



At-Risk People Strategy

Improving the safety of at-risk people by assisting them to be better prepared for bushfire and other hazards

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) bushfire program is targeted at specific communities in high priority locations. However, it is not reaching all at-risk people and the organisations that service them. Therefore it was recommended¹ that DFES undertake research to highlight gaps in services for at-risk people and, through a strategy provide opportunities to improve them.

The purpose of this strategy is to provide direction to DFES and information to stakeholders to assist at-risk people to be better prepared for bushfire.

For this strategy, the definition of at-risk is *'People who are unable to receive, understand or act on information, prior to or during an emergency'²*.

A DFES report³ highlighted a common theme; responsibility for bushfire planning and preparing must be shared between government, service providers and the wider community.

After research, DFES consulted with over 37 agencies and providers in Western Australia. This consultation occurred alongside discussions with national partners in South Australia and Victoria. Overall two key themes were identified during this process:

1. Service providers need criteria to determine the level of risk for their client, based on the client's ability to receive, act on or understand information prior to or during an emergency. This then establishes the level of involvement required from the provider during a bushfire emergency.
2. At-risk people in their own homes are more vulnerable in a bushfire emergency than those living in residential care.

The strategy explains what must happen in order for at-risk people to be better prepared for bushfire emergencies. To achieve this objective, DFES will involve partner agencies by providing online and workshop training across the sectors. As noted by stakeholders during consultation, the training packages developed will allow service providers to support at-risk clients in being better prepared for bushfire, by providing simple, clear messages and realistic objectives for providers that have limited contact with at-risk clients.



The strategy's success will rely on agency and service provider participation. Along with their commitment to sharing the responsibility to assist at-risk people being better prepared for emergencies, DFES will continue to engage with agencies and providers to encourage participation.

DFES has committed resources to implement this strategy.

Key recommendations are:

1. Adopt this strategy and develop and deliver training to service providers on how to assist their clients to be bushfire-ready. This will involve creating the above mentioned criteria to help service providers identify a client's level of risk.
2. Establish a working group to assist in the development of training packages and the implementation of the pilot program.
3. Initiate discussion with key agencies around emergency evacuation plans for at-risk facilities⁴ to ensure evacuation plans go beyond the car park.
4. Continue to consult and engage with other stakeholders on a state and national level.
5. Expand DFES training to include broader hazards⁵ across the WA state.

¹ Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission and A Shared Responsibility: The Report of the Perth Hills Bushfire

² Australasian Fire Authority Council definition

³ At-risk people and hard to reach communities: a report on current good practice for Western Australia

⁴ Childcare, residential care

⁵ storm, flood, cyclone, tsunami



PURPOSE

The Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) currently coordinates a Bushfire Program that educates the community on bushfire risk, and builds local capacity to prepare and respond. The program is targeted at specific communities. However, it is not reaching all at-risk people and the organisations that provide services to them. This increases this group's exposure to hazards, such as bushfire. Therefore it was recommended⁶ that DFES undertake research to highlight gaps in services for at-risk people, and through a strategy provide opportunities to improve them.

The strategy will provide direction to DFES and information to their stakeholders. Once implemented, it will help service providers assist at-risk people to be better prepared for bushfire and other hazards across the WA state.

For this strategy, the definition of at-risk is *'People who are unable to receive, understand, or act on information, prior to or during an emergency'*.

OBJECTIVES

- Improve planning and preparation of at-risk people for bushfire with intention to expand to other hazards
- Encourage a shared responsibility between DFES, stakeholders and the wider community, now and for the future
- Employ a full-time 'At Risk Communities Program Officer' to develop and deliver training.

STRATEGY

The strategy provides direction to DFES on how to improve the safety of at-risk people by assisting them to be better prepared for bushfire and other hazards. DFES will achieve this by involving stakeholders, other agencies and service providers across the sectors, to support at-risk people to put relevant bushfire plans in place.

