Sharing responsibility – so what about it?

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Overview

The ‘Sharing Responsibility’ project is a three-year research project that aims to support emergency management stakeholders to make decisions about sharing responsibility for community safety and disaster resilience. Since it began in July 2010, research has focused on unpacking the meaning of shared responsibility (a vision) and its significance for sharing responsibility (as practice). In addition to the reports and publications produced, a highlight has been the ‘Visions of Sharing Responsibility for Disaster Resilience’ workshop held in March 2012. Participants said the workshop had “a richness absent in most other forums” because it brought together “a great mix of groups that you don’t usually see in the same room”.

An important emerging focus in the project for the next year is the design and trial of interactive, multi-stakeholder workshops that wrestle with the implications of the shared responsibility vision for ‘real world’ management scenarios.

Reflections

This project is as much about conceptualizing ‘problems’ and understanding their significance as it is about finding clear answers or recommending specific solutions. This is a complex subject and there are no simple answers, as much as we may want them.

From our research so far we can say that:

- The shared responsibility principle has been reframed by the Victorian 2009 Bushfires Royal Commission and the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience. There is now a fundamentally different national agenda developing for living with disaster risk.5,6,7 As a workshop speaker stated: “we can’t allow government to return to business as usual”.4 If the new ideas are carried through: things are going to change in emergency management.

- We need to look at issues of shared responsibility through multiple windows. Similar issues are being wrestled with across many areas of public safety in Australia and abroad.2,5 Many different conceptual approaches are used to make sense of them, each with different implications for our understanding and practices.1,8 There is no single ‘best’ way to frame these issues: we need to look at them through multiple windows.1,3,8

- Processes and relationships are as important as standards and outcomes. Stakeholders tend to focus on determining their preferred standards and outcomes for shared responsibility. Yet we need to focus much more attention on developing processes and relationships to support sharing responsibility as practice.2,5,7 If the processes and relationships aren’t ‘right’ the possible outcomes will be modest.

- Forming appropriate and legitimate collective action institutions and governance arrangements are at the heart of sharing responsibility well in practice. Institutions for collective action provide the rules, norms and expectations that shape responsibility sharing processes and relationships.2,5,8In essence, sharing responsibility is about governance: engaging governments and citizens together to live with disaster risk.

Selected reports and publications

Reports


Peer reviewed publications


Forthcoming

For more information go to www.bushfirecrc.com
(Follow links to: Our Research > Understanding Risk > Community Expectations > Shared Responsibility)

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