end of the day they don’t have to. They get nothing back for it.”*

Much of the good will associated with the CFA at the local level comes from the fact that they are everyday people who are not involved with bureaucracy – rather than seeing them as part of government organisation, people see them as “country folk” who are in touch with the issues affecting bushfire-prone communities and who are committed to helping their fellow community members. The volunteers see themselves as embedded in their community, and feel much more connected to the people around them than the CFA as an organisation.

*“They’re all country folk, and country folk stick together. There is a mentality that city people don’t have.”*

*“The place where the CFA stops and the community starts is an invisible line - the two are totally interconnected. To separate those things is like asking me to be one or the other - we are the community up here, and [volunteering] is my way of making my community a better place.”*

*“I think when you move from the community into the bureaucracy, that’s when it starts to change.”*

Amongst community members, there is very little negative feeling towards the CFA at the local level. The majority of respondents were hesitant to “blame” CFA volunteers for any failings to emerge from Black Saturday because they do not have high expectations of them, given that they operate on a voluntary basis. Some, however, believe that CFA volunteers are reluctant to assist with fires that are outside their jurisdiction, and this was viewed negatively. One or two respondents reported concern that “fire bugs” tend to be attracted to the CFA.

Generally, respondents felt that CFA volunteers should receive greater support from their organisation. The CFA at the local level was seen to be “stuffed up” by the perceived bureaucracy at the top – particularly with regards to a lack of funding.

*“They save lives and they do more than fight fires, and at the end of the day, they don’t have to. They get nothing back for it.”*

*“What I don’t understand is that the CFA put their lives on the line fighting fires for us, and they also have to raise the money to do so. Why aren’t the Government funding them?”*

*“We need to know that the right facilities and resources are provided for our local CFA so we know they can do their job properly.”*

*“Laver’s Hill has been trying to get some funding. They finally got it, but it was a big process. You are one of the most fire prone areas in the state and you have to battle with the hierarchy to get funding.”*

This respect for volunteers is a double-edged sword. Many feel reluctant to overburden them with the role of onerous, local-level non-paid community education work. This was certainly the response of many to the suggestion of having the CFA provide individual advice on the defendability of individual properties.

*“They are expected to do too much. The ideal situation would be for the CFA to have a paid member in each town in the country.”*

## **The CFA – Organisation**

Perceptions of the CFA as an organisation based in Melbourne were inherently different to perceptions of CFA volunteers. The CFA was seen as a faceless, bureaucratic entity that is out of touch with the issues that country people face.

*“Stuffed up by the bureaucracy up top.”*

The discrepancy between perceptions of the CFA at organisational and local levels can be partially attributed to the fact that many have higher expectations of the CFA organisation because it is a paid Government body, while the local-level departments are run on a voluntary basis.

There is some sense that there were flaws in the way that the CFA at an organisational level operated on Black Saturday. For those who want to lay blame for certain things that happened on Black Saturday, it is the CFA as an organisation – rather than the volunteers – who are held responsible.

"Everybody respects the volunteers, but the paid ones - people aren't sure and don't think highly of them."

"You go to the headquarters and it's a multi-million dollar palace."

"From what I heard, on Black Saturday they could have done better. The guys on the ground did the best they could; the problem was with the administration and communication."

## The Volunteers

The volunteers were very positive about being CFA members. Most of them had joined the CFA because they had family members who were volunteers – It is 'just what you do' - and they saw a great deal of personal benefit in being volunteers themselves. These benefits include...

- Meeting people and making lifelong friends
- Comradeship and teamwork
- Contributing to the community
- Learning leadership and communication skills
- Getting your truck license
- Learning first aid
- Personal development

"It's a great organisation, I have made lifelong friends. The benefits are overwhelming compared to the negatives."

The negative aspects of being a CFA volunteer were seen to include...

- Heavy workload (especially if you are in a leadership role)
- Missing out on Christmas holidays due to CFA commitments
- Working nights
- Having to take time off paid work occasionally

Volunteers are for the most part extremely proud of their organisation. However, many say that they would like to receive some more support and back up from the CFA head office, in terms of resources and funding. They feel like they often have to stretch their time and resources to meet the demands of the community.

"It would be good to see what the CFA could do with proper back-up. Up until this point we've had to be so multi-dimensional to keep up with the expectations that are placed on one organisation that is made up of volunteers."



A number of volunteers report awareness that people have some negativity towards the CFA at an organisational level; however they feel very removed from the CFA head office. They perceive that people see them as separate from the bureaucracy, and they feel that people's attitudes towards the CFA as an organisation do not reflect on to them. They are happy for this to occur as they want to be seen as ordinary community members.

*"Whatever comes out of the Royal Commission will never change what the volunteers do. It doesn't matter what happens at the top, we'll still go out and do what we do."*

*"We're so far removed from the upper levels of bureaucracy that whatever people think about them doesn't really change their opinions about us."*

## Roles and Responsibilities

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### The CFA

Amongst community members, there are not a lot a lot of expectations of CFA members because they are volunteers. There was little consistency or clarity around the perceived role and priorities of the CFA.

They were generally thought to be expected to...

- Attend local car accidents
- Responded to house fires
- Attend training
- Raise money for equipment

*"Their role is to help with various emergencies and put out fires."*

*"The CFA is her to protect private assets."*

*"The CFA is responsible for recovery... the preparation and prevention is up to the individual."*

There was inconsistency in terms of their perceived role and responsibility when it comes to managing, education and responding to bushfires. This role was variously described as...

- Putting out bushfires
- Controlling/containing some fires and simply watching others burn
- Warning people when they're in a fire's path
- Burning off to prevent bushfires
- Educating the community

*"House fires are the CFA's biggest role... asset protection."*

*"With bushfires, the CFA's biggest role is response."*

*"the CFA need to be an information source about the weather and conditions, so we know when to enact our fire plans."*

*"Do they do the actual burning off or is that the DSE?"*

*"The CFA shouldn't be involved in prevention and fuel burning... they have enough to do and they don't have the skills."*

Some people feel that CFA volunteers are “experts” in knowledge about bushfires, and a few currently approach local volunteers for information to assist them in preparing their houses for bushfire season and making bushfire survival plans.

“If you’re a newcomer in the area and you’re not sure about the fire regulations, you can call them out and they’ll come over and explain the best way to prepare your property for fire and all that” (Mount Macedon)

However, many were reluctant to place more responsibility on the CFA volunteers – they don’t want to burden them with the role of “bushfire expert”, and crucially the volunteers themselves resist expanding their role. Many see the volunteers as going above and beyond their duty as it is, and therefore there was very little support for the idea of making volunteers experts in the area of bushfire prevention and preparedness. It was felt that this should come from higher up in the CFA chain, and should be a paid role.

Many CFA volunteers expressed frustration with the legislative restrictions placed on their responsibilities and actions in preventing and preparing for bush fires. They talked about the “good old days” when there wasn’t so much red tape and procedure – when they could conduct their own burn offs to reduce the risk of a potential fire, and when they could use these burn offs, the “real fire”, as a training opportunity for new members. Many felt frustrated that they are now restricted from any role in preparing for bush fires and bush fire season, and also felt that they could not give advice to their neighbours for fear of “getting sued” if this advice is wrong.

Most community members (*Passively Reliants* excepted) and volunteers agree that it is not the volunteers’ job to look after people, but that people need to look after themselves. But clearly, most members of the community need greater education and support. This needs to be provided in a more strategic and targeted fashion, as the current system of relying on meetings and distributing leaflets is failing to engage with most.

Volunteers commonly expressed frustration because they feel that they put time and money into community education meetings, which are poorly attended. They feel that people need to be more proactive in educating themselves, and that the community can only be truly informed and educated when the CFA volunteers and community members work together.

## The Role of Other Organisations

The groups saw the roles of other organisations as follows...

