

COMMUNITY-LED BUSHFIRE PREPAREDNESS IN ACTION: THE CASE OF BE READY WARRANDYTE



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THE CASE

Be Ready Warrandyte (BRW) was an award-winning, community-led bushfire preparedness project instigated by community members and coordinated by the Warrandyte Community Association from May 2012 to June 2015. Its goal was "to have more Warrandyte households with effective bushfire plans". It involved close collaboration between community volunteers, local governments and the Country Fire Authority (CFA).

BRW involved a diverse range of locally tailored preparedness and awareness-raising activities, e.g. a humorous video, interactive scenario planning workshops, and a tour of local fire bunkers.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

We can learn about the potential benefits, opportunities and challenges of community-led initiatives in emergency preparedness from people's real world, 'on-the-ground' experiences with projects like this one.

This case study is also an example of an important type of non-traditional volunteering: extending volunteerism. This is where a community group that is not usually involved in emergency management helps build community resilience by extending its activities into this area in response to a risk event (in this case a near miss on Black Saturday).

THE STUDY

Data for this case study was collected through interviews, participant observations and a range of secondary sources.

"They can do things, they can take risks that government can't and with great outcomes."

-EM representative



WHAT WAS ACHIEVED?

BRW participants portrayed the project as an effective, cost-efficient vehicle for sharing responsibility that had community safety benefits beyond its specific goal. It was predominantly seen to have struck a good balance between focusing on community concerns and needs while respecting the established emergency management (EM) system, and between complementing existing community safety approaches while also challenging and influencing them.

Amongst other things, BRW was able to adapt government communications to the local context, connect further into the community, devise and test innovative approaches, lead discussion on topics that needed independence from government (e.g. bunkers), and bring local contexts, priorities and knowledge into emergency management dialogues and planning.

WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

This case study demonstrates how a community-led project that has strong leadership and governance, is authorized by the local community and thoughtfully supported by EM representatives can bridge a number of gaps in bushfire preparedness: between government and community, between centralized and localised planning and communication, and between formal or official and informal or grassroots action.

The report on this case study provides numerous insights and lessons about the potential benefits, impacts, enabling factors, challenges, risks, limitations and opportunities of pursuing and supporting community-led emergency management planning and preparedness more widely.

"I think it's actually made the emergency management community realise that the community have a great amount of power. That something that's born from right at the community level has the capacity to be fantastic and to really take off."

- EM representative

MORE INFORMATION

The case study report is available on the webpage of the 'Out of Uniform' project (Google "bnhcrc non-traditional").

More information on Be Ready Warrandyte is available from its website at <http://warrandyte.org.au/fire/>

Alternatively, contact Blythe McLennan (blythe.mclennan@rmit.edu.au) or the BRW Chair, Dick Davies (dickdockdavies@gmail.com).

Image source: Jock MacNeish, Strategic Images (cartoon); Warrandyte Community Association (logo)

