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PROGRAM: COMMUNICATING RISK

PROJECT: HUMAN BEHAVIOUR UNDER STRESS(2):

‘WAIT AND SEE’: THE ELEPHANT IN THE COMMUNITY BUSHFIRE SAFETY ROOM?

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Australasian fire agencies’ community bushfire safety policies recognise two safe courses of action under bushfire threat:

- 1. Leave well in advance of any predicted fire impact.**

OR

- 2. Stay and defend a suitably prepared property.**

These are encapsulated in the current AFAC bushfire safety position summary

PREPARE. ACT.SURVIVE

--and there is no provision for a ‘middle way’.

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afac Capgemini - scaled warnings and advice designshop

PREPARE. ACT. SURVIVE.

Questions for agencies will provide you with the most information on the subject through a range of the information. This is a message, a 2011 message that you can use. You need to understand the risks of message and information. This is a 2011 message that you can use.

It is important to do some things to make an official message and to be aware of what is happening around you as you wait for a warning in danger.

PREPARE

What will you do if a bushfire threatens your family, your house or your business? Do you have a bushfire plan and have you discussed it with your family?

You must decide what you are going to do well before the siren goes and make a **DECISION**.

What will you do to be safe?

- If you have an escape route and a fire plan, you are going to go. You are going to go there and what you are going to do.
- If you are going to leave - prepare for where you are going to go. You are going to go there and what you are going to do.
- If you are going to stay - prepare for a fire starting anywhere. This is a plan for how you are going to survive and where you will shelter. Find out the options you have and determine what advice you should be following to plan.

Prepare your home and your property to survive the fire. Shut your doors to leave the more you prepare. Shut your doors to leave the more you prepare. Shut your doors to leave the more you prepare.

Know where to find information. Know what to do and what to do. Know what to do and what to do. Know what to do and what to do.

ACT

Fire can threaten suddenly and without warning. You may hear a siren without receiving any warning. Listen for signs of fire, especially smoke and flames.

When you hear the danger siren for your area is high and listen for information on the radio and the internet.

Act decisively the moment you know there is danger. Do not wait for an official warning. Do not just "wait and see".

SURVIVE

The safest place is to be away from the fire. Stay in the open air. Stay in the open air. Stay in the open air.

Emergency Warning

Emergency warnings are used to tell you of a bushfire threat. They are used to tell you of a bushfire threat. They are used to tell you of a bushfire threat.

The message will be given by a siren. The message will be given by a siren. The message will be given by a siren.

Watch and Act

When you hear a siren, you must act. When you hear a siren, you must act. When you hear a siren, you must act.

When you hear a siren, you must act. When you hear a siren, you must act. When you hear a siren, you must act.

Bushfire Advice

When you hear a siren, you must act. When you hear a siren, you must act. When you hear a siren, you must act.

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Page: 1 of 1 Words: 1,079 English (U.S.)

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PREPARE. ACT. SURVIVE

ACT

Act decisively the moment you know there is a danger. Do not wait for an official warning. Do not just "wait and see".

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QUESTION: DO PEOPLE 'WAIT AND SEE'?


A. Rhodes (2007): several studies, most states, phone and mail surveys (N = 350 to 800), plus interviews.

Across all the studies:

'Intended to wait until told by authorities what to do':
11-23%

'Intended to wait but leave if they felt threatened'
17-32%

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QUESTION: DO PEOPLE PLAN TO 'WAIT AND SEE'?


McLennan, Elliott & Omodei (2012)

Interviews with 457 survivors of the 2009 Victorian 'Black Saturday' bushfires:

Bushfire Survival Plan?

Leave Safely	23%	XXXXXXXXXX
Stay and Defend	50%	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
Wait and See	6%	XX
Unclear Plan	13%	XXXXXX
NO Plan	8%	XXX

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QUESTION: HOW MANY 'WAITED TO SEE'? 

McLennan, Elliott & Omodei (2012)
Interviews with 457 survivors of the 2009 Victorian 'Black Saturday' bushfires:

Bushfire Survival (?) Action:

Left previous day	2% X
Left early, no warning	4% XX
Left, warning	26% XXXXXXXXXXXX
Left, threat imminent	17% XXXXXXXX
Stayed and defended	49% XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
Sheltered passively	2% X

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DO PEOPLE STILL INTEND TO 'WAIT AND SEE'? 


McLennan, Elliott, Beatson & Omodei (2012) surveyed 544 residents in bushfire-risk locations in: Tasmania, NSW, ACT, N-E Victoria.

Now imagine that during the fire season you and all those who normally reside with you are at home. It has been declared a day of "Extreme Fire Danger", and there is a Total Fire Ban for your Region of the State/Territory. At about 3pm you become aware of a warning (on the radio, or a web site, or by email, or text, or telephone) that there is a large bushfire burning out of control and that it will probably hit your location in 1-2 hours. You look outside and see a large plume of smoke being blown toward your property.

What do you think you would most likely decide to do?

- Leave as soon as you can
- Stay to defend the home
- Wait and see what develops, before finally deciding whether or not to leave, or to stay and defend.**


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What do you think you would most likely decide to do? (N = 544)

- a. Leave as soon as you can: N = 256 (47%)
- b. Stay to defend the home: N = 126 (23%)
- c. **Wait and see what develops, before finally deciding whether or not to leave, or to stay and defend: N = 162 (30%)**

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WHY WOULD 30% OF THOSE SURVEYED INTEND TO 'WAIT AND SEE'?