<b>POLICE</b>	<b>LOCAL COUNCIL</b>	<b>DSE</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Work with the CFA and the Red Cross during and after a bushfire emergency</li> <li>▪ Co-ordinate and communicate road blocks</li> <li>▪ Send text messages about gale or fire warnings (which people take seriously)</li> <li>▪ Local police know who in the area might need extra help if there is a fire</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ There is the perception that local Councils need to conduct more controlled burn offs and reprimand people who do not clear their yards and gutters in preparation for bush fire season</li> <li>▪ Should be responsible for clearing roads of debris</li> <li>▪ Should mediate between the CFA, DSE and the "Greenies"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Workers are paid, not volunteers</li> <li>▪ A lot of confusion around what their role is, but significant negativity towards them in some areas</li> <li>▪ Conduct controlled burn offs to reduce fuel loads</li> </ul>
		

People feel that there are problems regarding the perceived overlap of the DSE's and CFA's roles, and they feel that this overlap results in problems with communication and doing what needs to be done. CFA volunteers and some community members were unsure about the distinction between the roles of these two organisations – there was the general perception that fire in the bush or in a national park is addressed by the DSE, whereas issues in towns are handled by the CFA, however there was a great deal of confusion surrounding this. Many expressed frustration with the DSE, believing that they only "help out" with fighting fires that are in their jurisdiction, and attempt to pull rank over the CFA whenever they are in a joint situation.

Volunteers were at times angered by the fact that DSE can choose when and where they conduct burn offs and clear vegetation and bush, without any consultation with the CFA, while CFA members can never make these decisions. Some felt that the DSE are highly resistant to conducting burn offs, and regarded the DSE as being on-side with the "Greenies."

Clearly, there is a need for a clearer distinction in roles and distribution of responsibilities between the CFA, DSE and local council in preparing for and responding to bushfires.

"The DSE come in from Melbourne, running the whole show and stuffing it up. They have never put out a major bushfire in the last 10 years."

"The problem for the CFA here is that unless there is a fire in town they have no control. If the fire comes in the bush it is under DSE's control."

## The Role of the Community

In relation to bush fires, there was broad consensus that the role of "community members" is to maintain their own property (i.e., clear gutters and vegetation).

Some *Informed Enthusiasts* and *Old-Fashioned Cynics* see it as being their responsibility to also...

- Educate themselves about the risks of bushfires and develop informed bushfire survival plans
- Keep up to date with information relevant to their local area
- Put fires out if they are small enough
- Own and maintain their own fire-protection equipment (e.g., pumps and tanks)

However, many *Passively reliant* are less convinced of their personal responsibility in these areas.

## Preparation, Preparedness, Response, Recovery

As a mechanism for understanding people's perceptions around the roles and responsibilities of the CFA in relation to other organisations and the community, we used the model of "Prevention, Preparedness, Response, Recovery". Let's now take a close look at the community's understanding of these roles and the CFA's capacity to fulfil them.

For many, the idea of "Prevention, Preparedness, Response, Recovery" was seen as an extension of the CFA's role.

There was unanimous agreement as to the importance of the tasks involved in each of these stages, but for many it raised questions as to the CFA's capacity, ability, and resourcing to do all of these jobs properly.

"You need to have these processes months before summer... it doesn't have to be the CFA, but someone needs to do it."

"Black Saturday was inevitable, but it might not have been as bad if we had better prevention, less fuel."

"Have they got the resources to do all the prevention and preparedness? That's what I'm thinking."

"I can see a role with the CFA that if all else fails, they have a role of protection... because then at least if you can get everyone into one spot the CFA can look after them."

## Prevention

This is seen as preventing a fire from starting, and was mainly associated with burning off, cutting down trees and clearing debris.

Most felt that the community, the council and DSE need to be involved in prevention, albeit overall it was felt that the DSE have greater capacity, resources and the political jurisdiction to achieve this most consistently.

The CFA volunteers feel that they are heavily restricted in the area of prevention – they feel “hamstrung by red tape”, and are frustrated that they can’t burn off or cut down trees that are clearly a fire hazard, due to legislation and the protestation from the “greenies”.

*“You could in the past. Not now. You get reamed by greenies.”*

In some towns, CFA members go to people’s houses and tell them what they could to make it safer. However, as earlier reported, many community members would not think to call the local CFA to come out to their house, assuming that they wouldn’t have time.

*“The CFA shouldn't be involved in prevention and fuel burning, they have enough to do and they don't have the skills, they aren't professionals.”*

*“We need to have these processes months before summer. It doesn't have to be the CFA, but someone needs to do it.”*

The community’s role in prevention is seen to involve...

- Clearing trees around property
- Checking that there are no fire hazards around house and property

## Preparedness

Preparedness is seen to involve preparing house for bushfire season and making plans, and there was some contention around whose responsibility this is. Most members of the community we spoke to notionally accept that this should be “the community’s” or the individual’s role, but equally they feel that someone needs to educate them and facilitate the process. They accept that this could be done by the CFA but that it requires more spending and a groundswell of public awareness to achieve this.

In most areas we heard that CFA volunteers are running their own meetings and information sessions and facilitating street fire guard meetings. They offer advice where they can, however this varies from place to place. In addition, they do their own training to ensure that they are prepared to respond to bushfires.

Some members of the community ask for help already, but most don’t think this should be a formal responsibility of CFA volunteers (not due to a lack of expertise but because of an unwillingness to burden the volunteers). However many do like the idea of a paid person from the CFA being available to check their house and provide advice on their bushfire survival plan.

Preparedness was seen to primarily relate to community members getting themselves ready, and is not currently seen as the CFA's role. For community members, preparedness means...

- Do everything possible to make your property safe
- Preparation in relation to your fire plan (e.g., if you are going to leave, ensure that you have protective clothing, valuables and adequate supplies in a designated area; check that sprinklers and water tanks are working properly)

Some would like to see allocated safe areas to be part of the collective "preparedness."

## Response

This is seen to be the current role of the CFA. They respond to bushfires by fighting them where they can. However many do not necessarily expect them to be able to take on large-scale out-of-control bushfires, given that they are ordinary community members. Others perhaps naively think it is the CFA's role to "put out" the fire however large it is. Some suggest that CFA volunteers should respond to bushfires by protecting community members who have gathered in a "Safer Place".

A major aspect of "response" is the provision of adequate warning messages. Community expectations around warning messages are extensive and have been reported separately (Sweeney Research study number 18942).

## Recovery

For most people, recovery means "getting the community back on its feet" following a bushfire. It is seen to be the responsibility of community members and people from outside the town, the CFA, the Government, and organisations such as the Red Cross.

To some degree this is seen as the role of the CFA, in that they clear roads and make areas safe so that people can get back to their houses.

**Most accept that the CFA could grow their role to be more aligned with prevention and preparedness; however, most believe that there would need to be paid CFA employees involved in co-ordinating and executing this. There is also support for the idea of having paid regional representatives travel around to different communities in Victoria to give people personalised advice on prevention and preparation for bushfire season.**

*"The role that the CFA could develop, with some funding and support of course, would be to prepare the community, to inform them about how fires operate, how they accelerate and slow down, in what circumstances to stay or leave early... the threats, the dangers, the possibilities. The CFA could have a department that is dedicated to this, and they could do it in the off-season" (Mount Macedon)*

## Bushfire Survival Plans

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Understanding of what a plan is varies from person to person. Ultimately, it is a plan which gives residents the best chance at survival in bushfire season.

Description of the plans generally falls into 2 categories:

1. **Preparation and planning** – i.e. cleaning up gutters, removing debris from around the house, having items packed and ready to go, having the right equipment ready if the plan is to stay and defend
2. **Action** - either evacuate or activate a stay and defend plan

Incidentally, those who cite preparation and planning as part of their plan consequentially pair that with activating the plan (evacuation or stay and defend). This is more common amongst the Informed Enthusiasts segment.

For some, it's just a case of "getting out quickly", with no regard as to how this should be done. The "plan" is a last minute reaction to escape a bushfire scenario, and it is unlikely to be written down. After discussing this as part of a group, many conceded that their "plan" as such was lacking, and that they may leave too late, not know where they are going and are unprepared with supplies.

*"An emergency plan for when a fire is in the district."*

For *Informed Enthusiasts*, a plan is much more detailed and is written down. It includes maps of their house and evacuation routes, diagrams of equipment, ensuring relatives and friends are contacted, having the house and land prepared to reduce fire damage.

