



Getting Ready for a an EI Nino Summer

Chair: Malcolm Hackett OAM

Panel members: Parvathi Subramiam
Craig Lapsley
Danielle Clode

Malcolm

Now we're going to have a panel session where we follow up some of the key ideas that have been discussed in these themes. Danielle's going to join us. To kick it off often we talk about individuals preparing a plan, have you got your plan? Then the way we used to talk about family plans. Now we're much more encompassing and we talk about households.

We will start with you Danielle, do you want to say something about that notion of what it means for a household to produce a collaborative plan?

Danielle

Thanks Malcolm. I guess the issue of households is a really important one and certainly Craig and Parvathi both touched on this in their presentations. That different people in the household will have different views. And I really appreciated Craig talking about taking on board people's personalities because very often we can discuss plans or mention plans but we find that one person will have a plan and another person might have a completely different plan they haven't discussed or they've agreed to the other plan but then on the day they switch and change back to their old plan.

It's really common to have circumstances where one partner is absolutely sure that they're leaving early, they've got everything packed, they're ready to go and on the day the other partner decides nope they're going to stay and defend and that can cause a lot of conflict and a lot of stress. We can end up with people being left to defend on their own. We can end up with people who don't know what's happened to their partner on the day so there's all sorts of terrible consequences from that lack of conversation and I guess it's also important to remember that it's no good us making a plan and being certain that's what the plan is if we're not 100% sure that the other person is committed to it.

You have to make a realistic plan and you have to be prepared for the consequences of that plan, so that household plan is really important. And we also have to think about who's in the household and how the household changes. So being flexible to whether you're going to have teenagers visiting or some of them not being at home or other people visiting you on the day. Your household is a moveable feast, who's there on the day will differ depending, as Craig said on the time of year and what's happening in your community. All those things need to be taken into account. It's very hard to actually have a simple plan that one member of the household decides upon, it's got to be a little bit flexible, it's got to be more encompassing. And it's got to include a broader swath of people I suppose.

Malcolm

Craig, you did talk about going for a property walk and that would be a terrific way I imagine to include people, do you want to say something about that?

Craig

I think it's one of the most fundamental things. It's easy to sit at the kitchen table and draw up a plan. It's probably a very good starting point to get people around the table and have that discussion. But I think if you actually did the property walk, and depending on the size of the property, went down and actually thought about how fire will travel in your property and it won't always come one way. Quite often we think a fire will come from the northeast or it'll come from the north. Embers could drop in behind you. There's no given one way a fire will move into your property, so I think that's important. The other one is as you walk around your property look at the things that you can do something with, the flowerbeds or the gardens that are right up against the property versus what's down the back of the property. What's over the fence? Look over the fence and look about the piece of land that you don't own. It might be shire land, it might be a neighbour's piece of land. Those things are important, but if you walk it and talk it that's a critical part of the plan.

And don't think just because you've done it in October or August or September. It's one of those things that the place changes as you move through the spring into the summer period the property will change. So to walk it and think about that environment I think is quite fundamental. To feel it, to think about what fire will do. Don't underestimate smoke. Because quite often there'll be smoke in the area that will prompt you to think what am I doing if you're still there. Smoke can be very disorientating. So think that through, think about the environments change.

We have a tendency to plan during the day. Think about it at night. Go for a walk when it's dark and just take a torch and think "Okay. Instead of it being dark this is actually smoke, I can't see and I'm going to try and put the trailer on the car in the dark." All of a sudden, it'll change your opinion about how much work you need to do early. Because you try and couple the caravan up or the horse load in the dark by yourself with a torch and nothing else and all of a sudden, you'll start to think this is actually difficult, this can be actually very stressful if it's done in a rush in a hurry and you'll get it wrong.

I'll just prompt people to run a scenario, a different scenario. It's too easy to do it at 2 o'clock in the afternoon or 10 o'clock in the morning and think it through and think "I've got this. I've got it." And as the three of us indicated, time of day, of week, the time the period you're in. Early part of summer versus the really critical February part of summer, they are different. Different scenarios come up. So that talk/walk scenarios I think is really fundamental, and it's quite practical. It's actually just trying to put yourself into a different spot and get your imagination working about the circumstances that are going to change in your environment. Because quite often we plan where the environment is total control and we're in control of it. Change the environment and challenge yourself to say how am I going to do that, and can I do it?

