



UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITIES PROJECT

THURINGOWA PERI-URBAN RESIDENTS AND BUSHFIRE

→ HOW KNOWLEDGEABLE ARE PEOPLE? WHAT ARE THEIR PERCEPTIONS OF SERVICE PROVIDERS AND OTHERS IN THEIR LOCALITY?

This bulletin summarises results from the Thuringowa Bushfire Survey 2005, which randomly sampled residents living outside the Thuringowa metropolitan area, within the jurisdiction of a Rural Fire Brigade Group (RFB). The survey response rate was 28%, with 263 surveys returned. Bulletin No. 6 provides the background to the Thuringowa Bushfire Survey, and this bulletin.

→ KNOWLEDGE OF FIRE SERVICES, BUSHFIRE AND MANAGEMENT

Residents appeared to have a good knowledge about their local fire brigade. For example, most (78%) knew that the RFB would come if they rang 000 about a fire in their locality. Some (19%) selected two services such as the RFB and the Metropolitan Fire Brigade, which may be possible depending on the locality and circumstances of the fire. A majority (62%) also knew that their local fire brigade members are voluntary/unpaid, however there were a number of residents (32%) who stated that they did not know. If residents wanted to do some burning on their property, they indicated that they would contact the Fire Warden (51%) or the RFB (35%), which further suggests a good general knowledge.

Residents also have a relatively good understanding of the bushfire season; most (92%) selected months that at least partially conform (i.e., some months conform, some do not) with the normal bushfire season as defined by the Rural Fire Service (i.e., August to December) (see Figure 1). Controlled burning was less understood; just over half of residents (54%) selected months that at least partially conform with the ideal controlled burning season as defined by the Rural Fire Service (i.e., June to August), and many (46%) selected months that did not conform at all (see Figure 1). Some residents however, may be confused with hazard-reduction burns, which are undertaken at various times of the year.

Knowledge of fire services and bushfire management may be dependent on a number of factors: results suggest that longer-term residents, and residents belonging to a community organisation may be more knowledgeable about their local fire service; and men, residents with household members belonging to a fire fighting organisation and those who have had past bushfire experience may be more knowledgeable about controlled burning.

Most residents were unaware of any arrangements their local council has for natural hazards in plans for property development, building regulations and counter disaster plans. Those that may be more aware include residents with good bushfire knowledge, males, over 40 year olds and households with a member belonging to a fire fighting organisation.

Residents who own their house may also be more aware of building regulations, and results suggest that such awareness, perhaps as a consequence of exposure to building regulations through buying/building their house, may lower bushfire risk perception.

Television or radio was clearly reported as the most useful information source about bushfire for residents; a third (33%) of residents selected it as their most useful information source. Television or radio was also most frequently rated in resident's top three most useful information sources about bushfire (see Figure 2). This was followed by newspapers and pamphlets in the mail.

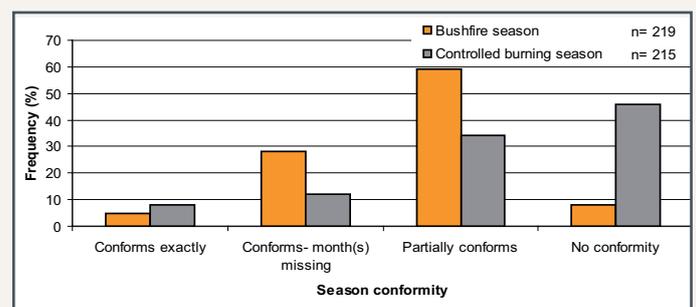


FIGURE 1 -RESIDENTS' CONFORMITY WITH THE "NORMAL" BUSHFIRE SEASON AND THE IDEAL CONTROLLED BURNING SEASON.

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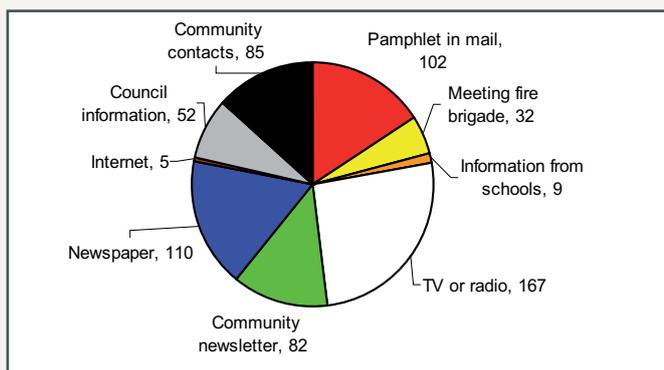