*"Prepared in advance to provide a plan and action list of preparations and resources needed to assess developing situations and deal with responses. Obviously this needs to be actively followed during the event."*



## Examples of Bushfire Survival Plans

Plans range from being thoroughly thought through, like this one...

**Example of Bushfire Survival Plan**

**Regular attention throughout fire season**

**Preparation: List of clothing required**

**List of those responsible for, including pets**

**House modifications**

**Maintenance Activities**

**Prevention - itemised list describing all areas to be looked at prior to bushfire season**

**Updated regularly**

**An indication of stage should be completed**

**ONGOING MAIN**

**WHAT TO DO**

**DEFENDING THE HOME**

**OUTSIDE**

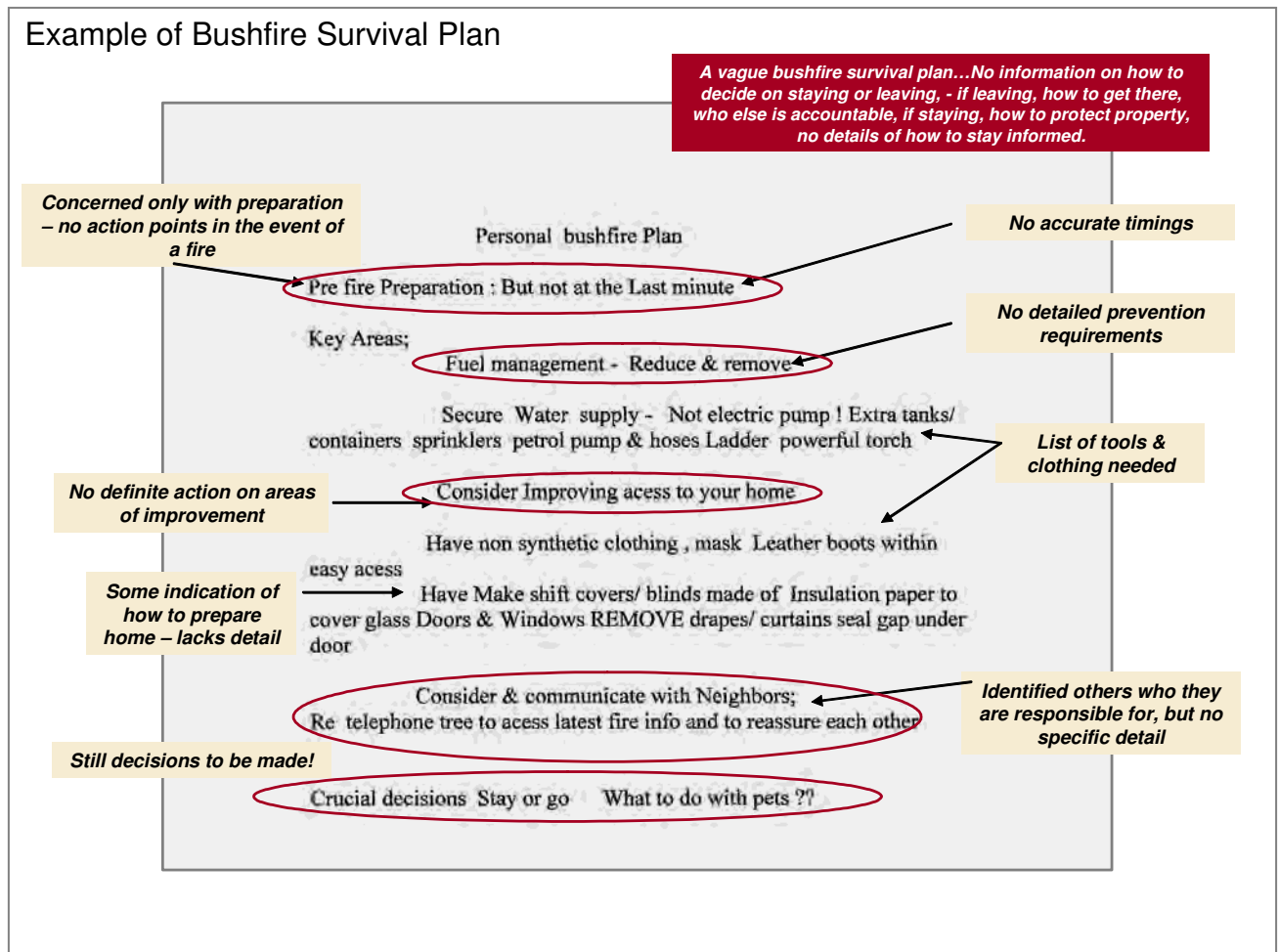
**INFORMATION**

**Telephone numbers & communications written down for reference**

**Response: Detailed list at each stage of a bush fire**

**A detailed example of a stay and defend bushfire survival plan. Considers who is involved in the plan, how to protect the property and person, information to ensure there is knowledge during the fire and what to do afterwards.**

To being vague and sketchy, like the one below...



More plans can be found in the appendix.

## Personal Responsibility

Whilst all respondents agree that they do have a personal responsibility, especially in situations that may affect other members of the community (such as ensuring a property is cleared of debris so not to impact on neighbours), there are varying degrees of personal responsibility...

- Responsible for **themselves**: especially singles and those who have been told 'you are on your own' – this is more common in very remote areas
- Responsible for their **families**: many choose to leave to protect their families – especially females. In some situations, there may be a plan for the man of the house to stay and defend, where the females will leave with the children
- Responsible for their **neighbours**: particularly in smaller communities and if there are elderly neighbours nearby
- Responsible for **tourists**: those running B&B's or guest houses feel a responsibility towards tourists who tend to have less knowledge of bushfires

This all impacts upon the level of planning required.

There are also some who feel some responsibility should lie with authorities (Shires, council, DSE) to provide 'safe places' or 'refuges'.

## The Difficulty of the Decision

In each group we found that whether or not people had a plan to stay or go was very often not a black and white issue. It was a decision made up of shades of grey.

Those with the clearest plans were those whose decision it was to leave early. But this is clearly not a simple plan to implement. There is a need to balance the desire for personal and family safety with the practicalities and responsibilities of day to day life.

*"I'm really embarrassed by this because I've been a seasoned fire ready person. It was a really hot, windy day. I fell asleep in my house. There was a fire and I ran around in circles... I wasn't packed for an evacuation at the time."*

## Leaving

We saw a strong philosophical commitment to the importance of allowing competent adults the right to choose to stay, however, the majority of respondents reported a view that the responsible thing to do was to leave early (especially females and families).

*"I would get dogs and get in car and go to Apollo Bay"*

*"My policy is to get out if I can"*

Whilst there were those very committed to staying and defending, overwhelmingly we sensed a general shift since Black Saturday towards leaving early. However, what is somewhat concerning is people's definition of 'early', with many still thinking that 1-2 hours pre-impact of fire is 'plenty' of time to implement their 'leave' plan.

Those who were inclined to leave early regarded it as the safest option for them and their family. Invariably these people also felt that it was also the safest option for most members of the community.

*"I think you should leave. Don't believe you should be there"*

The old CFA line "people protect houses, houses protect people" was often spontaneously raised and criticised as giving people a false sense of confidence in their ability to stay and defend.

Most say that it is simply not practical to leave town early (i.e. the night before) every Total Fire Ban day, because...

- They have jobs to go to
- Children have school to attend
- There is a cost in seeking accommodation elsewhere: either a financial cost if seeking accommodation in a hotel or the like or a personal cost if calling on the generosity of friends or family in the city or suburbs of Melbourne or other non-fire risk areas
- Pets need to be considered
- And because there is a level of emotional fatigue and complacency which comes from evacuating unnecessarily too often

For many, leave early still means "when they see fire" and this can reduce route options.

No matter how well prepared people seemed in implementing their leave plan, very few would actually practice, mainly because...

- It's just not practical. Many would have to round up dogs, chickens, horses, children – which proves difficult in a real evacuation – no less on a practice one.
- It's mentally draining. People don't want to have to do it when it's not necessary.

*"How do you practice, unless you are making your pumps go?"*

Further, only the very organised actually write down their plans. Others feel that they have thought about it tirelessly, and for that reason it is imprinted in their mind. There are also a number who do not have their plans written down anywhere, nor have thought about it to any extent.