Malcolm

Parvathi is there anything you'd want to add to that?

Parvathi

I would just echo what everybody has already said around being bold and starting the conversation. One of the activities in our course actually is to bring this capability wheel to your dinner table and see what conversation that sparks. I think it's really important to have every member of your household involved in this conversation as well and keeping things as practical as possible. So this plan it should be your plan to act, it should be the actions that you're going to take and being as specific as possible with this is really helpful to know the feasibility of those actions.

We're saying that we're going to pack all these things. What does that look like? Who's going to do them? That sort of thing. That's what this series of conversations in the P-CEP is all about. It's getting everyone's priority so that you're not having to make those hard decisions because you've been unprepared. You've actually planned to take all of the things that you want to take and you've planned to account for everybody's needs. And I think that if I can encourage anyone to do anything is just to start this conversation. Danielle mentioned a lot of the time when we have the conversation with even our family members, we're all on different pages because we don't have these conversations together. So see where everyone's at, what everyone's thinking and how you can again combine and leverage each other's strengths as well to work cohesively.

Malcolm

I guess we could take this to the next level which I guess is talking about what about your neighbours? Danielle you've handled a lot of experience working in neighbourhoods getting neighbours on the same page or at least knowing what everyone's doing. Have you got any advice on that?

Danielle

I think it's really important to know what your neighbours are doing just simply in order to be reassured of what their plans are and what they're likely to do. You don't want to be worrying about your neighbours in a fire event or even rushing off to try and help them if they've actually already left. So it's really useful to talk through your plans and their plans. Also sometimes neighbours might be thinking that they can rely on you to come and defend their house when they're not there and you might not have any intention of doing that so that can also cause problems if your neighbours need somebody to set off their fire pump or something like that.

It's really important to discuss what other people's expectations are. It does depend upon the size of the property you're talking about. If your neighbours are within 100m of your own house then their preparation will have a big impact on your ability to defend and protect yourself or the survivability of your property or how you respond to a fire or other disaster. So that's why it becomes important. We've seen in a lot of neighbourhoods where there are a lot of holiday homes for example. Holiday homes are often undefended or they may be unprepared and that then puts neighbours at risk. So you do need to have a neighbourhood policy. Usually bushfires don't impact just on one house, they impact on the whole area and how everybody responds has an impact on everybody else.

Malcolm

Craig, getting a neighbour who isn't invested in the property that you're walking across could be a good check.

Craig: absolutely.

Malcolm: And it probably would help start the conversation too.

Craig

Many eyes will see many things as Danielle said. An understanding of what the neighbour has done, has an expectation to do and all those sort of things are important. The other one that I probably zipped over too quickly was the school plan. If you've got children in school, children in day care, or there is a carer of some kind, what's happening there? That's really important. Children will drive a lot of decisions and if they're not at home and they're at school to know what the school plan is really important. So I just think it's what you do but it's where the other things that impact on what you're doing is absolutely fundamental.

Good discussion and every time you talk about this Malcolm it leads to another friend or another opportunity, it never exhausts itself about how to get a good plan. And for that reason we shouldn't overstress either, you've got to take it in your stride. And so much you need a bit of a smile on your face to be able to do it because it can actually be quite onerous as you walk through and you don't want to end up at a dead end, you want to actually be able to walk through and go "that's a possibility", or "I realized that I can't do much about that."

Those things are important in your discussion. Because there's nothing worse than doing a plan and being more stressed at the end of the plan than at the start of the plan. That's not what this is about. It's about trying to just tease out the options. And like I said know your capability and know how you do it and when to reach to others whether it be neighbour family or friends.

Malcolm

Parvathi you want to add anything to that?