STRATEGY

| Strategic Objectives | How DFES will achieve this | Overall Recommendations | How we will know it is working |
|--|---|--|---|
| 1. Ensure that at-risk people are better prepared for bushfire | By working in collaboration with agencies and service providers on a state and national level. | DFES is required to action the following recommendations: 1. Adopt the proposed model to deliver training to service providers on how to assist their clients to be bushfire ready. | Monitoring and Evaluation DFES will take ownership of evaluation and will monitor the following: YEAR 1: Number of agencies and service providers meeting with us. YEAR 2-3: Monitoring impact: ■ Number of providers trained ■ Number of providers that have put into practice what they have learned ■ Number of at-risk people that now have plans in place as a result of this strategy Quantifiable data will set a baseline for comparison in future years. Qualitative data will provide general feedback for DFES to learn from. After an incident plans need to be automatically reviewed and amended if required. |
| 2. Encourage a shared responsibility between DFES, stakeholders and the community; now and for the future | Inform stakeholders, agencies and service providers on the benefits of collaborating in this strategy and the consequences of not being involved. This includes stakeholders such as Department of Health (DoH) as well as non-participating agencies such as WA Police (WAPol). Encourage service providers to work with the wider community to put plans in place for at-risk people. | 2. DFES establish a working group to assist in the development of training packages and the implementation of the pilot program. | |
| 3. DFES will employ a full time 'At-Risk Communities Program Officer' to develop and deliver training | 1. Design and deliver training ⁷ in cooperation with stakeholders. Based on stakeholder recommendations, 3 at-risk groups were chosen to pilot the program – Child Care, Aged Care and People with Disabilities. | 3. That DFES initiate discussion with relevant agencies around a change in policy so that emergency evacuation plans of at-risk facilities go beyond the car park. | |
| a. Help providers to identify gaps in emergency plans and, | 2. Develop online and workshop training with stakeholders. Online training will help all stakeholders to be bushfire ready. Workshop training is required for providers that are based in a high priority bushfire location. These providers may also have clients in this area. These providers and clients are at more of a risk than others and require greater support. | 4. Once able to, DFES expand their training to broader hazards, across the WA state. | |
| b. Increase their level of understanding so they can put relevant bushfire plans in place for their staff and clients. | 3. Create criteria to help service providers identify a client's level of risk – based on their ability to receive, act on or understand information prior to or during an emergency. This will determine the agencies level of involvement and planning required for bushfire emergencies. | 5. DFES continue to consult and engage with stakeholders, on a state and national level. | |
| | 4. Pilot and evaluate training with service providers. It will then be gradually rolled-out to a broader audience and include a greater range of at-risk groups such as Culturally & Linguistically Diverse (CaLD) and people with mental health issues. Using a targeted approach to do this will prevent DFES working beyond capacity (important lesson learnt from SA Country Fire Service [CFS]). | | |
| | 5. Develop and deliver this training program, across WA. In order to utilise the DFES Program Officer effectively, DFES will train individual representatives from providers who will then share information with their employees. Employees will then have the required tools and knowledge to either be able to directly assist their clients to be bushfire ready, or provide information to their client's next of kins to help. Figure 1 demonstrates this program's 'cascading of information' approach and highlights who DFES will be working with. | | |
| | 6. DFES will explore funding opportunities that may be available to subsidise costs to service providers when attending training. | | |

⁶Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission and A Shared Responsibility: The Report of the Perth Hills Bushfire Report

⁷Based on 'The Principal's Guide to Bushfire: Preparing your schools for the bushfire season' in collaboration with the Department of Education (DoE) and Department of Health (DoH).

CONCERNS

Concerns around at-risk people and how prepared they are for hazards is nothing new. 173⁸ lives were lost in the 'Black Saturday' tragedy in Victoria (VIC) in 2009. 35⁹ lives were lost in the Queensland floods in 2010.

Western Australia (WA) has experienced several large-scale bushfires¹⁰ within the last few years. Properties were lost, but fortunately no lives.

As a result of these events, it was recommended¹¹ that DFES specifically help at-risk people to be better prepared for bushfire emergencies, by working with the agencies and the service providers that support these people. Funding was provided to report on what currently happens in WA in relation to at-risk people and bushfire planning and preparedness. The report¹² identified gaps in WA services and this involved reviewing other states policies, procedures and resources.

Common themes worth noting from this report are:

- Recognition across the emergency management sector of the importance to bushfire plan for at-risk groups (specific concerns around people with disabilities, older people and children)
- Shared responsibility for bushfire planning is between emergency services, government and the wider community
- Training is required on how to put bushfire plans in place for at-risk people.

It is important to note that as a result of community service providers, people are able to maintain their independence and choose to remain in their own home for a longer period, before considering residential care. Therefore with an increasing WA ageing population¹³ and number of people living in their own home for longer, the need for relevant individual bushfire plans will only get stronger.

CONSULTATIONS

This strategy is for the south west land division of WA (although it can be adapted and applied to the rest of WA). Based on previous WA incidents and after discussions with DFES and local government, the following locations were chosen to hold consultations with stakeholders. Consultation determined gaps in services, identified challenges and also provided an opportunity for stakeholders to be involved in shaping this strategy:

- Armadale
- Denmark
- Margaret River
- Toodyay

Over 37 organisations including State Government agencies, Local Government and Community Service Providers attended consultations. Common themes are summarised¹⁴ as follows:

- **Leadership:** DFES need to drive this strategy forward but will need to collaborate with stakeholders and service providers
- **Education:** Service providers felt they can assist their clients to be bushfire-ready. Achieved by engaging with client friends, family and neighbours, as well as using training that DFES need to provide. Selection criteria to assist in determining their clients' level of risk, and then the level of involvement required from a provider before and during a bushfire emergency is needed
- **Change in policy:** Evacuation plans for establishments need to change from going to the car park, to beyond the car park¹⁵. This would ensure that service providers have thought about how to relocate clients to safety if this is required before or during an emergency
- **Shared responsibility:** It was acknowledged that bushfire emergency responsibility does not lie with one agency; it is shared.

