

Fire, Families and Decisions

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This project focuses on the bushfire experience from a domestic perspective.

What are the decision-making processes in families under crisis?

1. The Wangary Fire

On the Lower Eyre Peninsula in remote South Australia, a bushfire started on Monday 10 January 2005. It broke containment lines the following morning (now commonly referred to as 'Black Tuesday').

The Wangary fire burnt over 77 000 hectares of agricultural and forest lands, claimed nine lives, ninety-three homes, over 46 000 livestock and approximately 6 300 kilometres of fencing.

2. Fieldwork

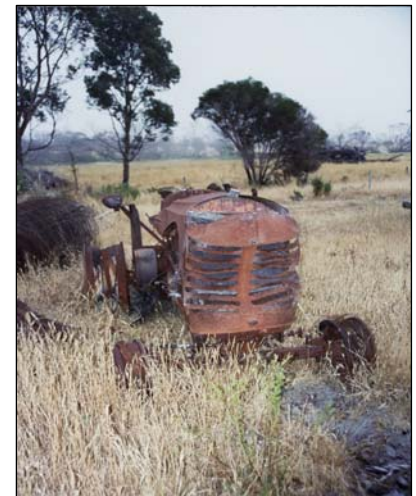
- Thirty-eight families from fire affected townships and regions participated.
- Residents from different generations, occupations and cultural backgrounds shared their unique experiences.
- Interviewees ranged in age from 28 – 92.

"That day. I regret what I did. I should never, ever have gone."

"It was just sheer bloody panic."

"We were engulfed by the fire, just as I got into the car..... I think I crashed the car into a tree stump and all the kids by that stage were hysterical."

"He was very insistent that we just go. I was dilly-dallying, doing the dishes."



Burnt tractor on a Greenpatch farm.



The researcher participated in fire fighter training with the local brigade.

3. Analysis

Interviews are being analysed with particular focus on the roles and dynamics within the family unit. This qualitative project delves into decision-making and the assumptions that underpin the 'prepare, stay and defend or go early' policy.



An interviewee provided access to the remains of the historic Greenpatch homestead.

4. Value and Outcomes

Acknowledging and understanding how families make decisions in critical times can help shape future bushfire education programs and contribute to the modification, application and implementation of the 'prepare, stay and defend or go early' policy.

- Co-authored a chapter, "Social contexts of responses to bushfire threat: a case study of the Wangary fire," for the Program C book.

- Presented preliminary findings: 'Women Continuing to Improve the Odds in Disaster Recovery' workshop in Port Lincoln, SA (12/2/07).