The role of local government in influencing bushfire preparedness: Enforcement of fuel reduction on properties

Petra T. Buergelt, Patrick D. Dunlop, Carmen Lawrence & David L. Morrison
School of Psychology, University of Western Australia, Western Australia

Research Context
A survey of six WA communities showed:

- differences in proportion of preparatory actions taken at the individual level:

- differences in who residents perceive as responsible for saving their house:

Research Design
To address these gaps we are conducting a mixed-methods study:

- Data Collection:
  - in-depth interviews & participant observation in selected fire-prone Shires in WA
  - surveys of individual preparedness
  - literature review

- Data Analysis:
  - grounded theory analysis techniques
  - qualitative analysis software Atlas.ti

Key Local Government Preparedness Activities
Preparedness activities at the local government level consisted of nine major areas:

- Emergency Mgt Planning
- Preparing & participating
- Mitigation activities
- Fire fighting resources
- Education
- Evacuation facilities

Enforcement Process

1st year
- Extensive education campaign requirements & consequences

Prior season
- Sending fuel reduction notice with rate notice
- Winter inspections to educate

Start season
- Summer inspections to enforce
- Follow-up inspections to check fulfilment of work orders

Factors ↑ Preparedness

- Local Govt
  - work order, fine or court case (neg)
  - acknowledging indiv & community (pos)
  - being direct, straight & hard stand
  - taking time to specifically telling residents what to do & how, giving reasons and answering questions
  - letting residents know consequences
  - addressing residents' resentment

Community members
- hearing stories from others that ranger are very strict in enforcing requirements
- perceiving enforcement process as fair
- trusting & respecting authority of rangers
- being able to, having reasons to, and being energised to implement measures
- measures match goals/ envisioned future

Process Length
- can be long-term process — turning point after ~ 5 years of strict enforcement

Research Questions
- What is the nature & extent of differences between communities in preparedness?
- What community-level differences account for these differnce?

Next Steps
- finalising questionnaires designed based on qualitative data to develop an empirical model

Gaps
- data on actual community-level preparedness
- central data base on household property preparedness compliance

- communities & researchers can’t assess the preparedness level of communities
- communities have no access to interventions at the community level to increase preparing