

FIRE UPDATE

BUSHFIRE CRC NEWSLETTER OCTOBER 2011

PERTH HILLS REPORT RELEASED

The Bushfire CRC's report on last summer's Perth Hills bushfires was published on 22 September, followed by a community meeting at Kelmscott, one of the affected areas, on Thursday 29 September attended by Bushfire CRC Deputy CEO and Research Director Richard Thornton.

The report was the result of face-to-face interviews with residents of 425 households in the Roleystone-Kelmscott area by Bushfire CRC researchers from the University of Western Australia, with a further 900 responses from residents to a postal survey.

Western Australia's Fire and Emergency Services Authority (FESA) asked the Bushfire CRC to conduct research into what the affected communities knew about bushfire safety prior to the fires, how they interpreted and responded to fire services messages sent before and during fires, and how they understood their role in fire safety.

The *Final Report on the February 2011*

Fires in Roleystone, Kelmscott and Red Hill Research Project found many Perth Hills residents recognised a bushfire was possible in their area before the fires, but did not see it as a threat to their own lives or properties.

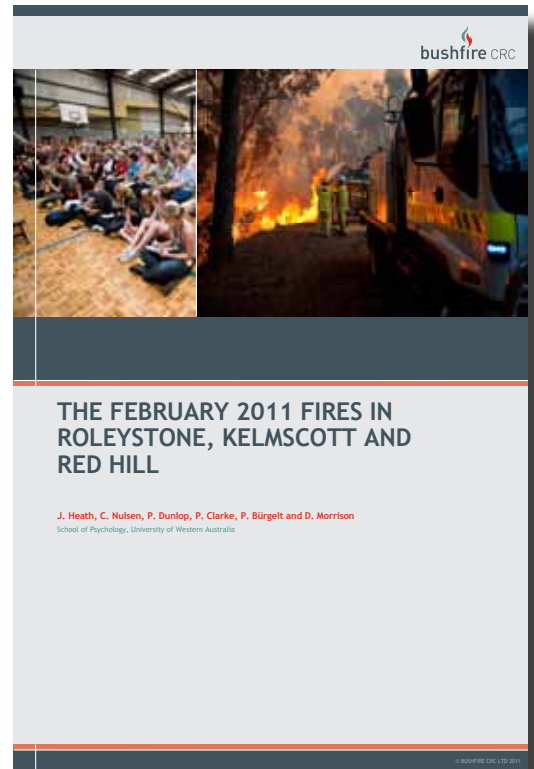
Those who had recognised fire was a direct threat to them – after attending a Bushfire Ready Group for example – did more preparation before the fires than others.

Richard Thornton said the findings were similar to those of research conducted after the February 2009 Victorian Black Saturday fires.

FESA Director Community Engagement, Suellen Shea, said the report's findings were invaluable to help local communities better prepare for the upcoming bushfire season.

Richard blogs his account of Thursday night's residents' meeting over the page.

The full Perth Hills fires report (pictured right) is online at www.bushfirecrc.com/perthhillsfires_report



COMMUNITY RESEARCH CHECKLIST

Bushfire CRC researchers Jim McLennan and Glenn Elliott, of La Trobe University, have produced a handy booklet for community bushfire safety researchers that provides a checklist of questions about household bushfire preparation activities.

Their booklet, *Checklist Items For Researchers: Householder Preparations For Bushfires*, is based on questions originally drafted for a survey of residents after the 2009 Victorian Black Saturday bushfires, updated, reviewed and expanded.

"The goal was to generate a manageable checklist of activities, incorporating those actions regarded by experienced community bushfire safety practitioners and researchers as sound preparation by residents of communities at-risk of bushfire attack for either staying and defending or for leaving safely," Jim says.



Dr Jim McLennan, left, working in the field at Strathewen with members of the multi agency Research Taskforce after Black Saturday.

The result is a 30-item research checklist, which includes questions related to both staying to defend and leaving safely. It can be modified for particular research purposes and can be used in paper, electronic and on-line formats.

A *Fire Note* describing the work behind the checklist will be published shortly. The nine-page checklist booklet can be downloaded at www.bushfirecrc.com/resources/research-report/checklist

COUNCIL MEETING

The Bushfire CRC Stakeholder Council will meet on Wednesday 23 November in Melbourne. More details on the agenda will be sent to stakeholder representatives shortly. The day will include important updates on the progress of the current research program, developments with the transition to an Institute, and the launch of our book *Burning Issues*.