FIGURE 2 - MOST USEFUL INFORMATION SOURCES ABOUT BUSHFIRE ACCORDING TO FREQUENCY OF OCCURRENCE IN RESIDENTS' TOP THREE CHOICES

→ PERCEPTION OF THE BUSHFIRE HAZARD AND OTHERS

Overall, residents perceived the bushfire hazard in their locality as high, particularly those who lived on larger blocks and with past bushfire experience. Furthermore, most residents (61%) perceived others in their locality to be at risk from hazards. Despite this, residents tended to perceive the hazard to their own house as moderate to low. Therefore, residents appeared to believe that they are less vulnerable to hazards than others in the same locality, and others probably exposed to the same level of risk as themselves. This may be because residents perceive their neighbours to be less prepared, or because of other factors such as the location of their property (e.g., too close to bushland), or an inability to prepare for or escape from a hazard (e.g., the elderly), or 'it wouldn't happen to me' - denial.

Most residents (73%) were concerned about neighbours who did not clean up their property, particularly those who undertook preparation activities themselves, but a minority (29%) agreed that they talked to neighbours about the importance of cleaning up their property. Those who are more likely to talk to neighbours appear to be longer-term residents, over the age of 70 and without post-secondary education. The general lack of neighbourhood communication about hazard preparation could be due to a perception that people in their locality would be able to recover from a natural disaster in a short time (only 16% of residents thought that their community may not be able to do so).

→ PERCEPTION OF SERVICE PROVIDERS AND BUSHFIRE HAZARD MANAGEMENT

An overwhelming majority of residents agreed that the local fire brigade does a good job preparing for (80%) and fighting (87%) bushfires. A majority were also in agreement with controlled burning, they believed it makes the area safer from bushfires (92%), is necessary to maintain plant growth (64%) and that the smoke is an acceptable nuisance (75%). However, a number of residents (63%) were concerned for wildlife, particularly females and those who had not experienced a bushfire, and some (13%) believed that the smoke causes respiratory problems, particularly those with post-secondary education.

There may also be a relationship between perception of fire services and perception of controlled burning; the better the perception of fire services the more positively controlled burning is viewed.

A majority of residents (63%) agreed that the fire levy component of their council rates provides value for money, particularly residents with household members belonging to a fire fighting organisation. However, fewer residents agreed that there are adequate water supply points for bushfire (42%), particularly those with past bushfire experience, and that rubbish tips are readily available (55%), the lack of which both suburban and farming properties appeared to have problems with. There was general agreement (73%) that the grass in public areas is slashed.

In terms of enforcement to improve maintenance of properties for hazards, almost all residents indicated that local council, state and federal government enforcement should remain as it is at present or increase. Residents tending to want more enforcement included female residents, those who perceive the bushfire hazard as high, are concerned about neighbours who do not clean their property, those who talk to their neighbours about the importance of cleaning up their property, and those living on suburban and farming properties.

→ EXPECTATIONS OF SERVICE PROVIDERS

Most residents (93%), particularly newcomers (<10 years residence), agreed that they would rely on the local fire brigade if there was a bushfire in their locality. This is a concern for areas serviced by a volunteer brigade which may not be able to meet community expectations. For activities related to fire maintenance activities, few residents expected the RFB to take responsibility; rather property owners and the council were primarily viewed as responsible (see Figure 3).

Residents from different block sizes and who owned or rented their home did differ somewhat in their expectations of service providers; however this is addressed in Bulletins 7 and 8 respectively.

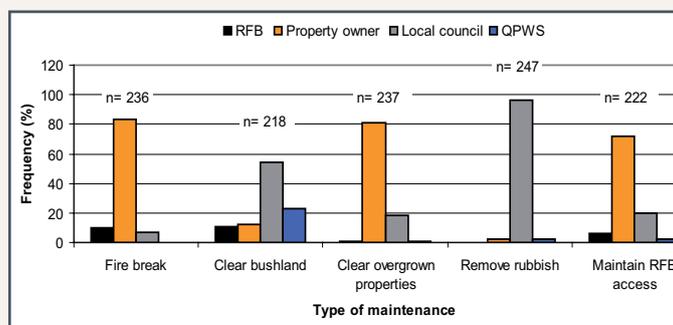


FIGURE 3. EXPECTATION OF RESPONSIBILITY FOR UNDERTAKING BUSHFIRE MAINTENANCE ACTIVITIES