

# Clearing the undergrowth: shedding light on the factors that influence the decision to prepare for bushfires

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Risk communication is a targeted exchange of information aimed at increasing an individual's ability to cope with the effects of some form of threatening event. Risk communicators target those people most likely to suffer as a result of the threat. By providing this information, risk communicators attempt to encourage people to prepare in order to minimise the effects of the event, or speed up their recovery after the event. However, each individual makes the decision to prepare based on a huge number of factors. For risk communication information to be effective in encouraging preparation it must focus on those factors that most influence the decision to prepare.

The presentation will provide a brief introduction to research examining the factors that influence the way householders make decisions about preparing for bushfires in Tasmania. It will also identify and discuss several of the more important factors influencing preparedness and how an understanding of these could be incorporated into the risk communication message.

Data were collected from 482 householders living on the peri-urban fringe of Hobart. The householders completed a questionnaire that rated their level of preparedness, along with a wide variety of factors that are known to play a role in preparedness decision-making in a natural hazards context. Of the respondents, 90% owned their homes and 8% were renters; 51% were men, while 48% were female. The average age of respondents was 51 years (ranging from 18 to 87 years of age). Qualitative data was collected from 20 questionnaire respondents to complement the survey data.

Results presented here show that six primary factors predict householders' preparation ( $R^2=0.4$ ). Three factors promote householders to prepare, while another three dissuade preparation. Forming an intention to prepare is the most likely factor to increase the likelihood of preparation, but the belief that preparations actually make a difference (Positive Outcome Expectancy) and the neighbourly spirit of community members (Sense of Community) also contribute. Preparation Inhibitors like the cost of preparing, the knowledge required to prepare, and help from neighbours will most likely prevent householders from preparing. Inadequate information resources and a belief that preparation was unlikely to increase safety during a bushfire (Negative Outcome Expectancy) also reduced the likelihood that householders would prepare.

The factors described in this presentation play an important role in the way householders make the decision to prepare or not. However, an examination of these factors alone by no means provides a complete picture of the complexity of the preparation decision-making process and the inter-relationships between the factors that influence this decision. The next phase of this research will concentrate on constructing and testing a model that addresses these inter-relationships and builds a picture of this decision-making process that can be used to improve risk communication practices in a bushfire context.