

# FIRE UPDATE

BUSHFIRE CRC NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER 2011

## FLAMES AND FIREBRANDS AT FORUM

Around 60 Bushfire CRC researchers, students and end-users gathered at University House at the Australian National University for the fifth meeting of the Research Advisory Forum at the end of last month.

Fire weather, risk management, community education, smoke behaviour and characteristics, shared responsibility, environmental impacts, greenhouse gas emissions, health and safety on the fireground – these were some of the topics under discussion at the forum in Canberra.

The Bushfire CRC holds the forum twice a year to review the progress of ongoing projects. Researchers and Lead End Users are given the opportunity to present an update of their activities and invite discussion from across the members of the Bushfire CRC. The forum provides an invaluable opportunity to get broad feedback from all stakeholders to support the research.

The audience heard presentations from around half the current research program from researchers, students and end-users.

The meeting included a site visit to the nearby CSIRO Pyrotron for a demonstration of fire



*A bed of dry fuel is lit in the pyrotron.*

spread under controlled conditions. The pyrotron is a 25 metre long fire-proof wind tunnel with a glass panelled observation area to monitor the burning fuel bed. Led by researcher Dr Andrew Sullivan from the CSIRO, the pyrotron research is part of the Bushfire CRC Extreme Fire Behaviour project as well as part of the CSIRO Climate Adaptation Flagship.

Nearby, Dr Peter Ellis, demonstrated his work on firebrands in a vertical wind tunnel.

Presentations from the Research Advisory Forum are online in the Events section of the Bushfire CRC website. See <http://www.bushfirecrc.com/research/event/2011-raf5>

## STUDENTS SUBMIT THESES AND HAVE DEGREES CONFIRMED

Two more PhD research students from our 2003-2010 program have submitted their theses in the past fortnight and two more have had their doctorates conferred.

Karen Bosomworth has submitted her thesis to RMIT University, Melbourne. Her research looked at how wildfire risk management could support community and natural resource resilience to climate change.

Briony Towers has submitted her thesis to the University of Tasmania. She has researched better ways to educate the public – and especially children – about bushfire risk. Both Briony and Karen will be working hard at RMIT over the next few months to turn their theses into journal papers. Such papers are critically important to early career researchers and students are strongly encouraged to get publications from their theses out as quickly as possible.

While not one of our scholars, Patrick Dunlop at the University of Western Australia has been

undertaking Bushfire CRC work as a member of Professor David Morrison's team at the school of psychology. His thesis, submitted last week, looks at how people who resit the psychometric tests for firefighting perform during subsequent tests. This work was done in close collaboration with FESA and is of considerable interest to that agency. Patrick spoke on this research at the recent AFAC/CRC conference in Sydney.

Meanwhile, Anne Miehs and Matt Phillips have had their degrees conferred. Anne, studying at the University of Melbourne, looked at the role of coarse woody debris to forest fuel level and biodiversity conservation. Matt, at Deakin University, researched the physiological effects on volunteer firefighters engaged in bushfire suppression.

Anne is now employed as Bushfire Project Officer at the Nature Conservation Council of NSW and Matt is working with the Department of Defence.

## CEO'S BLOG

GARY MORGAN



The launch of the book *Burning Issues* later this month is a timely reminder of the complex relationship we as a society have with fire.

The use of controlled fire as part the management of forests, woodlands and grasslands has been a matter of ongoing debate for many decades.

*Burning Issues* does not provide the definitive answers to these debates – debates that involve science, cultural and social issues – but it does provide a valuable scientific discussion on the current state of knowledge on prescribed burning.

There has been much research in the broad area of prescribed burning over many years, including a significant contribution by Bushfire CRC researchers. The 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission examined the issue in depth.

*Burning Issues* draws this science together and attempts to analyse its contribution to the politics and policy development of various governments. Good government policy should always be based on good science, and although the community is sometimes divided over the merits or the impacts of prescribed burning, *Burning Issues* now provides us with an independent scientific basis for a debate.

*Burning Issues*, by Bushfire CRC researcher Professor Mark Adams, from the University of Sydney, and Professor Peter Attwill, from the University of Melbourne, will be launched after our Stakeholder Council AGM on Wednesday 23 November, by the Hon Bernard Teague AO, Chair of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission.

## LAKE CLIFTON FIRES REPORT

**The report of a Bushfire CRC task force led by Professor Jim McLennan, of La Trobe University, into the Lake Clifton fire near Perth on 10 January this year has just been published.**

Task force members interviewed members of 35 households from within the affected area and five on its edge about their bushfire preparation and knowledge. Ten houses were lost in the fire.

