

Safety actions for the fire season

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Malcolm

Let's have a look at some of the thorny issues that have come up. This is repeated in a few of the questions. Residents will need to leave by roads that are likely to be inadequate for mass evacuation. What is the official policy and specific planning to prevent blocked roads and facilitate rapid exit ahead of a fire? And there was another question about evacuation from somewhere from an urban area.

Craig

To me road congestion will always be an issue when we get high level of activities. Hence why leaving early is one of the greatest options. You think about it. If you leave early you're in command, you're in charge of this and you can go somewhere. If you wait and the roads are clogged - Jamie had a couple of photos in his presentation of roads leading into Anglesey on the Great Ocean Road. Police will do their best. But again it only takes one tree to fall over a road. That's all it takes. It only takes one accident. It only takes someone with a caravan or a horse float that wants to turn around. And all of a sudden it blocks up the traffic not only for minutes. It can be hours.

The reason of leaving early is to be out of there and not get caught on roads. Certainly in your plan think about more than one way if that's possible. But not everyone has two or three options. Also know the pinch points of roads. It doesn't matter where you are you'll know the pinch points. When it's busy where does all the traffic back up at 4 o'clock in the afternoon when it's school days and so on. It's got to be part of your plan. None of us can give it to you. It's simply got to be something you're thinking about, not only in your backyard but the points of egress and the best point of egress. You might find authorities have closed roads early and you do have to take the secondary or third options. But again Malcolm I think the leave early message is the best message. I know that's not always what everyone can do. And the hardest one is when the fire starts on top of you and the authorities are saying it is time to leave or they tell you "you can't leave". So there are many options there. And the sad part about it for us is we haven't got a single answer for that question.

Jamie

Build that into your planning. When the road's blocked what do you do then? Set your trigger points. You're right there won't be enough to guarantee movement of traffic. That's going to be one of the ones where if it works it's a bonus.

Malcolm

This question is in a sense related to that is and how effective is a neighbourhood safer place and under what conditions should it be accessed? This person says the local one is an open area on a dirt road in a small community settlement about 6km from their township. What are your thoughts?

Craig

It's not an easy answer. It's a reality answer. The words that go after neighbourhood safer place are a place of last resort. That's really important to understand. It's not a primary place. It's a place of last resort. 99% are open in a football ground, an open space. They've done the science behind it. If you're in Marysville in 2009 will tell you that the experience in the middle of the oval where the cars were clustered together and what the people experienced was as traumatic as what it would have been on the roads and it was as traumatic as if they had been at home. However they clustered together and that's why a neighbourhood safer place was built in legislation - to give an option. But it's a last resort option.

Know them even on your routes of travel. But if you do have to travel a distance and there's some on the way they are important to understand. But again if you are needing to use a neighbourhood safer place, a place of last resort, you will be fatigued, you will experience extreme weather, smoke and even fire. So it's not as if you're away from it. You're just in a place that's cleared and it's cleared for a reason. It's got a good purpose and it is a good thing. However it's not the place that you should plan to be part of. Plan to be away from it. Get out of the area.

Jamie

That's planning. What's Plan B, then your Plan C. CFA have got some great things if you are in a car or if you are in these remote areas. There are some guidelines to the precautions you can take. But again it comes down to those Plans A B C D. The neighbourhood safer place might be that bit and then the next level might be just trying to get through it. And it's going to be horrible. It's just going to be horrific. If you're not there you're not experiencing it.

Malcolm

There's a number of questions that I think are difficult because what they're really asking is what if I don't want to constantly leave because I know it's a bad day coming up but I want to stay to see whether it's going to be bad. This is the real world thoughts going on in people's heads about I don't want to leave every time I'm told it's bad. I want to decide when it's bad.

Jamie

You're right. *The Ostrich Paradox - Why we under prepare for disasters* is a really good book. It's that human element. We all know what we should be doing but let's just be real, we're human so people won't do what we need them to do. There's six key biases they found why we do. Once you understand you build them into your planning. If you understand why people won't leave early and all these types of things. There's myopia, amnesia, optimism, inertia, simplification, and hurting biases. So these are the studies why people under prepare or don't do it. This is what we've got to start doing.

There's that much information of what to do. We've got to start drilling at why aren't they doing it? That's what the reality is. People won't and how do we manage that bit? What their thinking is build this into your planning, understanding what affection you can actually take those into account and build a better plan. I think it really good to have to help with your planning.

Malcolm

Here's a question that isn't really related to the webinar but it's come up I guess from thoughts coming out of other webinars. It says we know around 80% of houses lost in bushfires are caused by embers. Would it be helpful if government made a subsidy available for specialist tradesmen to ember proof houses of residence for a small fee? This might enable people to have more confidence in using their home as a radiant heat shield when it's too late to leave. Anyone want to offer a comment?

Steve

I don't know why the government would do that anymore than they do a whole bunch of other things for us. And we've become a very dependent society. You pay insurance. Putting gutter guards on your house is just part of your insurance. It's up to you if you want to use your house as a place of safety. It's one of the preparedness things just like sealing under floors, taking all the rubbish away, a whole bunch of things. The responsibility for the land is the property owner. And if you don't want to do that, if you don't have the money for it, don't want to do it, don't think it's your thing, then your place probably isn't going to save your life. So having a plan to leave will be your plan.

Malcolm

It does seem to me that one of the things that the responses in most of these webinars have thrown up is this idea about whose responsibility is it to make those decisions? And in most cases people do take it upon themselves to make those decisions. And in a sense you have to recognize that yes it is your responsibility. It seems to come up time and time again. It's your responsibility whether you're going to spend money, or your responsibility whether you're going to take the family out every time it's a threatening day. And in general we don't want governments to make those decisions for us.

You mentioned gutter guards. Here is a question that's related. They want to know does filling up gutters with water reduce the effects of fire damage? Justin Leonard has told us on numerous occasions it's going to put the embers out that fall on your roof that come down into your gutters and won't get blown inside. But anyone else got anything to add to that?

Steve

It's not an unworthy thing to do. We were talking about tennis balls the other day. Don't use tennis balls. They'll just get in your drain pipes and block them. There are proprietary plugs you can buy from hardware stores. They're great. Don't injure yourself while you're doing it when climbing the ladder in haste and doing things. This is one of the things you do the day before or when you know there's a fire somewhere in the area. And you can put those plugs in place the night before, or the day before, even the week before if you don't have any rain and put some water in your gutters. Just take them out before it starts raining again otherwise you might get a flood back inside your house.

Malcolm

The emergency app tells us about locations of fires. Is there anything that tells us about locations of closed roads?

Craig

Yes there is. The VicRoads website shows closed roads. However in the initial stages police may block a road with a police vehicle. That action is not guaranteed to be on the VicRoads site straightaway. There could be a delay. If a road has been closed because there's a tree over it or we've closed the road and redirected for a reason doesn't mean it is automatically displayed. But over time the VicRoads website would show closed roads.

Malcolm

Thank you gentlemen for your presentations and for your input tonight.