

FIRE UPDATE

BUSHFIRE CRC NEWSLETTER MARCH 2011

SURVEY OF PERTH HILLS BUSHFIRE-AFFECTED COMMUNITIES BEGINS



Residents of the Perth hills areas affected by the recent bushfires have been invited to take part in a study of how communities deal with fire.

The Bushfire CRC has been asked by the Fire and Emergency Services Authority of Western Australia to conduct a study of the bushfire affected communities. The study will build on work already undertaken nationally to better understand community attitudes to bushfires; how warnings can be delivered more effectively; community understandings about living with bushfire risk; and how these are affected by the stress of imminent fire danger.

Teams of researchers mostly from the University of Western Australia, but also from La Trobe and RMIT universities of Victoria, are interviewing up to 400 residents in the Roleystone, Red Hill and surrounding areas over the next few weeks. Other residents will be asked to take part in a mail or internet survey.

Dr Richard Thornton, Deputy CEO and Research Director of the Bushfire CRC, said the study

CONVAIR BOMBERS ON TRIAL

Convair water bombers have conducted their first test drop as part of an Australian-first trial by the Bushfire CRC to determine the aircraft's suitability for Victorian firefighting. Fitted with a large belly tank, each Convair CV580 has a capacity of 8000 litres of water, foam or fire retardant.

and its methodology was developed from the extensive work the Bushfire CRC conducted in Victoria immediately after the Black Saturday fires of February 2009.

The survey topics will include:

- What the communities knew about bushfire safety prior to the fires,
- How the communities are interpreting and responding to messages the fire services send out before and during fires, and
- The way communities understand their role in fire safety.

“By completing the survey, residents will be making an important contribution to the ongoing bushfire research being conducted across Australia to improve the safety of people threatened by bushfires,” Dr Thornton said.

“In particular, they will be providing a voice to the community input to this important area of research which has been a strong focus of our efforts since the fires of February 2009,”

Dr Thornton said.



CEO'S BLOG

GARY MORGAN



FIRE, FLOOD AND CYCLONE – THE LEARNINGS ARE THE SAME

It has been a comparatively quiet season for fire for most states so far, although fires have been a real threat to some communities, particularly in Western Australia and Victoria.

And yet what we learnt from the Black Saturday fires of two years ago – about better communicating with residents by providing timely and accurate warnings and information – has been crucial to the management of the many floods, cyclones, and other natural hazard emergencies we have seen since.

This is an unanticipated but welcome consequence of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission that so heavily emphasised the centrality of people to the task of emergency management. A major set of Royal Commission recommendations focussed on the need to improve communication and warnings to communities.

It is really not just about fire, water or wind any more – emergency management is now about people.

If we accept we are a land of regular extreme natural hazards then we must accept that the roles of prevention, preparedness, response and recovery of these extreme events should be a core part of our government budgets, never a rolling series of one-off responses.

Only with an analysis based upon scientific knowledge and experience will we make solid decisions on how to make our communities more resilient to the fire and other natural hazard events in the future.

Find the full blog at www.bushfirecrc.com/fireupdates

WA RESEARCH IN BOARD'S FOCUS

A Governing Board meeting in Perth in late February allowed Western Australian based partners of the Bushfire CRC the opportunity to present to the Board on the future directions of their organisations and how ongoing research with the Bushfire CRC or the Institute aligned with their priorities.

Representatives from the University of Western Australia, the Department of Environment and Conservation, and the Fire and Emergency Services Authority, outlined how the research delivered a range of both immediate and future benefits, including assistance with the recent fires around Perth.

The University of Western Australia hosted the day's activities for the Bushfire CRC led by Board member and Pro Vice-Chancellor (Research Initiatives) Professor Alistar Robertson.

