



Improving the role of hazard communications in increasing residents' preparedness for bushfires and floods: A summary of project findings

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This project focused on the evaluation of communication strategies and identification of barriers and enablers to residents' preparedness for bushfires and floods. Key findings are presented below.

DEFINING PREPAREDNESS

Based on an extensive literature review, we captured the following facets of preparedness for bushfires and floods:

- ▶ Preparing an emergency kit
- ▶ Preparing one's property, preparing for defence, and preparing for evacuation (bushfires only)
- ▶ Planning the household's response to hazard
- ▶ Perceived ability to respond and recover
- ▶ Social support for response and recovery
- ▶ Financial resilience

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF INFORMATION SOURCES IN INCREASING PREPAREDNESS

Next, in late 2014/early 2015 we examined whether residents who used at least one of the following information sources prepared better than those who didn't: brochure(s), community meeting(s), website(s).

- ▶ Those who used at least one source were better prepared in terms of a) an emergency kit, b) property preparedness/defence preparedness/evacuation preparedness (fires only), and c) planning
- ▶ However, preparedness differences were small or non-existent for perceptions of preparedness and social support availability.
- ▶ Also, fewer than 1 in 3 residents in our sample had used at least one of the 3 information sources, which further limits their impact on preparedness.



FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information on the above findings, and access to the Technical Reports, please go to <http://www.bnhcrc.com.au/research/hazard-resilience/238> or contact Dr Ilona McNeill (imcneill@unimelb.edu.au).

LESSONS LEARNED ABOUT SURVEY METHODOLOGY

In September 2015 we ran a survey study to examine the effectiveness of community led planning interventions in increasing preparedness for floods. Unfortunately, the response rate was too low to continue the study. Here are the key lessons we learned from this:

- ▶ The survey's length needs to match the interest people have in the topic of the survey, or it needs to be tied to a monetary incentive.
- ▶ Minimize questions that appear irrelevant to the topic (even if they are), unless survey completion is tied to a monetary incentive.
- ▶ For personal questions, clearly state that the question can be skipped.
- ▶ Make sure media releases are timed so that they precede survey send-out by about a week.
- ▶ If doorknockers are used, make sure to brief them in person, and provide them with a clear and engaging elevator pitch to increase participation in the survey.

ON WORRY AND PREPAREDNESS

To make up for the aborted 2015 study, we ran a study which examined the role of worry in preparing for bushfires. We found that people worry in two distinct ways, with one being related to increased preparedness for bushfires and the other being related to decreased preparedness for bushfires. When trying to increase preparedness through worry it is therefore important to consider that this may have opposite effects for those who worry in an unconstructive manner.

THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY CULTURE

Finally, in late 2016/early 2017 we ran a study that examined the role of the community culture around preparing. Key findings were as follows:

- ▶ Community social norms are more strongly related to preparedness than perceived community attitudes towards preparing.
- ▶ More specifically, residents are better prepared for fires and floods when they see other residents as being more prepared, and when they think other residents are expecting them to be better prepared (latter for bushfires only).
- ▶ Seeing others as well prepared was also related to an increased perceived availability of social support for response and recovery.
- ▶ Viewing the local council and fire/emergency service as better prepared was connected to higher levels of perceived personal preparedness. In the case of floods, it was also related to higher levels of actual personal preparedness, but in the case of bushfires, it wasn't related to actual preparedness at all.

END-USER STATEMENT

Suellen Flint, Director – Community Preparedness, DFES

The research presented here is an important reminder that information, of itself, does not lead to behaviour change. It indicates that individuals are more likely to take action when they feel part of a community where planning and preparedness are valued, and where others are also taking action. Therefore, when engaging communities in planning and preparedness, our information must be combined with a community focussed approach that considers the role of community attitudes and norms in behaviour change. This type of engagement can only occur at the local level, and with the involvement of local governments, brigades and communities themselves.