What is arson?

Arson is:

- the intentional use of fire to damage or destroy
  - unlawful
  - malicious
  - reckless

Outline of this presentation

- What is arson?
- Impact of deliberately lit bushfires
- Frequency of deliberately lit bushfires
- Why people light fires
- A bushfire arson typology
- Where to next?

Deliberately lit fires

Includes

- incendiary fires
- suspicious fires
- firesetting
Impact of deliberately lit bushfires

- Bushfires average $77 million per year
  - Black Friday 1939 - $750 million
  - Ash Wednesday 1983 - $400 million
  - Canberra 18 Jan 2003 - $300 million
- Very difficult to apportion costs

Arson-caused fires more likely to be lit:
- in circumstances where they will spread
- in areas where aspect and slope is conducive to fire growth
- during total fire bans

Frequency of deliberately lit bushfires

Number of fires which are deliberately lit:
- varies between time and place
- 25 to 50 percent in most situations
- appears to be increasing
Frequency of deliberately lit bushfires

Apparent increases may be due to:
- greater awareness
- improved reporting
- better investigation
- definitions

Why do people light fires?

Most common motives for general arson:
- revenge
- excitement
- vandalism
- attention or recognition-seeking
- financial gain
- crime concealment
- political
- no motive / psychiatric
- mixed motives
- child firesetting

Why do people light fires?

Child firesetters
- Fireplay & experimentation
- Problematic firesetting
Why do people light *bushfires*?

Most common motives for *general* arson:
- revenge
- excitement
- vandalism
- attention or recognition-seeking
- financial gain
- crime concealment
- political
- no motive / psychiatric
- mixed motives
- child firesetting

A bushfire arson typology?

Bushfires lit:
1. to create excitement or relieve boredom
2. for recognition and attention
3. for a specific purpose or gain
4. without motive
5. with mixed motives

A bushfire arson typology?

1. Bushfires lit to create excitement or relieve boredom
   - vandalism
   - stimulation
   - activity

A bushfire arson typology?

2. Bushfires lit for recognition and attention
   - hero status / praise
   - self-esteem / impress others
   - pleading
A bushfire arson typology?

3. Bushfires lit for a specific purpose or gain
   - anger
   - pragmatic
   - material
   - altruistic

4. Bushfires lit without motive
   - psychiatric
   - children

5. Bushfires lit with mixed motives
   - multiple
   - unclear
   - incidental

Where to next?

- motives and patterns
- data collections
- treatment and management
- prevention
- investigation and prosecution
- consolidated arson information
  - bulletins
  - database
The Invisible Hand
Bushfire Arson in Australia

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Questions?