Nevertheless, only one or two admitted to not discussing their plans with family or friends (or both) – although, some would wait until the day of evacuation to inform people of their intended location.

## Staying

Amongst those in our study who stated that their plan was to stay and defend we saw those who appeared to be extremely well prepared and those who were clearly overwhelmingly unprepared (whose approach to staying and defending was alarmingly laissez-faire). The 'stayers' in the groups were almost always men, and were more common in remote areas (Old Fashioned Cynics).

It was a decision which appeared to be based on a combination of rational and emotional factors...

- Primal urge to protect what is theirs
- The financial desire to save their property and possessions
- A belief that evacuation is too difficult because of where their home is located (eg on a mountain with only one road in/out that can be too easily blocked)
- Inability to take their animals with them in the case of an evacuation
- The financial/emotional/socio investment they have made in preparing their home for defence
- Machismo
- A lack of appreciation for how hard/hot/scary it will be to stay

Amongst these respondents there were those with a dogged determination to stay to the end, and those with a more pragmatic approach which allowed for evacuation if the conditions became too extreme.

## Ability to Make Own Plans

This varied greatly between respondents. Some felt they were more than equipped to be able to make their own plans, through...

- Living in a threatened area
- Working with bushfires
- Having a 'common sense' approach
- Being country people
- Learning through experience (either of themselves or through speaking to/reading about others who have lived through a bushfire)

**The fact that the majority of respondents failed to have a well thought out, written bushfire plan is proof of the fact that most people are unable to make an effective plan and/or are unconvinced of the need to do so.**

Those who felt that making a bushfire survival plan is beyond their capabilities indicated a general lack of knowledge...

- Not understanding what 'early' means
- Not understanding the consequences of a plan

*"I know it sounds silly, but my husband was going to go down the sewerage tank. When we heard how you lose all your oxygen, we changed the whole plan. You need to be aware of not only what is happening, but what could happen"*

- Not having thought through all the necessary steps in executing a plan – especially a "leave" plan
- Lack of understanding around the extremities of a bushfire

**What is needed is clarity in the form of simple, consistent advice which focuses on the actions of the individual.**

### Current Preparation Information

Currently, residents are getting information for their "plans" from a range of sources, including...

- Neighbours – those who have more experience and knowledge
- Local newspapers – especially in the height of summer. The local press is also a useful source of bushfire experiences – and how others have succeeded or failed in survival attempts.
- CFA members – informally
- CFA – organised briefings and information sessions. However, many admit to not turning up to any of these sessions
- Books – The Australia Bushfire Safety Guide
- Brochures and leaflets

However, many feel that they could simply rely only on their own 'common sense'.

## Preparing for Bushfire Season

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We have identified different degrees to which people prepare themselves for bushfire season...

1. Clearing: such as clearing debris around house, clearing gutters, kill weeds, cutting grass, getting rid of anything flammable.
2. Testing & organising tools: gathering torches, transistor radios, gloves, goggles, woollen and leather clothing, checking hoses, motors, pumps. Having tools ready and to hand.
3. Gathering valuables: having a box or bag ready to go, filled with insurance papers, some clothing, sentimental items (such as photos). Ready at front door or packed into a car throughout fire season.
4. Communication: with schools, neighbours, family – so plans are understood by everyone in the event of a fire.
5. Revision: of established fire plans. Adapted if necessary.
6. Lists – reminders of what to do in the heat of the moment.

Some update their knowledge on an annual basis; or more generally when their circumstances change – when their children grow older or leave home, and when they themselves become too old or frail. Others admit to revising their information more regularly (some say daily) during the summer months, and there are still a number of people who never update their information on bushfire planning.

## The Fire is Here

### Psychological Preparedness

It is difficult to gauge in a research environment how psychologically prepared different people are for a bushfire situation. Most felt that it would be an extremely anxious time, but it was those who had actually experienced bushfire who were the most aware of how frightening it can be.

*"If you have never experienced fires, it is one of the most frightening things on earth. You have a healthy respect for it. If you have had some sort of exposure to it, expectation of what it will look like, sound like, smell like - you can cope"*

Interestingly, despite acknowledging that it would be difficult and frightening, most who had not experienced bushfire failed to translate its impact on their ability to make sound judgements and enact their "plan."

The previously identified segments indicate how people may react differently in a bushfire situation...

- **Informed Enthusiasts:** most likely to remain relatively calm in a bushfire situation as will automatically go to their plan, allowing them to methodically work through each stage on step at a time. This helps them to keep control of the situation.

*"I fell as though given the stress of the situation I need something to look at, so my plan is very detailed"*

- **Old Fashioned Cynics:** most likely to believe they know what to expect and to feel prepared. They think that they will go into 'practical mode', to try and fight the fire, but their resistance to thinking through the emotional impact leaves us a little less sure of their psychological preparedness.

*"I'm staying regardless because I'm building my own bunker. I'm very confident because I have been in bushfires before and I know what they are like. If people aren't experienced and they don't know how the fire works and they try to run - they're dead. You're dead before the fire gets to you"*

- **Passively Reliant:** Lack of knowledge means they are unsure of what to expect, and therefore are largely unprepared mentally to be able to cope in a bushfire situation. We feel that they are the most likely to panic at the last minute and hit the roads putting themselves and others in danger.

*"For goodness sake, it can't be that bad if you leave early enough."*

- **Inert:** Tend not to be emotionally prepared, however are less likely to "wait" to be rescued or informed than *Passively Reliants*.

*"You don't know if you are going to panic or be able to do something"*



## Knowing When to Act

We have already identified that there are a number of variables at play when activating a bushfire survival plan, all of which impact upon decisions to stay or go, and consequentially, can impact upon the time it takes to implement a plan.

There are differing perceptions of when the bushfire survival plan should be activated. Whilst some would look at the weather warnings and try to leave a day before a predicted fire, most feel that this is impractical. Some say they would look for evidence of a local fire to signal their time to move.

Most are heavy reliant on warnings to inform their decision and ask for more detailed warnings beyond the current "total fire ban day", "high alert" and the like.

*Informed Enthusiasts* are the most likely to have specific, tangible triggers.

"I have a 20km radius. If there is a fire within 20km of my home, I will leave. It used to be 5km, but since Black Saturday I don't think that gives me enough time to get my animals and myself out."

## Safer places

There is a typical notion amongst residents that there should be an option of a safer place.

Having a formal, protected "safer place" or refuge would essentially be deemed as a solution for...

- Those who couldn't get out in time
- Those who change their mind when the fire hits and feel unable to defend
- Areas whereby the roads are impassable

The safer place was identified in some areas as...

- Football ovals/sports ground
- Concrete bunkers
- School or community centre
- Toilet block

However, CFA volunteers express concern that having this 'backup' option is problematic because...

- It allows the community the expectation that they will be protected making them complacent
- There are very few 'safe places' in bush land areas
- Fire is unpredictable, therefore there is no guarantee of a safer place
- The community can come to rely on it too much

- There isn't enough funding to implement this/or the funding could be better spent on clearing/back-burning

In addition to formal "safer places" or refuges we believe that there is a need for education on the types of informal safer places that people might use when all other avenues of escape are lost. The following places were suggested as those that people had "planned" to use should they find themselves in a Kinglake-like doomsday scenario...

- A fire place
- A sewerage tank
- A brick garage
- A wombat hole
- A dam/reservoir
- A pool
- In/under a water tank
- A potato field
- Burnt-out grass area

## Communications

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### The Slogans

#### Stay or Go

The current stay or go slogan is, not surprisingly, well known. The slogan is taken quite literally as giving the community two choices.

CFA volunteers expand on the meaning...

*"It's the CFA policy for residents in the fire season. Stay and defend, and by that we mean a properly prepared and defensible property. If you are leaving, we say go early in the day"*

Positively, its simple and easy to remember and everyone, on the surface, knows what it means.

However, there is a general consensus that in fact, the stay or go slogan is too simplistic, with many not taking the meaning as the CFA intend it.

