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Australian Institute of Criminology

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Media Release

Greater cooperation could help to reduce bushfire arson

Greater cooperation between agencies could assist national efforts to prevent deliberately lit bushfires, according to the Australian Institute of Criminology's (AIC) latest report.

Using crime prevention to reduce deliberate bushfires in Australia released today showed that arson costs the Australian community an estimated \$1.6 billion in damage each year.

AIC Research Manager Dr Judy Putt said that in addition to traditional education campaigns, Australia should also be looking at crime prevention strategies to reduce the incidence of deliberately lit bushfires.

"Around 50 percent of bushfires are deliberately lit or suspicious," Dr Putt said.

"Besides the economic and environmental costs, there are also social costs to bushfires, including injuries and death and the emotional and physical wellbeing of people who lose property to fire."

The report's author, Dr Damon Muller, said that bushfires are most frequently deliberately lit on weekends and that those areas where the bush meets the suburbs are most at risk.

The report suggests that a primary focus should be on understanding the situations in which bushfires occur and making changes to the environment or local community in order to prevent them from re-occurring.

"While prosecuting arsonists is an important deterrent, preventing the fire before it actually occurs presents an effective longer-term solution," Dr Muller said.

Successful arson prevention initiatives have included controlling access to and reducing fuel at hotspots by using controlled burning, the removal of dumped cars from bushland and education programs to assist young people in understanding the consequences of deliberate fire lighting.

"It is likely that arson prevention programs will require some creative thinking by fire agencies, police, local governments and local communities to address the problem," Dr Muller added.

The *Using crime prevention to reduce deliberate bushfires in Australia* report is available at www.aic.gov.au

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