Alongside WA consultations, DFES liaised with South Australia (SA) Country Fire Service (CFS), VIC Metropolitan Fire & Emergency Services Board and VIC Health and Human Services Emergency Management. All agencies shared information and provided lessons learnt that DFES has taken into consideration for this strategy.

⁸ Emergency Management Australia

⁹ Red Cross

¹⁰ Margaret River (November 2011), Toodyay (December 2009), Kelmcott & Roleystone (February 2011).

¹¹ A Shared Responsibility: The Report of the Perth Hills Bushfire

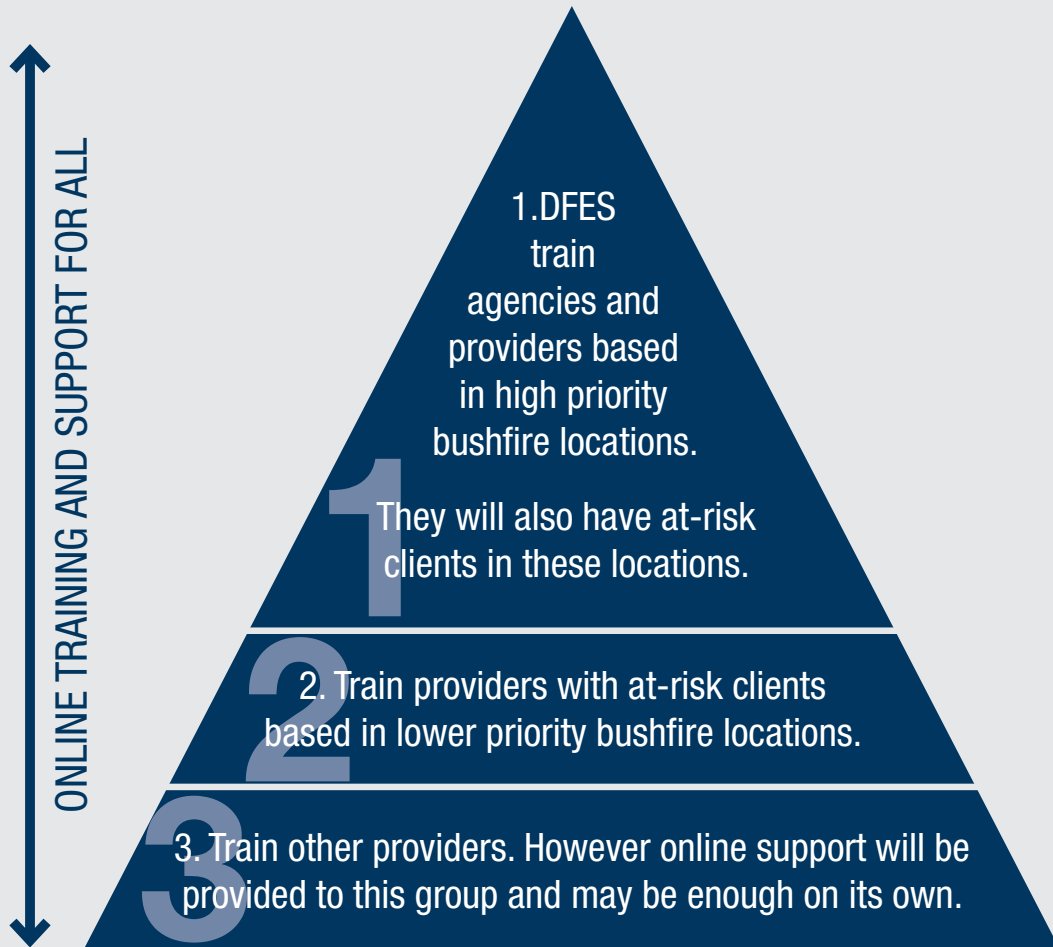
¹² At-risk people and hard to reach communities: a report on current good practice for Western Australia

¹³ The Profile of WA Seniors

¹⁴ All common themes can be read in the DFES Stakeholder Consultation Summary

¹⁵ Determined after consultation with Department for Child Protection (DCP)

Figure 1 – Targeted training delivery approach



Training for agencies and service providers will take a tiered approach, with those in high priority bushfire locations the first to receive training.

With thanks to the Agencies and Service Providers that contributed to the development of this strategy.