*"It's an absurdly simplistic statement, someone is just trying to absolve themselves of responsibility by saying here are your options. I feel the statement as it is, is too simple"*

Rather, many felt that it enforces responsibility back on to people who lack the information and knowledge needed to make a decision. Some clearly do not realise...

- There is still the need to prepare the property, even if you are leaving
- There needs to be a plan of where they should go
- There needs to be an awareness of the surrounding area and the time it will take to get to a safer area
- That staying means having to defend the property and the extent to which this should be done

*"I don't know what it fully means. I don't know if we were of the opinion that we wanted to stay, I wouldn't know exactly what you have to do to the house to make it as prepared as possible in case a bushfire came."*

The main shortcoming of this slogan is that many felt that the decision to stay or go is entirely circumstantial, and not so black and white so as to warrant this simplistic slogan.

#### Prepare/Plan, Act, Survive

Literally this was taken to mean that if you prepare and plan for bushfire season, and act on your plan, you will survive. CFA volunteers suggest this is too broad a statement for the general public to use. The community members themselves, whilst acknowledging that it is clunky as a slogan, feel that it does indeed draw attention to the more holistic and realistic aspects of bushfire preparedness.

**Prepare:** is seen as a positive communication message. It suggests 'prepare' is the practical preparations for getting property ready for bushfire season; specifically clearing, cleaning, and having the necessary equipment.

**Plan:** whilst many of the groups preferred 'prepare' over plan as it encouraged a more practical element, some suggest the word 'plan' is broader and encourages people to have a bushfire survival plan as a way of getting through the bushfire season. It is, on balance, an additional necessary step worthy of flagging.

**Act:** Needs to be placed into context, the "action" needs to be determined by the plan stage.

"Act? What does that mean? When you are preparing, you are acting anyway. You are going to be preparing your house against fire risks."

**Survive:** for some gives some perspective as to the extremity of the situation. It is a valid reminder of the ultimate priority.

"It is suggesting that you will die if you don't."

### Together We Survive

Some *Informed Enthusiasts* and even some *Inerts* see merit in this idea. It suggests the need to start a conversation about bushfires and to work collectively, however for most it is too vague and lacking in meaning.

'Together' also suggests that there will be help available – in some areas they have already been told that this is not the case. It is considered by some to be a meaningless, feel good slogan.

### Other Suggestions

When asked to improve on the existing statement, respondents came up with...

- Prepare, Act – Stay or Go & Survive
- Prepare to stay or prepare to go
- Stay and defend or leave early
- **S**urvive by **A**cting or **P**reparing, or you're a SAP

## Current Communications Materials

There is low awareness of the current CFA communication materials – many people had never seen the materials and had no idea how to go about getting them. Some were very enthusiastic and wanted to know how they could get this information, however on closer inspection felt that it fell short.

One of the biggest problems with the current information materials is that they are too text-heavy, which overwhelms people and many felt that they would be unlikely to get around to reading it, or they easily “switch off” when they do read it. Even people who had the best of intentions to read the material admitted they may put it aside and never returning to it.

### 1. Living in the Bush: bushfire survival plan workbook

Of all the materials, this was the clearest example of an information overload. The amount of information contained in this brochure overwhelms people as it is seen to demand a significant amount of time and effort to read and process it. While the information contained in the brochure was seen to be important, most people simply would not read it and it is therefore not serving its purpose.

People who plan to stay and defend are more likely to read this as they feel they need a detailed amount of information to guide their decision-making and preparation, however those who plan to leave feel that there is nothing in it that is relevant to them.

*“It would be a waste of paper for people who don’t want to read it. Send a smaller brochure to let people know what’s available.”*

*“It’s too much to take in. I would prefer just a one sheet saying the details you need to know, a checklist, and then have further information that you can keep and just refer to later if you need to. This is a little bit long.”*

*“I think if you’re planning to leave, like I am, I would flick through and see the relevant bits. If I’m planning to protect my house, i’m reading the whole thing.”*

*“You would file it and never look at it again.”*

### 2. Living in the Bush CD-ROM and RACV CD-ROM

Most had never seen this CD-ROM.

Many people felt that a CD or DVD is a good way of conveying information, as it involves less effort than reading, is more interactive, and may result in better absorption and recall of information. It is also more visual and has the potential to convey the “reality” of a bushfire. However some were unsure about whether they would actually use it – many thought that there was a high chance that they would never get around to watching it. Instead, they suggested using the content of the CD-ROM and turning it into a series of short commercials on television.

*“I got one and never looked at it. It would go in the pile with everything else.”*

*“A DVD would be good, as books may just be thrown out.”*

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"A DVD would be the best way of getting information out to people. Combined with some kind of lift-out, that would be good."

To maximise this medium, we feel that there is a need to incorporate more interactive elements to facilitate the development of a real, personalised, thorough plan with the various elements reported on page.

### **3. Spiral brochure**

Many responded favourably to this communication piece. Whilst it was thought to be a little light on to facilitate the development of a plan, the style, the fact that it looked "flickable" and was visually appealing made it a much more popular piece than the CFA equivalents.

Many suggested that it had the potential to be a handy reference or reminder – something that should have a magnet attached so that it is kept on the fridge where it is far more likely to be seen than on the coffee table or pile of paperwork.

### **4. Leaflets – Living in the Bush and Radiant Heat**

These were appealing as they are succinct and therefore easy to pick up and read quickly.

This said, some were concerned that the size of the leaflets may lead people to take the issue of bushfire self-education less seriously, thinking that all they need to know is contained inside. However, if the leaflets were incorporated into a larger education campaign, there is a good chance that the information contained in this format would be read and absorbed.

### **5. Red Cross Redi-Plan**

Few people had seen the Red-Cross Redi-Plan, however when they read through it in the groups they felt that it gave them a good idea of what they would need to pack when evacuating. It is a good example of the type of information (both in format and the content) that is needed to engage the *Passively Reliant* and *Inert*.

## Going Forward - Priorities for Communications

Our key recommendation for communications is ensure that more people feel informed and empowered to act. The current model - which seems to rely heavily on community meetings and cumbersome booklets - appears to be preaching to the converted. There is a need for a fresh approach to cut through the clutter of related but at-the-end-of-the-day irrelevant, political-socio-environmental noise with a clear, direct, action-oriented education campaign.

The priorities as we see it are...

### 1. Convince people that they need to be informed and have a plan

One of the most important things in CFA communication is getting people to understand that they need to take responsibility in educating themselves about bushfire risk, and that this needs to be a serious priority.

Currently, most *Passively Reliants* and the *Inerts* are not proactive in educating themselves and they operate under the assumption that if it is something they really need to know, someone else will tell them.

People also need to be convinced that they need to have bushfire survival plans that are informed and comprehensive, and that they can feasibly put into practice should they need to.

This is something that needs serious attention from the CFA, because no matter how effective communication materials are, if people don't see the importance of informing themselves then the message will never get through and behaviour won't change. The CFA needs to send the message that it is irresponsible and unacceptable for any person living in a fire-prone area not to educate themselves about bushfires and have carefully-thought out bushfire survival plan.

### 2. Be mindful of the reality that one plan is invariably not enough

The continuation of the Stay or Go message in many ways gives people an excuse not to have a plan because they think that they can't have a which will fit with all their needs and circumstances.

- Some feel that they require a different plan dependent on the conditions/extremity of the day/fire
- Others should be convinced of the need to have a **Stay Plan** for one or two members of the household and a **Leave Plan** for others
- Many are of the view that in the light of Black Saturday, they should have a plan to leave but also a plan B or C if they are unable to do so

A failure of the CFA to acknowledge the fact that "Stay or Go" is overly simplistic tends to result in many *Inert* and *Passively Reliants* (who we sense are the majority) having no plan at all and simply leaving it to the day to decide.

