

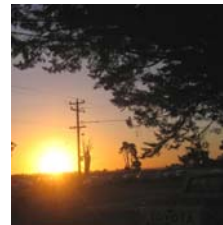


Alan Rhodes



COMMUNITY MEETINGS DURING BUSHFIRES

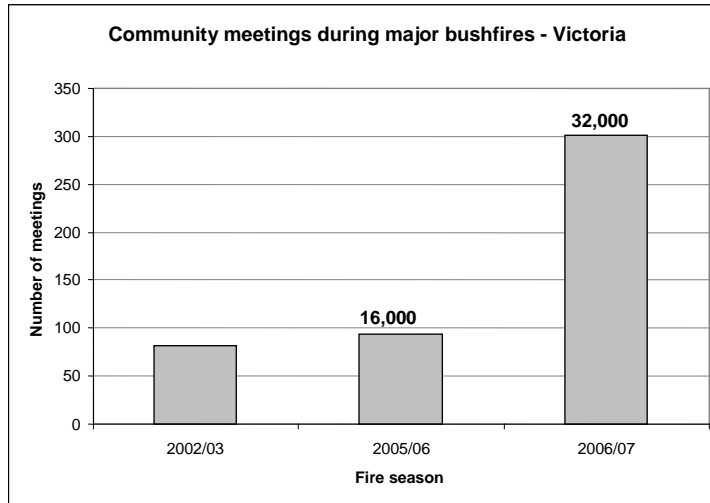
Alan Rhodes





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Community meetings



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...but does it really work?





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Evaluation of community meetings

- Initial theory (ideas) about how program works
- Data collection
- Develop a more refined theory of how community meetings work
- Testing of refined theory
- Approach to evaluation



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What do we want to know?

- Do community meetings work?
- It depends!
 - What is meant by 'work'?
 - It depends on
 - the circumstances
 - who is involved
 - It will work sometimes, in some places
 - Should we keep running community meetings?
 - Maybe



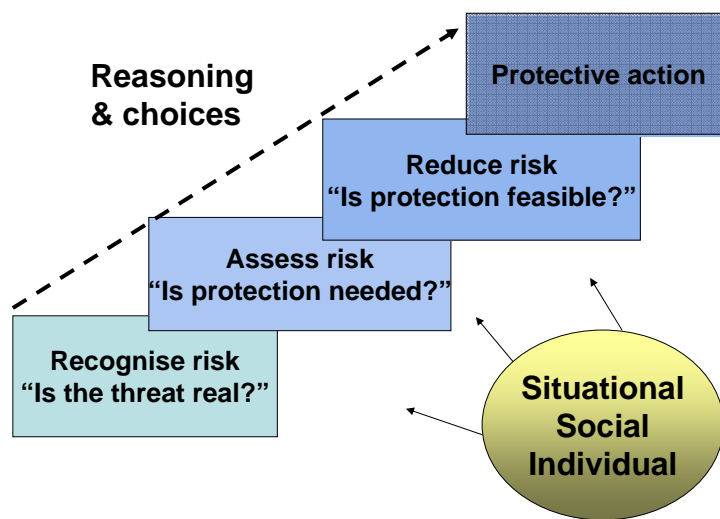
How do programs really work?

- Programs are ideas or theories of change - **theory-driven evaluation**
- Programs occur in a **context**
- Programs are active - create opportunities for choice and use of resources - **mechanisms** resulting in **patterns of outcomes**
- Programs vary over time and location
- What works for whom in what circumstances and in what respects?

