



# UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITIES PROJECT

## THURINGOWA PERI-URBAN RESIDENTS AND BUSHFIRE

### → WHO PREPARES FOR BUSHFIRE?

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.

### → OVERALL PREPAREDNESS

Most residents (94%) stated that they did prepare for bushfire. The actions most often reported as being undertaken were cutting long grass and clearing rubbish out of the yard, followed by cleaning leaves from gutters, preparing a firebreak around the property, removing branches and undergrowth from around the house and checking the water supply. Preparing an evacuation plan was the least commonly undertaken activity (see Figure 1).

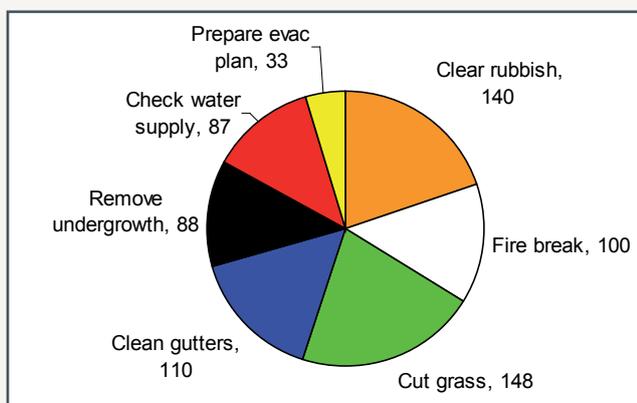


FIGURE 1. MOST IMPORTANT BUSHFIRE PREPARATION ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN BY RESIDENTS, ACCORDING TO FREQUENCY OF OCCURRENCE IN RESIDENTS' TOP THREE CHOICES

Observing bushfire, either through the media or controlled/uncontrolled fires in the area, was the most likely prompt for residents to think about preparing for bushfires (see Figure 2). Other prompts included observations of 'bushfire' weather and related conditions, and knowledge, experience and "common sense" relating to when preparation should be undertaken.

### → PERCEPTION OF THE BUSHFIRE HAZARD

Residents who perceived the bushfire hazard as high and were concerned about the bushfire hazard in their area were more likely to prepare for bushfire.

### → PAST BUSHFIRE EXPERIENCE

There is a weak link between bushfire experience and preparedness; residents with past bushfire experience may be more likely to prepare. This does not appear to depend on the length of time since the experience or the type of experience (i.e., whether the resident or the resident's property was threatened).

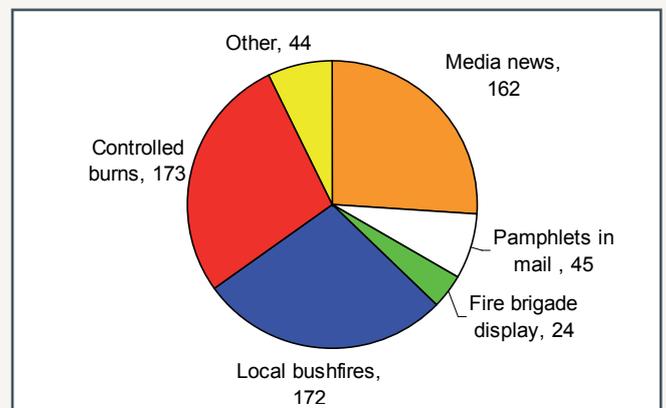


FIGURE 2. MOST LIKELY PROMPTS THAT MAKE RESIDENTS THINK ABOUT PREPARING FOR BUSHFIRES, ACCORDING TO FREQUENCY OF OCCURRENCE IN RESIDENTS' TOP THREE CHOICES

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#### → BLOCK SIZE

Residents living on different block sizes were equally likely to prepare, however the activities undertaken did vary. Those on larger blocks (~ ≥1 acre) were more likely to prepare firebreaks, cut long grass and check the water supply than those on smaller blocks (~ <1 acre) who were more likely to clean leaves from gutters.

Perception of responsibility may also determine activities undertaken, for example residents who believed that maintaining a firebreak was their responsibility would most likely undertake that activity.

#### → DEMOGRAPHICS

Bushfire preparation also appears to be undertaken by residents of various socio-economic backgrounds, however, similar to above, the activities undertaken may vary. For example, the preparation of a firebreak was slightly more likely to be undertaken by men, the self employed and tradespeople and those who work locally. An evacuation plan was slightly more likely to be prepared by females, those not working full time, office workers and household managers and households with children.

#### → OWNERS AND RENTERS

Residents who own or rent their home were equally likely to prepare for bushfire. Furthermore, the activities undertaken were similar, an exception was preparing an evacuation plan, which may be undertaken more often by renters.

#### → PROPERTY AND LOCATION VALUES

There is a weak pattern suggesting that residents who value trees and bushland in their locality and on their property may be less likely to undertake bushfire preparation activities that conflict with these values, such as maintaining a firebreak. However, it appears that community cohesion (i.e., high community values) may encourage preparation, particularly the lesser known activities such as checking the water supply and preparing an evacuation plan.

#### → ADEQUATE SERVICES FOR DISPOSAL OF WASTE

A surprisingly large number of residents stated that there were not adequate services to dispose of garden rubbish/green waste (32%) and household rubbish (16%) in their locality, but this did not appear to affect bushfire preparation activities. For example, people stating that there were not adequate services to dispose of green waste indicated that they still removed branches and undergrowth from around their house. However, whether these people are disposing of such waste in an appropriate place (i.e., the rubbish tip) cannot be confirmed; there were a number of comments indicating that some people burn their waste or dump it on roadsides or in the bush.