AWARD

Dr Malcolm Gill, Bushfire CRC researcher at the Australian National University, has been awarded the 2011 Ecological Society of Australia Gold Medal. The ESA Gold Medal is awarded in recognition of an ecologist who has made a substantial contribution to the study of ecology in Australia over the course of their

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career and is presented annually as a Plenary at the ESA annual conference, this year in Hobart, November 21-25. Congratulations to Malcolm on this recognition of his significant contributions to fire ecology.

FUNDING BID

The CRC Association is asking for an additional \$250 million over five years and positive design improvements to boost the Cooperative Research Centres program.

It has sent its 2012 budget proposal to the Australian Government suggesting that the funding request can be accommodated within the existing record \$9.4 billion annual innovation investment.

RESEARCH BLOG

RICHARD THORNTON



Last week saw the release of the report outlining the work undertaken by the University of

Western Australia team in the aftermath of the Perth Hills fires in February this year.

The findings were startlingly similar in a number of ways to those in Victoria. Communities still see that there is a generic risk, but still do not believe it is a risk to them personally. This is an important finding as it underlines what has been suspected for some time, but does place a challenge on the agencies to start to address this issue, particularly as the report also shows that acceptance of the threat is strongly correlated to preparedness.

One of the promises made to the local communities was to hold feedback sessions; and I had the pleasure of hosting the first community meeting in the suburb of Kelmscott in Perth. The UWA team did a great job in presenting the results in an approachable way. The meeting also gave the Bushfire CRC an opportunity to publically thank the residents for their co-operation in the research.

It is great to do these meeting as sometimes it is easy to get lost in the day-to-day work and forget who we are really working for, and meeting the residents in fire affected areas quickly brings clarity back in the picture.

RESEARCH UTILISATION BLOG

NOREEN KRUSEL



'Mainstreaming' Human Factors Research:

The initial seven year program of research at the Bushfire

CRC included two projects that applied human factors knowledge. These were; Safe Behaviour and Decision Making, led by Dr Mary Omodei and Enhancing IMT Effectiveness and Organisational Learning led by Dr Christine Owen. These two projects used human factors knowledge to better understand operational decision making and performance in the fire and emergency management industry.

The research in these two projects is complete and has been published in scientific papers as well as in our more 'friendly' *Fire Notes*. However, over the past couple of years agencies have consistently called on the researchers to make presentations and there is an emerging interest by end-user agencies in utilising this research and related knowledge in their business. In an effort to assist agencies to bridge the gap between theory and research and its application, the Bushfire CRC and AFAC are developing professional development workshops at both introductory and more specialised level. In mid September the CFA hosted a two day trial of the two Introductory Workshops. The evaluation of the workshops was overwhelmingly positive. Indeed, people wanted to know more and many felt the workshops were too short! Read more online.

COMMUNICATIONS BLOG DAVID BRUCE



The high media coverage out of the annual conference in Sydney continued through September, as parts of Australia experienced a run of bushfires across the east coast and into central Australia. The occurrence of these fires was no surprise to our partners

– in fact they were entirely predicted by the *Seasonal Bushfire Outlook* that was published as a Bushfire CRC *Fire Note* at the end of August. The science was picked up by national media including the ABC TV News and the regional ABC *Bush Telegraph*, as well as *The Australian*, which included the *Outlook* as part of a full page feature.

Meanwhile, the report on the Perth Hills fires also received considerable media interest, particularly in Western Australia. Research Director Dr Richard Thornton was interviewed by several newspapers and radio stations on the findings of the research out of Bushfire CRC researchers at the University of Western Australia.

Links to most of these media clips are on the news area of the Bushfire CRC website: www.bushfirecrc.com/news

RESEARCH BLOG LYNDSEY WRIGHT



The annual conference is only just over but we are now in the final stages of planning the Research Advisory Forum, in Canberra at the end of October. At this twice yearly event representatives of all stakeholders discuss progress reports on the research and,

for this time only, have the opportunity to visit the CSIRO Pyrotron.

It is hard to believe the Bushfire CRC extension research program is now into its second year. As many would have seen in the posters and presentations at the recent AFAC/Bushfire CRC conference the projects are now well into 'research mode' with most projects that were looking for new staff having made these appointments.

A number of projects have completed literature reviews that capture the state of knowledge in their particular area or discipline. These literature reviews will be circulated to selected end users for comment/feedback before they are finalised and made more broadly available and we sincerely thank those who review these documents as this is an important part of ensuring relevance and readability.