



MEDIA RELEASE

Research gives insight into community bush fire response

12 February 2018

A year after some of the worst fire conditions ever experienced in NSW history, a new research report has found many people continue to underestimate the risk of fire.

The NSW Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS) and Bushfire & Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre conducted community research following the fires of January and February 2017, including fires at Carwoola and Currandooley in southern NSW, and the Sir Ivan bush fire near Coonabarabran.

The research, led by the University of Wollongong, has found that while the majority of people understood the danger of fires at a highest fire danger level, many underappreciate the risks to life and property on days that are not Catastrophic.

It has also found that in some areas, such as around the Sir Ivan fire, there was a mismatch between the expectations of the community about the ability of fire services to fight such a large and destructive fire, and what was possible given the dangerous conditions.

“The fires of January and February 2017, peaking with Catastrophic conditions on 12 February, were amongst the most dangerous conditions we’ve ever experienced in NSW,” Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons said.

“Fires at a Catastrophic level are as bad as it gets – large, destructive and extremely difficult to control – and posing serious risk to the community and firefighters.

“We should be forever grateful that there was no serious injury or loss of human life during the worst of conditions. This is a credit to both the community and fire agencies.

“We need to understand how the community responds to these types of incidents, but the community also needs to understand the limitations in efforts to stop the fire and protect homes and properties.

“The research also highlights that people in bush fire prone areas need to understand that it doesn’t have to be a Catastrophic day for fires to threaten homes, properties, agricultural assets and lives.

“Importantly, the research shows that the community is taking steps to prepare and stay informed during fires but there is always room for improvement,” Commissioner Fitzsimmons said.



Other findings include:

- A majority of people found warnings during the fires easy to understand, up-to-date and useful, with 88 percent finding Fires Near Me easy to understand;
- 88 percent found fire danger warnings about the Catastrophic conditions easy to understand, with 63 percent using them as a trigger to discuss the threat with family, friends or neighbours;
- Nearly two in three used social media to access information about fires in their area.

A full copy of the research report is available at www.bnhcrc.com.au, including a Hazard Note summarising the key issues from the report.



For more information contact the State Duty Media Officer on 9898 1855
For current incidents or major fire updates visit www.rfs.nsw.gov.au
