

# Message Matrix



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## Fires which made the news

(in areas that we care about)

Many many fires have been burning, most small or in remote areas of national parks and brought under control without significant damage. Fires of note, because properties were threatened, are:

13 Jan - Port Lincoln, SA. Three house and two businesses destroyed, 280ha bush burnt. One of the destroyed houses belonged to the family of Marko Visic, the man who accidentally started the 2005 Eyre Peninsula fires!

14 Jan - Garigal National Park, NSW. Houses threatened.

15 Jan - Londonderry (near Penrith), NSW. Homes threatened. One man claims to have lost \$0.5million worth of uninsured equipment.

16 Jan - Two Rocks, WA. Burnt into Pinjar pine plantation, Yanchep NP and damaged power poles and lines. More than 8000ha bushland burnt.

16 Jan - Bridgetown, WA. Caused significant power disruptions and people reportedly evacuated. 1 house and 8 sheds destroyed, 3 houses damaged, 5900ha bushland burnt.

17 Jan - Evans Head, NSW. Fire began from RAAF bombing range threatened the Black Rocks camping ground, causing 35 campers to be evacuated. More than 350ha burnt.

18 Jan - Burleigh Heads NP, NSW. Police were called in to prepare residents for possible evacuation.

20 Jan - Seaford/Carrum Downs Vic. Burnt 5ha scrub and damaged the roof of one house.

22 Jan - Woodend, Vic. Residents were on alert from a fire which burnt 370ha bushland. Another fire and Drummond North, Vic, threatened Malmsbury and Taradale (see photo).



Photo: Peter Edwards, resident.  
Source: ABC news online

## ...and other things which caught our eye.

Residents of Barmah, Victoria, are putting cattle back into the Barmah forest to reduce fire risk despite the DSE ban on grazing.

The City of Greater Geelong is about to implement WMO in its planning scheme.

In December DSE, CFA, MFB and DHS released 'Living with Fire- Victoria's Bushfire Strategy' Available on the DSE website and soon to be in our library.

A class action has begun against DSE for negligence to maintain public land and allowing bushfire to escape to private property in the 2003 Alpine fires

## Community Participation and Engagement

(from our Community Engagement report for DHS, 2008)

Whilst there are currently opportunities for community involvement in the formal emergency management planning process, systematic engagement is rare. The most common scenario for community input is where a local organisation has concerns about an issue, possibly outraged, and usually their input is confined to the issue of concern.

Community engagement can have various objectives, such as:

- strengthening the community to increase resilience and capacity;
- educating at risk individuals and families to increase preparedness to prevent, respond to and recover from emergencies;
- providing information during an emergency; and
- undertaking cooperative place- and person-based planning and decision making (Terramatrix, 2008).

### Benefits

Community engagement can ensure a more efficient use and allocation of resources. Projects developed using a model of community participation are more likely to be successful as they will better meet the expectations and needs of the

community. Although public participation programs can be time and resource expensive (Cottrell, 2005), these higher costs are likely to be offset by the long term benefit of meeting community objectives. Programs which meet the needs of the community in which they are set are also more likely to contribute to strengthening the overall capacity and sustainability of that community and therefore reducing risk in the long term.

Benefits of a community participation program can also extend beyond the intended objectives. These may include positive publicity; increased good will; supportive evidence and a strong basis for resource allocation and funding applications; and the community being better informed about policy and program development (Pisaniello and McKay, 2002).

### Challenges

Community participation, is not only complex, time consuming and resource draining (Cottrell, 2005), but it can present other challenges for both government and the community. These may include a perceived loss of control/power when genuine engagement takes place; creating a wish list and raising public expectations which cannot be met; and community leaders believing they already know what people need (Pisaniello and McKay, 2002).

Community participation is not about shifting responsibility to

the community (Buckle *et al.*, 2003). Nor should it be driven by cost cutting or economic rationalism, whereby the community is seen as a free resource to replace roles traditionally carried out by the government. Instead, community participation programs should be seen as a way of enhancing the capabilities of government to achieve emergency management outcomes. During a disaster, it is normal for resources to be stretched beyond capacity. It is thus imperative that the community be considered a resource adjunct to that of government (Coles and Buckle, 2004).

One of the key dimensions of the notion of community participation is that it challenges conventional relationships. Most significantly it is upending the traditional top down relationship between the government and the community to a more bottom up approach. There is an increasing focus on partnership building and a process which is more inclusive of all stakeholders. Brackertz *et al.* (2005) raises the question of 'whether the available consultation techniques are able to adequately represent all groups within the community, rather than reinforcing existing patterns of social exclusion or allowing self-interested individuals or groups to dominate'. Further, representative process are not just about inviting all the ethnic, socio-economic, age-related and other groups to participate, but developing systems which ensure

that they do. This is despite the fact they are difficult to involve and traditionally disengaged from such processes.

It is important to recognise that community engagement is a process rather than an outcome in itself. In the context of emergency management, it is a method by which government and emergency service agencies can assist people to reduce risk, increase preparedness and improve their capacity to respond and recover. There are, however, limitations to the use of community engagement and it is vital government agencies are realistic about what can be achieved and the time frame in

which this can occur. Two key considerations are 1) the size of the task of changing the culture of community expectations of government agencies and emergency services during an emergency and 2) People's available time and resources to engage with agencies and move towards increased resilience and greater self sufficiency.

### **Why it is the best**

The complex nature of people and society combined with the inherent uncertainty of understanding risk may be the root cause of community safety being such an underdeveloped area in emergency management. Whilst the biophysical aspects of

hazards are much easier to understand, quantify, explain and plan for, the social aspects are dynamic and do not easily fit into definable categories from which problems can be addressed.

An efficient and effective emergency communication strategy would look at capitalising on the many existing programs, rather than a complete replacement.

Programs which build community coherence and capacity enhance resilience and thus contribute to a safer and stronger community.

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## **And in the office...**

The Beechworth office move was highly successful, with everyone pitching in (some more than others!). Pats on the back. Beechworth staff are very happy with their new location, although Kayla is somewhat concerned by the sound of footsteps coming up the stairs, but then no one appearing.

**World domination:** In our on going desire to takeover the world, the terra-gang held a strategic planning meeting. The outcomes will be presented in a neat little diagram by Duncan and/or Jon. Key elements are the expansion of our services into other states (NSW) and in the breadth of work we do.

**Work stuff:** Post holidays we have all been straight back into it. Many site assessments on the go and new ones are coming in. Jon has been pumping out reports. Kayla has done a sterling job training Amalie to use the GPS. Duncan has done wilderness first aid, so call on him if you need mouth to mouth. Jon still doesn't have an appropriate call sign. This must be rectified in the coming months



Our focus for the next month is on wrapping up the report on reserve fire management for Mornington Peninsula Shire Council and completing the 08/09 round of rail fire prevention audits for Department of Transport. We will also be facilitating the final two risk assessment workshops for CFA Midlands Wimmera Area, and working on a swag of WMOs and EMPs. There are also quotes being churned out, many for WMOs and also for a bushfire management plan for The Briars Park in Mount Martha.