### 3. Tell them what they need to know and do

In communicating with people, the CFA can't assume any baseline in the level of knowledge that people have around what they need to know, think about and do to be properly prepared for bushfire risk. Information needs to be direct and explicit – there needs to be more of a focus on telling people the **actions** that **they** need to do:

#### a. Preparing:

- i. **How to make a plan...** Provide information on how to make a plan and the different factors that must be considered when making a plan. Make it easier for them.
- ii. **A checklist of what to pack and when to pack it...** a description of the essential items people should pack if they plan to leave (e.g., important documents, valuables, change of clothes), to be organised before bushfire season.
- iii. **Defendability of houses...** Information around what makes a house defendable or not defendable. This will help people decide whether to stay and defend or leave early.
- iv. **Preparing their property...** Information on cleaning and clearing properties; and the checks to run on their property and equipment if they plan to stay.
- v. **Forming a phone tree...** Explanation of what a phone tree is, the benefits of forming a phone tree and how to go about doing so.
- vi. **What clothes to wear if fleeing or defending...** Details of the most appropriate clothing to wear in the event of a fire.
- vii. **Flagging local events...** Providing details of preparation-related events in different regions which can be followed up by those who wish to do so.
- viii. **Who to contact and how to do it...** Details on how to access additional information and contact details for people who can assist people further.

#### b. Leaving:

- i. **When to leave...** Information on the triggers or warning signals to look out for to help people know when to leave. This may need to vary for different fire days.
- ii. **Where to go...** Make people aware of the need to have a plan A, B and C in terms of where they can go when evacuating in a bushfire.
- iii. **Who to contact...** Information on who people should contact in a bushfire and when to contact them.
- iv. **What to consider for children...** Inform people that they must talk to children about their bushfire survival plan and co-ordinate their own plan with their school's plan.



- v. **What to consider for animals and pets...** If people plan to leave, whether they will take animals and pets and how they will co-ordinate this.
  - vi. **Checklist of things to take and do...** Provide checklists to go through at the time of the fire to ensure that they can take and do what they need to in an urgent situation.
  - vii. **How to get out...** Inform people about organising which route they will take to evacuate, the need to plan a back-up route, and what to do if trapped on the road or in their home. Make it easy for them to plan and record this.
- c. **Defending:**
- i. **What to expect...** A description about all the things that people need to expect and account for if they plan to stay and defend their home. Aim to increase their psychological preparedness for the situation and minimise the chance that they will try to evacuate when it is too late.
  - ii. **How to defend...** Detailed information on what equipment people need if they wish to defend their home and how to use this equipment should they need to.
  - iii. **What to do if needing to retreat...** The steps that people should take and where they should go if they can no longer defend their home, and how to recognise that they need to retreat.
- d. **Plan B:**
- i. **What to do if caught out...** Inform people that they must **always** have a plan B to refer to if things don't play out how they expect them to or if they are caught out in trying to execute their original plan. Provide advice on what to do in different scenarios.
  - ii. **Where to take shelter...** Provide information on designated "Safer Places" or on the sorts of areas in which it is best to take shelter or retreat in a bushfire.
  - iii. **How to survive...** Inform people of all the things they can do to protect the lives of the people around them and maximise that they survive the bushfire.

In addition, there may be a role for using targeted channels to reach the different typologies.

**Passively Reliants...** The ideal forum for communicating with this typology would be television/community announcement style campaigns. Any form of communication which places the onus on them to track down, read extensively or attend a meeting is likely to fail for this group. They are also likely to respond to simple check-lists and reminders which can be placed around the house/on their fridge and referred to once the danger becomes more apparent to them (or which may at least be read and acted on by other members of the household, such as older children).

**Informed Enthusiasts...** are well catered for by existing materials. Consideration could be given to using them in a sort of member-get-member capacity to assist others with their plans.

**Inerts...** require a groundswell of general community action. Respondents suggest things such as a Bushfire Preparation Day with widespread media promotion to focus attention on the need to prepare, and the tools with which to do so. They appear likely to read and act on information sent to them if it is clear, action-oriented and concise. Much of what we showed the groups, in particular the "Living in the Bush Survival Plan" is simply too cumbersome, too daunting and likely to be put aside where it will be invariably forgotten. Some *Inerts* say that they would like the opportunity to seek out further information, such as on websites, CD-ROMs and the like.

**Old-Fashioned cynics...** also seem to be well catered for with existing information, but could benefit from being convinced of the need for a more detailed plan, including a plan to leave under some circumstances, and particularly to be convinced of the importance of sending partners/children to leave well in advance of an actual fire threat.

We believe that any below-the-line communications will be greatly improved if it is supported with an integrated above the line approach – to raise awareness of the need and to remind of the importance and ease of acting now. We also recommend that in developing communications strategies for this significant group that thought be given to addressing their inertia. The "change your clocks, change the batteries on your smoke detector" campaign is a good reference point for linking action with specific points in time, lest they simply keep deferring the need to be prepared for another day.

Finally, the following comments illustrate reported desire for more simply, action-oriented information and practical help to aid their bush fire preparedness...

"A checklist - 'have you done xxx?'"

"Things like 'if you see the smoke it's too late, maybe more of that sort of information. Asking 'is your plan this? If so, how are you going to implement it?' If your plan is to stay, do you have xxx?'"

"Attached to the main information they should have a separate booklet about making a bushfire plan. If I have a book like that [bushfire survival plan workbook] I've got to have time to sit down and read it... but I could fill out my bushfire plan and stick it on the fridge, and that would be a lot more beneficial than a book."

"I would use brochures when putting together a fire plan. It would be good to have something with a checklist to make sure you haven't forgotten anything. Make the information clear so that you can look up specific points."

## Appendix: Bush Fire Plans

# Example of Bushfire Survival Plan

From Maccaison  
Warnings Group

Bushfire Plan

throughout year - maintenance of garden:  
pruning  
mowing  
weeding etc.

clear around house.

Last year, laid pavers around house, so there is nothing that can burn up against perimeter of house.

Summer - fire-risk times (before hand)

Each member of family to make a priority list of what to take if possible.

eg. passports  
important papers  
photos  
work related documents  
some clothing, shoes, toiletries

When media give warnings of potential risk, we pack these items into our cars, so it goes where we go. (Did this twice last summer - about a week each time).

Check with neighbours on their plans. (3 families)

Constant vigilance with media / CFA info, and  
ready to leave (or not come home) **TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR OURSELVES.**

# Example of Bushfire Survival Plan

## Bush Fire Plan

### Spring, weather getting warmer

- Clean out gutters
- Rake up leaves around house
- Locate hoses, hose attachments, nozzles
- Locate mops, buckets and nap sack
- Locate protective clothing for everyone:- overalls, boots, hat, glasses/goggles, mask
- Move firewood away from house
- Remove flammable objects from around house
- Rake/clear undergrowth to reduce volume of fuel
- Check sprinklers work properly
- Prune plants around house (when we get some)
- Minimise use of tank water to keep it reasonably full
- Fill fire pump with fresh petrol, give it a bit of a test run and check sprinklers

### The days before Total Fire Ban Days

- H Clean out gutters
- H Rake up leaves around house
- M Rake leaves from surrounding garden if necessary
- M Check big plastic drums at either end of the house
- L Locate hoses, hose attachments, nozzles
- L Locate mops, buckets and nap sack
- I Locate protective clothing for everyone:- overalls, boots, hat, glasses/goggles, mask

### Total Fire Ban days

- H Clean out gutters
- H Rake up leaves around house
- H All doors and windows closed
- H If not at home bring in door mats
- M Make sure sprinkler system is setup and ready to work
- L Fill nap sack spray
- L Locate protective clothing for everyone:- overalls, boots, hat, glasses/goggles, mask
- L Listen to radio for fires in area
- L Locate hoses, hose attachments, nozzles
- L Locate mops and buckets

C:\Data\Misc\Bush Fire Plan.doc

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30/12/2005

### Smoke is seen

- H Top up water tank level from mains
- H Bring in hoses, hose attachments, nozzles. Leave one in laundry and one inside courtyard door
- H Locate mops, buckets and nap sack
- H Keep all doors and windows closed
- H Put up ladder on north side off roof
- H Check sprinklers work properly run off mains pressure if possible
- H Fill nap sack spray
- H Locate protective clothing for everyone:- overalls, boots, hat, glasses/goggles, mask
- M Look for embers flying through air
- M Fill bath, laundry trough and kitchen sink with water
- M Pile towels in bathroom, laundry and kitchen bench
- M Bring in door mats
- M Fill drink bottles and have a drink
- M Listen to radio for details of where fires are, if they're close put on protective clothing
- M Put all dogs in house
- M Disengage garage door, close big door and unlock little door
- M Have a drink
- L Empty contents of large wheelle bin, locate in courtyard and fill with water
- L Move furniture and curtains away from windows
- L Take down smoke detectors, remove batteries or put in a cupboard
- L Turn gas off at meter