Parvathi

I might just add by telling a quick story that brings us together around the importance of checking in and talking and collaborating with your neighbours but then also starting this process. We worked with a group of people in Victoria that were at risk of fire and flood. They learned about P-CEP. They made their P-CEP plans and one person in particular was very diligent, they got up to the point of their plan where they covered off a Plan A, Plan B and a Plan C where if they had to evacuate their home. They were a wheelchair user. Plan A would be that they would leave with their husband and their husband would drive, plan B was if their husband wasn't there their adult son would drive and help them to evacuate and then Plan C was where it got quite contentious, because if both of those people were unavailable for whatever reason (because you never know when you're going to have to leave), they didn't know what they were going to do. So we got talking and brainstorming as step three is all about and said, "Well who else could you ask?" And first it was "They're the only family I have in the area. If I have to evacuate my friends will have to evacuate so I can't rely on them in that situation." Okay. And then we got to talking around how this person lived within a complex of other houses. So we said I wonder what your neighbour's plans are at that time, I wonder if anyone will be available or what is going to happen.

So they said "You know what? I've never actually thought to ask these proximal supports" so off they went and had the conversation with their neighbours and sure enough they had plenty of volunteers around "Oh you just need me to drive the car? You have the car. You know how to get in. You've got all your stuff ready to go, you just need someone to physically start the car and drive to where you're going to evacuate to which you've already worked out? For sure I can do that for

you." I think to put a positive spin on this we all do need to collaborate and come together to make these plans work and strengthen our resilience as a community as a whole as well. These can be the really positive things that come up. As I've talked about with P-CEP it's not just about emergency situations, it's also about the everyday as well. So that also then started a relationship where there was a greater support network in an everyday sense as well. So there can be other more short-term benefits that come from having these conversations.

Malcolm

When we've had those discussions in the household and then with the immediate neighbours what are the information resources? I can think of the local CFA and that they could be supportive with information, but where else would you go to get good information? Danielle, do you want to have a crack first?

Danielle

There are loads of places you can get more information. Often it is just about talking to other people in the district. Often some of the best information you might get us is from your neighbours. You might have neighbours who've been through these experiences before or connections within the community who have had fire experiences and can share their thoughts and ideas about that as well. There's obviously all the official sources which we generally know about from councils and from CFS and from the bushfire resiliency people as well, so these are all great sources.

But I do think people tend to set a lot more store by information they get from their trusted neighbours and friends and family members. And you do have to be a little bit careful about what information you get, you have to critically assess it because sometimes it might not be as appropriate as others. But it is worthwhile drawing on those resources and drawing from people with experiences in your area about how fires might behave what might happen and all those sorts of things.

Parvathi

I would definitely encourage you to look at the emergency services. I guess the challenge that can come around this is how accessible and meaningful that information is. I think there's no limit to the amount we can learn around risk. But that's why that step two of the P-CEP is about personalizing risk and really understanding what that risk looks like for you. Because being able to do that is what guides you in terms of the actions you can take. There are actions we can all take that are a bit more generic around how we protect our property and these are the things that you should have in an emergency kit for example. But there are going to be unique things for each of us that only come from us personalizing and thinking about what's going to happen to me or my family or this person in my family when this happens. That won't come from any one resource or checklist, it really requires you to personalize and think about and reflect on that situation as well. I also would suggest being quite curious and exploring those resources together. The CFA I know although I'm in New South Wales so RFS and Fire and Rescue New South Wales as well as the NCS. They have a number of resources that they've developed in easy English or maths which help understanding. They have resources they've developed in other languages. They have resources they've developed for children, so I think it's also about having a search and finding things that suit you well as well as suit what you need to learn about too.

Malcolm

Craig, are there any things you'd want to add?

Craig

I think it goes back to where your recreation or your networks lay in the community. Neighbourhood House, Men Sheds, sporting organizations. It might be neighbourhood houses because they do have plans about what they do and how they support people. But the municipality's Fire Authority is absolutely a starting point. But then what are your networks? The horse club. If you're involved with horses all of a sudden the discussion goes on there will be really important because that could be a place that you gather you've got ideas you're dealing with the same issue. So we've all got horses. What are we going to do with horses?

Those sorts of things are really important. So sporting clubs Men's Sheds, Neighbourhood House, schools, whatever you're involved in to have that discussion I think is important and use those networks and understand what other people are thinking. But also what do those networks offer to assist you in your planning and to assist you in the time of action? Don't keep it to yourself, I think the message here is reach out to the neighbours and then reach out to those groups you're involved in and they'll all have something to contribute that then you can tailor for your plan.