WA based Project Leader Professor David Morrison spoke to the Board about his work. Other researchers, including some involved in the Bushfire CRC survey of communities affected by the recent Perth fires, were

introduced to Board members. The Board also met up with senior academic representatives including former Bushfire CRC Board member and now Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research) at the University of Western Australia, Prof Robyn Owens, and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Research and Advancement) at Edith Cowen University, Prof John Finlay-Jones.

Among other topics, the Board discussed the strategic directions of the planned Australasian Fire Research Institute. More on this will be outlined at the next Bushfire CRC Stakeholder Council meeting on 9 June.

The next Board meeting will be held in Adelaide on 7 April where directors will get an opportunity to meet South Australian based partners and researchers.

The Bushfire CRC currently has an opening for a Project Manager to oversee the National Fire Danger Rating science project. Applications close 18 March. All the details are at: www.bushfirecrc.com/opportunities

RESEARCH UTILISATION BLOG



NOREEN KRUSEL

In November 2010 our end user agencies participated in a survey about

research utilisation; about how their agencies were set up to deal with research from the Bushfire CRC, about their use of the tools and mechanisms that we had developed and also about potential barriers to the utilisation of research.

Responses came from 148 people from a range of agencies, and the results have

now been analysed. The analysis has revealed some key components of research utilisation that can be strengthened. These areas are relationships and partnerships, engagement and active involvement, a responsive and learning culture within agencies, development of high quality and targeted products, and working on the forming of meaning.

The survey also revealed that the most significant barrier to the utilisation of research were those within agencies.

So, I know that there are innovative approaches to research utilisation within agencies – I invite you to share them so that others can learn from your experiences.

RESEARCH BLOG

RICHARD THORNTON



Thankfully there was no loss of life in the most recent Perth fires, but with

almost 100 properties damaged or destroyed these are significant and tragic events.

What can we learn from the recent natural disasters in Queensland, Victoria and now Western Australia? Firstly that the many of the findings from bushfires relating to community preparedness are common across the various natural disasters: just like in our research into communities in the Black Saturday fires of two years ago, we saw reports of people inexplicably unprepared, reluctant to evaluate the situation in which they found themselves and waiting for someone to tell them what to do; secondly, issues relating to where and how houses are built continue to be debated. Much can be learnt from the extensive community research we have conducted. Similarly the fire community can learn a lot from what went well in the recent cyclones, and floods. These are lessons which still have to be learnt.

The Bushfire CRC is now open to new proposals from students to contrast and compare the various natural disasters. This cross hazard work would provide a unique insight which all agencies could learn from; I look forward to receiving ideas.

In the past month we have sent researchers to the Lake Clifton fires south of Perth to understand the experiences of the locals, and as of last week similar teams have moved in to the recent Perth fires.

STUDENT BLOG **LYNDSEY WRIGHT**



The current round of student reviews has uncovered some inspiring stories of the efforts some of

our students are maintaining to complete their study. If you haven't already had your review, don't be alarmed. It is neither difficult of daunting. It is just an opportunity for me to touch base and see how things are going.

A quick message to all our PhD students who are in the final review or writing up stage – we are thinking of you! To all our new students – yes there will be an end to all this effort!

COMMUNICATIONS BLOG **DAVID BRUCE**



During the floods in Queensland and Victoria in January some Bushfire CRC researchers were asked to make comments in the media including one of our new postgraduate students, Rachel Carter, of La Trobe University, who spoke on issues of insurance for natural disasters.

The Bushfire CRC made media comments on the fires in Western Australia in February regarding the learnings from Black Saturday and the links between warnings for fire and flood, as well as other more general comments on prescribed burning and building in bushfire areas. Gary Morgan, CEO of the Bushfire CRC, was interviewed for the national ABC 7.30 Report, ABC Radio National Breakfast, The Australian, and Adelaide radio, while our comments were repeated across many news publications.

And only last week, as our University of Western Australia researchers began to survey residents following the fires around Perth, Project Leader Professor David Morrison and Research Director Dr Richard Thornton, were both in high demand by local radio and newspaper media.