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Response to risk

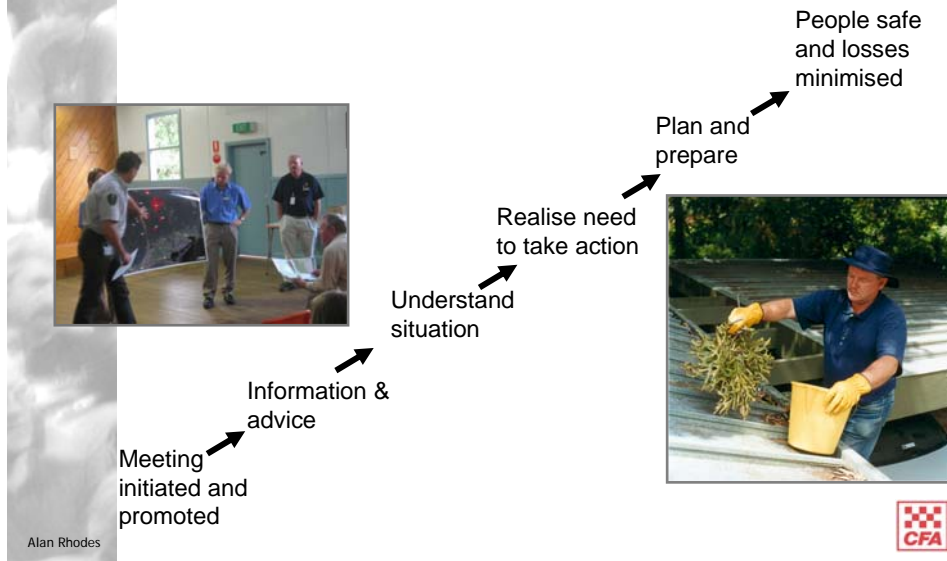


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Lindell 1992

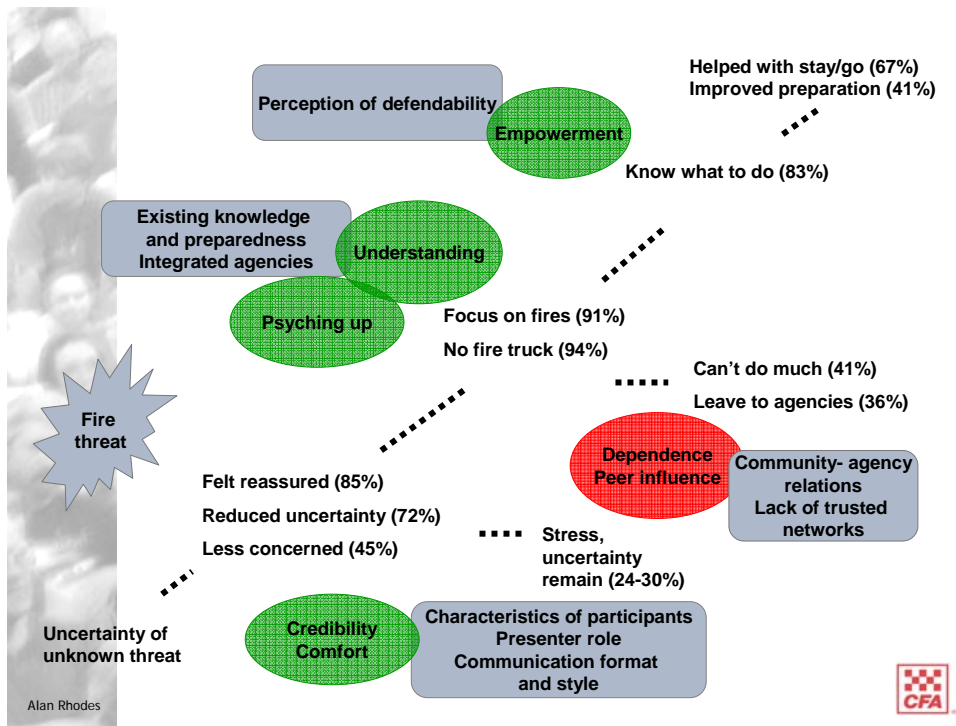


How are meetings supposed to work?



Logic of key messages presented at meetings

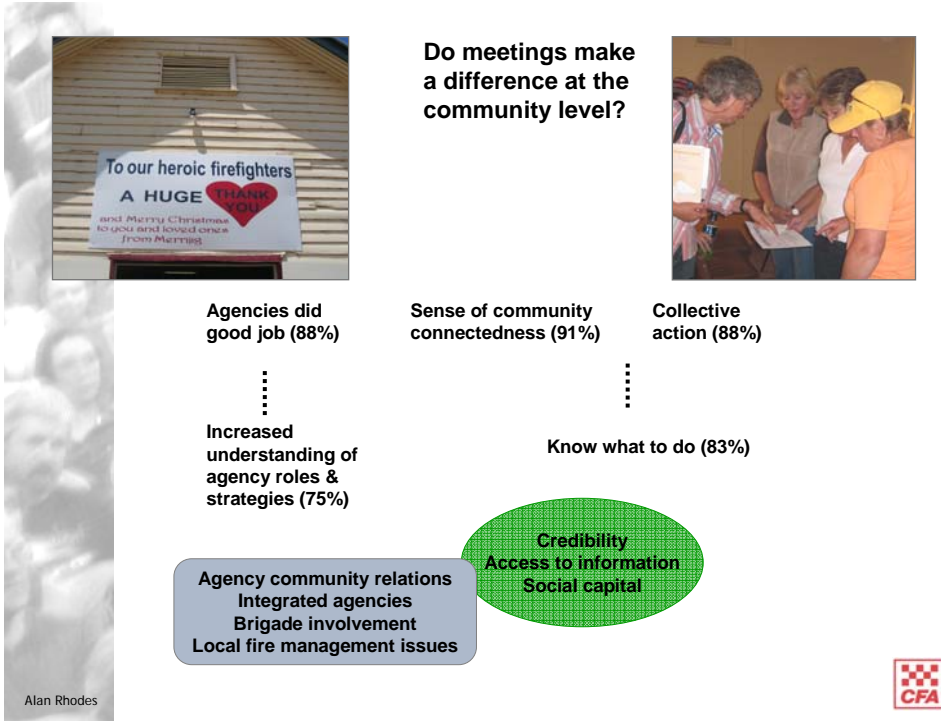
- *The current fire situation and predicted weather mean the fire threat is significant, and*
- *The fire is may/will spread and threaten this community at some time in the future, and*
- *Agencies are undertaking various actions to deal with this threat, but*
- *Agency capacity is limited in a fire of this scale agencies are unable to provide protection to every property ('don't expect a fire truck'), so*
- *People need to take responsibility for dealing with this threat themselves, but*
- *People need to have a realistic understanding of what is involved in these decisions, so*
- *People need to think about their situation and what they will do if the fire threatens (stay or go), so*
- *People need to plan and prepare as part of their decision, so that*
- *They will be safe and property loss will be minimised.*



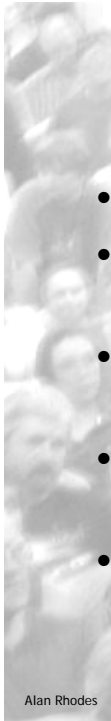
What did people do?