The researchers found that most people interviewed had no previous experience of bushfire; most received bushfire preparedness material prepared by the Fire and Emergency Services Authority (FESA); less than half had any longer term bushfire preparedness

measures in place, and there was limited appreciation of the potential for a serious bushfire on that particular day.

Most had thought about what they would do in the event of a bushfire and had a bushfire plan, and took action in accordance with the plan – after the fire most said they would follow this same course of action again.

The researchers came from La Trobe, the University of Melbourne, the University of Western Australia and FESA Community Engagement.

The report is available at [www.bushfirecrc.com/lake\\_clifton\\_fire\\_report](http://www.bushfirecrc.com/lake_clifton_fire_report)

### IN BRIEF

#### WILDFIRE

The Bushfire CRC has the cover story in the latest issue of *Wildfire*, the official journal of the International Journal of Wildland fire. The article looks at issues related to controlled burning, with particular reference to Professor Mark Adams' book, *Burning Issues*. Go to <http://wildfiremag.com>

#### BURNING ISSUES

On the subject of *Burning Issues*, the book – which has already sold several hundred copies – will be formally launched on 23 November in Melbourne by the Hon Bernard Teague AO, the chair of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission. The launch takes place immediately after the Bushfire CRC AGM and Stakeholders' meeting.

#### FIRE AUSTRALIA

By the time you are reading this, the Spring edition of *Fire Australia* will be in the post. Articles include a behind the scenes account of the Seasonal Bushfire Outlook Workshop held in Adelaide recently, photos and stories from the annual conference in Sydney. *Fire Australia* is not online so if you are a Bushfire CRC member and not already on its mailing list and want it, let us know.

#### FIRE AUSTRALIA 2011

The Bushfire CRC will have a shared booth with AFAC at the Fire Australia 2011 conference at the Adelaide Convention Centre from 16 to 18 November. The conference is the premier annual event of the country's fire protection industry. Come and talk to us there.

#### KAKADU NOMINATION

The Bushfire CRC and CSIRO supported Kakadu Wetland Burning Project was a finalist in the Environmental Research section of the prestigious 2011 Banksia Awards. Unfortunately, it didn't win the main prize at the awards ceremony last month, attended by researcher Dr Alan Anderson and one of the local Indigenous families involved with the project.

### RESEARCH UTILISATION BLOG

#### NOREEN KRUSEL



Last month I wrote about our efforts to 'mainstream' the human factors research

from two of our Projects – Safe Behaviour and Decision Making, and Enhancing IMT Effectiveness and Organisational Learning – by offering professional development workshops.

In conjunction with agencies in Victoria, we have developed, trialled and refined two introductory workshops and in

October conducted them in Kaipoi, New Zealand, with a group of seasonal fire fighter crew leaders. Again, the feedback has been very positive. Participants clearly saw that the workshops were practical and could be applied.

These workshops are intended as introductions only, showing agencies the potential for the outputs of human factors related research to be included into their business.

The two half-day introductory workshops are offered at no charge to all jurisdictions within Australasia. A minimum of 15 participants (and a maximum of 30) is required. More information at [www.bushfirecrc.com/research/utilisation](http://www.bushfirecrc.com/research/utilisation)

### COMMUNICATIONS BLOG

#### DAVID BRUCE



As the Bushfire CRC prepares to attend the Fire Protection Association of Australia conference in

Adelaide later this month, another edition of our joint *Fire Australia* magazine is set to hit the streets.

The quarterly magazine is a joint publication of the Bushfire CRC, the Australasian

Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC), Fire Protection Association Australia and the Institution of Fire Engineers Australia. It is posted to more than 5000 of our members and hopefully shared around within organisations.

The editorial content of *Fire Australia* a great way to get a quick understanding of some of the bigger issues in our industry.

The Spring 2011 edition features a wrap up of our annual conference and the Fire Weather workshop that followed straight after. It also takes an in-depth look at the design lessons learnt from recent fires in tall buildings.

### STUDENT BLOG LYNDSEY WRIGHT



There was a real buzz in the Common Room at University House at ANU last week as Bushfire CRC

researchers and students presented updates on their projects at the Research Advisory Forum.

It was obvious to all that most projects were now making good progress and the calibre of the work being undertaken was high. This progress is reflected in the number of journal papers already in preparation or indeed submitted, based on this work. End users again observed that the projects are ambitious – but at the same time recognised that the researchers are very focused on delivering answers.

The ongoing engagement with Lead End Users and their involvement as members of the research teams was evident in the way each was able to speak authoritatively about the projects that they were involved with. Of course, not everything goes entirely to plan and some projects reported that factors beyond their control (for example, the Perth Hills fires in early 2011) had caused them to amend their research.