### The shower of embers

- H Turn on sprinklers
- H Put on protective clothing for everyone:- overalls, boots, hat, glasses/goggles, mask
- H Patrol outside looking for landing embers, put them out ASAP
- H Pay special attention to around windows
- H Keep an eye on clerestory area for landing embers
- M Be ready to retreat inside
- L Keep an eye out for approaching flames, if possible assign someone the task
- L Open gates
- L Have a drink
- L Take photo's

### The fire front arrives

- H Turn on all sprinklers
- H Make sure all humans and dogs are inside, tie up those that are stressed and getting in the way
- H Put all doors and windows closed
- H Put on protective clothing for everyone:- overalls, boots, hat, glasses/goggles, mask
- H Patrol inside house looking for flames or smoke, look out for windows breaking
- H Stay inside until safe to go outside
- H Stay inside until safe to go outside
- M Apologise to dog then throw into bath
- M Bring in ladder
- L If radiant heat from outside is too hot, or house has caught fire into laundry
- L Have a drink
- L Take photo's

C:\Data\Misc\Bush Fire Plan.doc

Page 2

### After the fire front passes

- H Put on protective clothing for everyone:- overalls, boots, hat, glasses/goggles, mask
- H Stay inside until ground is black and blazing bushes have died down
- H Put on nap sack spray or take mop and bucket
- H Keep eyelids lowered
- H Be careful opening door, be prepared to return to house
- H Go around perimeter of house, pay particular attention to window sills
- M Checkout roof and clerestory windows, get ladder if necessary
- M Inspect outside of house closely
- M Inspect inside of house carefully, have one person inside and one outside if possible
- L Leave dog inside
- L Have a drink
- L Check cars and out buildings
- L Patrol outside for hours after fire front has passed
- L Keep an eye out for spot fires on neighbouring properties
- L Take photo's

EQUIPMENT Need downpipe plugs, super soaker, breathing masks.

# Example of Bushfire Survival Plan

## FIRE PLAN

Reducing Trees and clearing around property

Burning off

Checking water storage regularly

Purchasing extra batteries for radios and torches

Learnt how to start and use fire pump

Maintaining fire pump by starting each week

All Business documents kept in Central place for ease of evacuation if necessary

Purchased a dog trailer to be able to evacuate dogs

Evacuation Kit packed with clothes, food, water etc and alternative cooking appliance

Evacuation kit for dogs packed with bowls, water and food

Fire protection clothes ie/cotton clothing, goggles and gloves at the ready

Woollen blankets available

Maintaining grass around house

Keep grass moist

Ensure cars have enough fuel

Keep mobile phones charged

Fill bath and buckets with water to have in the house

Established places to evacuate if needed

# Example of Bushfire Survival Plan

<p><b>Pre-season August /September</b></p>	<p>Clean up around outside. Trim back bushes and remove and dry branches/foliage Clear gutters Check radio and torches Purchase spare batteries for radio and torches</p>
<p><b>November (cup week)</b></p>	<p>Put towels (for door stops) in laundry and bathroom cupboards. Put water and blanket in car Check clothing and boots Ensure mask ready</p>
<p><b>High risk days forecast</b></p>	<p>Check if Lynne and Peter at home <i>If L&amp;P home:</i> Arrange to work from home <i>If L&amp;P not home:</i> Call Ros and arrange to drop dogs on way to work</p>
<p><b>High risk day</b></p>	<p>Confirm L&amp;P home Monitor radio and web Have dogs in harness hang lead of front door</p>
<p><b>Fire within 20 k</b></p>	<p>Check wind direction and forecast, Check all windows shut and curtains closed. Put wet towels under doors – ensure doors not locked Get into clothes Attach hose to laundry tap and remove roof space cover Gets dogs leads on and secure at front door If heading towards Cockatoo and <i>no other fire</i>, evacuate in opposite direction. TXT L&amp;P to let them know If other fires in area and moving towards Cockatoo, go to L&amp;P's.  *try and let mum know where I am.</p>
<p><b>Fire in immediate vicinity/threatening</b></p>	<p>Go to L&amp;P's if safe to go ie- road visible and no flame in immediate area If not safe, remove dogs to lounge, remain inside with blanket until front passed  If able: Check for embers Hose out roof space</p>

# Example of Bushfire Survival Plan

Preparation in readiness for fire season - The literature provided by the CFA is straightforward and easy to understand.

The 'Phone Tree system worked extremely well during the fires in this vicinity in 2002. Sometimes the radio and internet are not available. Besides, I reckon the 'phone tree is also a good way of 'checking up' on each other.  
The Combienbar area does not have mobile telephone service so we were provided with a satellite telephone - emergency backup.

\* Should there ever be the need to make a 'go or stay' decision, I would definitely be heading out of the valley.

Reasons: My closest CFA people are a minimum of one and a half hours away.  
I live on my own.  
The rain water tank is my only water source.  
I'm not as silly as I look.

\* If a fire came through the valley and there was no time to evacuate, a neighbor (about a kilometer or so up the road) has shown me a very sheltered, safe place down on the banks of the river - room for my little car as well.

## Fire Plan

Make sure hoses are right  
~~stuff~~ clothes right, eye wear

Block cutters - Water

if going go to safe place

Pack photo etc.

Shut up house block up  
any cracks in house if  
possible, Pets are safe.

---



# Example of Bushfire Survival Plan

August 26, 2009

## FIRE SEASON PREPARATION

**Reread** CFA booklet: "Living in the Bush"  
 "The Australian Bushfire Safety Guide", John Schauble, 2004

**Property Maintenance**

- Maintain grass low around structures by mowing, herbicide application, and confining sheep.
- Keep dry brush down around structures by burning off. (Fire restrictions generally commence November 1.)
- Clear rain gutters.
- Open water drums filled.
- Remove flammable materials and fuels from house surrounds.
- Check woodshed contents.
- Check flyscreen integrity.

**Personal protection**

- Check fire kit items listed on page 4.

**Assemble car kit**

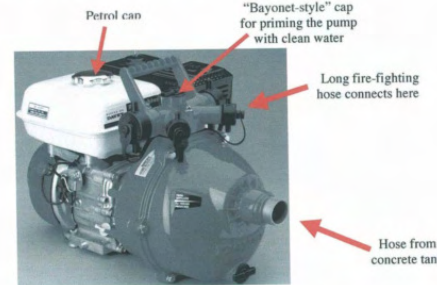
- Woolen blankets.
- Fire extinguisher
- CFA pamphlet: "Radiant heat—the killer in a bushfire" in glovebox.
- First aid kit.

August 26, 2009

## TOTAL FIRE BAN DAY

**Communication**  
 Advise neighbours of our location.

**Pump readiness**  
 Pump is prepared for connection to the 5000 gallon concrete tank on downhill side of big shed. When full, this tank will provide fire-fighting water for about 1 hour at the highest pump speed. Lower flow rates extend the available time.



The pump and fire-fighting hose are in the big shed. Identify the Davy Firefighter Plus pump. Check that it is full of petrol; if necessary fill with petrol (NOT mixed with 2-stroke oil) from the red plastic 10-litre container.

Transport pump to tank and connect using 4 m long hose; the screw-on pump connector is isolated on the protruding front of the pump.

There are two fire-fighting hoses in the shed; they have similar lengths and diameters. Observe both hoses, but carry just one hose to the pump, and screw onto one of the small connectors on the top of the pump.

Lay out fire-fighting hose towards cottage, taking care to avoid kinks.

Turn the red nozzle on the hose such that is opened slightly.

August 26, 2009

Now start the pump:

1. Move fuel valve lever on pump motor to ON.
2. Move choke lever to CLOSED.
3. Move the throttle lever away from MIN. position, about 1/3 of the way toward MAX. position.
4. Turn engine switch to ON.
5. Pull zip cord to start engine. Return cord slowly to avoid damaging starts.

