

TO THE READER

This document is being used by Engine Room Solutions for testing DOI production, prior to launching our Journal of Australian Postgraduate Research. It is the text of a Three Minute Thesis presentation by Dr Rachel Westcott given at the Bushfire & Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre's Research Showcase in Adelaide, South Australia, in July 2017. The audio is available at: <http://www.bnhcrc.com.au/resources/presentation-audio-video/3834>

HOW TO BECOME BUSHFIRE-PREPARED WITHOUT REALLY NOTICING

BE FIRE-FIT! WEEKLY IS WORTH IT!

It is widely acknowledged that preparedness for bushfires, and other hazards, is persistently too low. My research is about building a culture of preparedness – to be “fire-fit” – as a routine part of everyday life – as routine as buying the groceries or putting fuel in a car. It becomes a ‘social norm’ that can help save human life.

Climate change is the biggest public health risk of the 21st century. Severe weather events are the new normal. We can save human lives, reduce psychosocial trauma and everything that goes with it (including the massive costs) by making people and communities fire-fit.

I talked to my research participant groups – emergency responders and the owners of any kind of animal – on South Australia's bushfire at-risk Lower Eyre Peninsula, to come up with ways to help make this happen. These are some of my recommendations from my research findings:

FIRSTLY

1. Create a new type of workplace leave which I've called: *Catastrophic Day Leave*, giving employees the ability to trade other leave or overtime *specifically* for the purpose of putting their survival plans into action. This can be written into individual employee contracts.

SECONDLY

2. Give new residents a financial incentive to attend fire-safe seminars by offering a significant discount on their second year's council rates.

THIRDLY

3. Reward “best-practice”
 - identify excellence in property preparedness
 - give rebates *independent* of Emergency Services levies
 - use bushfire compliance to value-add to properties at point of sale
 - hold fire-ready open days – like open garden schemes
 - give public awards for *Bushfire Best-Prepared towns*

NEXT

4. Bring back fire breaks on farms and rural living blocks
 - maybe with a by-law?
 - a little shared loss could mean a lot of people are safer
 - consider planting more flammable crops further away from valuable infrastructure and assets

THEN

5. Use the social microclimate to advantage – syncing multiple sources of synergistic information from
 - Schools
 - The workplace
 - The family

FINALLY

6. Resource sharing – because available funds are not becoming any easier to source

These encourage MEDIUM to LONG term changes to public health and safety policy.

Make Catastrophic Day leave an optional, but FORMAL type of workplace leave.

Give new people easily accessible fire safety information and reward them for joining in.

Publicly acknowledge best practice.

Give farmers incentive to put in firebreaks, and think about crop placement.

Maximise the potential of multiple social microclimates.

New, straightforward public policy can help achieve this so that effective fire-fitness becomes just another part of daily life.