- Improved preparation (41%)
 - Cleaned up, raked leaves (25%)
 - Improved/enacted fire plan (20%)
 - Positioned water supplies (18%)
 - Completed house preparation (15%)
 - Readied equipment, ensured water (11%)





- ## Perceived benefits of meetings
- Keeping informed, gaining knowledge (52%)
 - Sense of community (17%)
 - Feeling prepared and confident (15%)
 - Reassurance, peace of mind (10%)
 - Deciding to 'stay or go' (3%)
- Alan Rhodes
- CFA



Alan Rhodes

What do meetings achieve?

- Reassurance - reduce uncertainty
- Improve knowledge of fire situation, safety and management strategies
- Incremental improvements in planning and preparedness
- Create sense of community connectedness (long term?)
- Positive view of agencies' actions (long term?)



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Limitations of meetings

- Significant minority of people in affected areas did not attend meetings
- Varying levels of pre-existing knowledge, preparedness & capacity
- Limited opportunities to achieve participant 'buy in' to goals
- Most people relied on existing level of preparedness with incremental improvements





Unintended outcomes

- False sense of security

'You go to the meeting and you'd hear them and we'd say "we've done that, we've done that", [but] we didn't get down to the nitty-gritty... we didn't actually say, well if it was wall of flame, I never got to that stage actually. I guess I was thinking mainly ember attack because that's what we were told. I mean, we had our mops and buckets but there's listening and then there's actual doing, isn't there? They could be two entirely different things' (NE resident)

- Unrealistic expectations

'One thing I will say, when that fire hit there was this almighty wind, oh god, it was just ... We'd been defending, we'd been running ... we were winning, we were happy, you know. If it hadn't been for that wind change or heatwave or whatever that thing was that hit...and then the hayshed caught on fire, that was the decider that I'd leave. Then we were driving through smoke and nearly suffocating and shit, you think, we've done the wrong thing here, oh no, it's terrible, it's just stupid, we're gonna die.' (Gippsland resident)

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Conclusion

- Effective at reducing uncertainty, alerting to threat, increasing knowledge, and promoting positive relationships within community and with agencies
- Limited impact on household preparation and planning - more likely to confirm existing
- Outcomes and processes different from initial ideas of program
- Some potential unintended, undesirable outcomes
- Not panacea - supplement to preparedness programs
- Particular conditions need to be in place and critical processes activated for meetings to be effective

Alan Rhodes





Thank you





'[The presenter] has to be someone that can talk to people in simple language and is prepared to tell it as it is and give the correct information...they need to be knowledgeable...[and] they've got to be able to get the knowledge ...to people that really don't know anything about it.' (NE resident)

'I've lived here for about 25 years and I don't think I'd ever experienced anything like it before and there certainly ... hasn't been any community meeting like [that] and I think people were very grateful for them. It gave some sort of reassurance.' (resident Gippsland)



'I remember going to the first meeting and it sort of dawned on me that this is for real, this is for real, it's not talk anymore. And it sort of sent shivers up my spine ...' (NE resident)





'People were made aware that ... if they were staying they had to be prepared to defend their own home. They couldn't rely on the CFA to have a truck outside their house...' (NE resident)

'Yeah, I would have to say that our level of preparedness was as good as it could have been as a result of the meetings. And also the understanding of or the knowledge gained of how you deal with a fire...' (NE resident)



'I would expect in the event of fire you have to protect your own property. And I think that's probably a point we all realised, we are all responsible for our own assets. That's the first line of defence that we need to take responsibility for our own assets.' (NE resident)





'A lot of people were just saying things like, "get out of here now, you're all dead in five minutes, it's coming in"... the ones that were leaving, were too scared to stay [were saying] "You're dead, you're gone, get out now, you're going to melt"'. (NE resident)

'For me the whole thing was more in the head as distinct from physically what I could or couldn't do. If I knew that the fire was 20km away, or when it came closer, I knew where it was ... it wasn't so uncertain. I needed that certainty ...of where it was and so I could...process it in my head ... that's how I felt.' (Gippsland resident)



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'It's that pooling of ideas and someone in the audience saying "Well I did this - what do you think about that?" Just that pooling of ideas.' (NE resident)

'It's a very strong community, very strong. I mean we're tied in so many different network ways and community relationships. If it's not the hall committee and hall activities it's the local radio. It's a whole pile of things.' (NE resident)



Alan Rhodes