August 26, 2009

**After front has passed**

- Check house thoroughly for smouldering materials. Remember roof space!
- Extinguish any fires close to house.
- Check car, cottages, sheds.
- Check livestock.

**When Total Fire Ban period is over.**

- Unplug rain gutters, and let drain.
- Close down the engine fuel flow by moving the fuel valve lever to OFF.
- Disconnect hoses to pump.
- Return pump to big shed.
- Carefully coil fire fighting hose and return to big shed.

August 26, 2009

## FIRE KIT

Clothing (Most stored in dedicated box)

- Cotton Jeans
- Flannel shirt
- Heavy socks
- Boots, preferably leather; not gumboots
- Work gloves
- Floppy hat
- Painter's face mask, moistened
- Goggles

Sundry fire fighting items stored together.

- Plugs for downpipes
- Hose attachment for filling downpipes
- Buckets
- Mops

Major fire fighting hardware.

- Pumps and nozzles
- Fuel for pumps
- Fire hoses
- Garden hoses
- Rakes
- Shovels
- Mattock
- Chainsaw
- Non-combustible fly screen material

Other fire fighting equipment.

- Ladder
- Extinguishers, including car extinguisher
- Herbicide spray packs
- Buckets
- Mops

Personal safety

- Pure wool blankets & towels, soaked in bath.
- Movers blankets
- First-aid kits
- Drinking water containers, filled
- Energy snacks
- Water and food for pets
- Mobile phone
- CFA pager
- Battery-operated radio and fresh batteries
- List of emergency telephone numbers
- Torches, with fresh batteries
- Maps
- CFA map reference for reporting position is .....

6

# General Concerns

We live on a primary producing farm bordered by the Bemm River

**CLIMATE CHANGE ? - CALL IT WHAT YOU LIKE. - BUT WE ARE FACED WITH HIGHER TEMPERATURES AND EXTREME FIRE DANGER EXPECTED ACROSS THE STATE.**

We live approx 28 kms from Cann River in a long narrow valley of mostly farms surrounded by kms and kms of forest on all sides. The road to our valley runs off the Princes Highway to a small community called Club Terrace with the one narrow road going onward to the wider farming flats and small community of Combienbar again circled with huge areas of forest. The Bemm River flows out along the floor of the valley towards the sea at Bemm River settlement on the coast

We now have the scenario of an earlier fire season possibly starting in November and potentially more dangerous than last years horror fires.

With 52 towns threatened towns identified across the Vic State, here in the East there are 3 mentioned being, Cann River, Bemm River and an hour further east to us, Mallacoota. These towns have been identified from weather mapping, topography, fuel load and population factors.

Club Terrace/Combienbar has one narrow road in or out where it connects with the Princes Highway. It is heavily forested on both sides with the canopy of trees meeting overhead in some areas.

The edge of the unburnt forest on our most dangerous north / northwest side is barely 150 metres away from our house. The fuel load on this side defies description, Foresters call it dirty bush as it is a mixture of unburnt highly flammable species which would go on for several hundred kms. To the North East and South again are kms of heavily unburnt bush.

This situation presents the communities here with some unenviable decisions. Do we leave early or do we stay and protect our assets / animals???

How will we know the possible severity of the situation IN TIME !!!!!

**We have 2 only lifelines.**  
**Frequent Communication** and **correct information** is the **first** absolutely vital lifeline for us all.  
Without lots of warning to make the correct decision there could/would be no way out with dire consequences.  
Many mobile phones do not receive mobile coverage up here so an SMS warning would not be received by everyone.

Also on the roads there are several 'black out spots' where coverage is not received. Probably our only reliable source of information is ABC radio.

Black Saturday demonstrated how with the breakdown in the IECC or integrated emergency co-ordination control centre, fires were not monitored properly and the ongoing communication problem, caused many people to be unaware and unalerted to the imminent danger approaching them causing those tragic results. All towns under threat need detailed, up to the moment and frequent information or warning given, to enable people time to make their decisions and allow the necessary time to get out and travel the many kms in many cases to safety. In a similar situation to what Kinglake and Marysville encountered we would all have no option but to get out early as the sheer scale of the possible size of the fire in this forested area is quite unimaginable.

Cann River, 30 minutes away to the left is through heavily timbered forest right up to the road sides, and isn't a great option now it too has been identified as a threatened town...

Orbost with a hospital is the other way, again with 40 minutes to an hour through again heavily timbered forest right up to the road sides.

Anyone caught with fires along the roads wouldn't stand a chance.

## **2<sup>ND</sup> LIFELINE**

Is our roads.

Our road out to the Princes highway along with the Princes Highway, left to Cann River or right to Orbost is a deathtrap because of the fuel load along all sides and kms behind.

## **RIGHT NOW**

Along with our only road out, the Princes Highway urgently needs clearing or burning back at least 100+ metres to provide safety for people fleeing to safety and emergency traffic to get through.

(A good example is see what has already been cleared right back on the new Bruthen to Bairnsdale Road to protect the power lines)  
Trees on the road edges burning and falling over the road during a fire and the trees that fall even more so after the burn has gone through would render the highway inoperable for days.

No Police, SES, CFA, Ambulances, DSE, food trucks etc would be able to get through until days of clearing.

## General Concerns

Re: Wildfire concerns

The Princess highway between Orbost and the NSW border has large sections of highway that run through native forest.

This forest contains large eucalyptus trees and a thick understorey scrub that's growing right up to the road edge.

In the event of a large-scale fire this vegetation becomes a fuel source and has the potential to turn sections of the highway into a death trap.

The Princess highway and the access roads that connects the towns throughout this region is the infrastructure, it's the lifeline for the people and provides the only real chance of receiving help.

It's critical that these roads are not only safer in the event of a fire for safe passage and evacuation if need be, but also provide a reliable backup for emergency and essential services in the aftermath.

It is the responsibility of the State government to put in place effective controls and measures to address this hazard and to minimise the time delays associated with having to clear/ reopen roads after a fire.

The clearing of roadside vegetation, for 25 mts either side of the highway as well as the removal of any larger trees that will reach the road similar to that conducted on the NSW side of the Princes highway is the best method of keeping our roads safe. In 2009 we have the technology, we have the specialised equipment and trained personal within the existing contracting force to harvest and utilise this resource.

This action will allow the government to deliver on its responsibility and should be adopted as "best practice" in managing this hazard

We need the State government to commit to an ongoing and continual improvement program to make our roads safer and to implement this proposal, or alternatively, table their plans to manage this hazard and minimise the risk associated to these communities and the general public.

The current practice of "road closure" does not address this issue.

## General Concerns

### What worries me

- people / society wanting / needing to lay blame somewhere.

(It is a natural disaster).  
(EFA is largely a voluntary organisation).

- regional meeting areas being abandoned since Ash Wednesday.

- What happens to people who are not able to make clear decisions or carry out an action plan due to mental / emotional difficulties, age, lack of transport.

- exit carriageways to get to freeway. eg. Mt. Macedon Rd, Blackforest Rd.  
(undergrowth)

- balance between vegetation and safety.

- home-owners lack of ability to make and implement sensible decisions for the safety of their own properties.

(tree clearance around homes)

- peoples right (and freedom) to choose

eg. to stay, to go  
to clear, to plant

## General Concerns

- ④ I am a Plc at YDHS.  
a lot of elderly live  
out of town alone
- ⑤ It brought the people  
together to help each  
other. Plenty of support  
to each other
- ⑥ I wanted to go to  
the hospital to help  
but could not get there  
Feeling really guilty  
for not helping.

Thanks Sue Hinkley  
McLoughlin Beach  
ph 51571283.

Risk I felt I  
could not help  
with food eat  
No communication  
with each  
other

- ① I live at McLoughlins  
beach when fire where  
on there was no way  
out Dead end at  
McLoughlins Fire going  
near Yarram could not  
get to Sale or Morwell.  
or Yarram.
- ② Not much communication  
with fire station  
Woodside Firemen where  
very good I had  
a electrical fire some  
day they where here  
as soon as possible.
- ③ No one knew where to  
go safest place  
  
What about all  
the cut down  
wood at side off  
road No one is  
allowed to clear