11 POSSIBLE REASONS, "HOW IMPORTANT?":
 % "VERY IMPORTANT":

1. Need to be certain that it is safe to leave	41%	XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
2. What if I could have saved my house?	19%	XXXXXXXXXX
3. Worried about returning for livestock	18%	XXXXXXXXXX
4. Confident I could defend if not 'catastrophic'	14%	XXXXXXX
5. Worried about not being able to return	13%	XXXXXX
6. Inconvenience - unnecessary	8%	XXX
7. Worried about looters	6%	XX
8. Nowhere to take pets	5%	XX
9. No suitable accommodation elsewhere	2%	X
10. Elderly/disabled family members	1%	.
11. Feel embarrassed if no fire came.	1%	.

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REASONS TO 'WAIT AND SEE' – OWN WORDS



162 residents who intended to 'wait and see', 91 "own words" write-in descriptions, 99 reasons for 'waiting to see':

1. Low risk involved in waiting: 52%

- Probability of fire impact low
- Threat level if fire impacted low
- Safe, easy, last minute escape option
- Ample time for decision.

2. Others will warn, advise, direct, protect: 19%

- Agencies
- Family/neighbours.

3. Self-reliant confidence of survival: 16%

- Self-efficacy
- Preparedness.

4. Reluctance to leave due to potential cost & risk factors: 9%

- Unnecessary house loss; danger in leaving.

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REASONS FOR NOT LEAVING EARLY – OWN WORDS



162 residents who intended to 'wait and see', 136 "own words" write-in descriptions, 150 reasons for not leaving early:

1. Low risk involved in waiting: 45%

- Probability of fire impact low; Threat level if fire impacted low; Safe, easy, last minute escape option; Ample time for decision.

2. Reluctance to leave - potential cost & risk: 31%

- Unnecessary house loss, danger in leaving.

3. Self-reliant confidence of survival: 12%

- Self-efficacy; Preparedness.

4. Others will warn, advise, direct, protect: 7%

- Agencies; Family/neighbours.

5. Need time to protect house: 3%

6. No means of leaving: 2%

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REASONS FOR NOT DECIDING TO STAY AND DEFEND - OWN WORDS



162 residents who intended to 'wait and see', 95 "own words" write-in descriptions of their reasons for not deciding to stay and defend:

1. Dangers for self and others: **58%**
2. Depends on the emerging level of threat: **21%**
3. Age, infirmity, disability: **12%**
4. Will depend on warnings from agencies: **7%**
5. Renting – who cares about the house?: **2%**

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WHAT DO WE HAVE ABOUT 'WAIT AND SEE'?



1. Fire agencies condemn such behaviour.
2. But significant numbers of householders in bushfire risk areas:
 - (a) Have waited to see, on receipt of a bushfire warning.
 - (b) Plan to wait and see in case of a bushfire warning.
 - (c) Almost certainly will wait and see over the course of future fire seasons.
 - (d) And do so for what seem (to them) very sound and sensible reasons!

-----Where does this leave those of us involved in our various ways with community bushfire safety?

[without any elephants?]

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WHAT IS TO BE DONE ABOUT 'WAIT AND SEE'?



Does anything need to be done? Since it is all so difficult, why not just ignore the situation about 'wait and see' and carry on as if people will do as directed and not 'wait and see'?

Two potential problems:

1. IF 'waiting to see' is so dangerous, is there not a moral duty to address the issue?
2. Is there a danger that the messenger (fire agencies) may be discredited along with the (widely ignored) message?

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Could fire agencies' current community bushfire safety programs be made more effective? That is, more of the same only better: more resources, better directed, more effectively delivered?

Possibly?

OR is the current 'do not wait and see' message equivalent to a 'just say no and don't do it' approach to sex education?

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Are there other approaches which will have better outcomes--that is, fewer householders in danger under imminent bushfire threats?

We now have some evidence about the reasonings which drive 'waiting and seeing'.

How can it be used?

SOME DISCUSSION PROMPTS:

1. EMPHASISE PROPERTY/HOUSE PROTECTION MEASURES SEPARATELY FROM PROPERTY DEFENCE:
"SAFEST PLACE DURING A BUSHFIRE IS SOMEWHERE ELSE, EVEN BETTER WHEN YOUR HOUSE IS STILL THERE WHEN YOU RETURN!"
2. CAN MORE BE DONE TO PROMOTE/ENCOURAGE LOW-COST SIMPLE MITIGATION MEASURES?
3. LOOK TO THE HEALTH PROMOTION AND INJURY PREVENTION RESEARCH LITERATURE—EMPHASIS OF THREAT AND INDUCTION OF FEAR NEEDS TO BE MATCHED BY *"...AND THIS IS WHAT TO DO AND HOW TO DO IT: IT IS EASY AND NOT TOO COSTLY AND IT WORKS!"*
4. EMBRACE THE FACT THAT MANY WILL WAIT AND SEE, ACCEPT IT AS AN INEVITABLE REALITY.
"DON'T JUST WAIT AND SEE—PLAN WHAT WILL TRIGGER YOUR SURVIVAL DECISION AND ACTION!"

Over to you!