

The Invisible Hand Bushfire Arson in Australia



Matthew Willis
Australian Institute of Criminology

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Outline of this presentation

- What is arson?
- Impact of deliberately lit bushfires
- Frequency of deliberately lit bushfires
- Why people light fires
- A bushfire arson typology
- Where to next?

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What is arson?

Arson is:

- the intentional use of fire to damage or destroy
 - unlawful
 - malicious
 - reckless

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Deliberately lit fires


Includes

- incendiary fires
- suspicious fires
- firesetting

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Impact of deliberately lit bushfires

- Bushfires average \$77 million per year
 - Black Friday 1939 - \$750 million
 - Ash Wednesday 1983 - \$400 million
 - Canberra 18 Jan 2003 - \$300 million
- Very difficult to apportion costs



Impact of deliberately lit bushfires

Arson-caused fires more likely to be lit:


- in circumstances where they will spread
- in areas where aspect and slope is conducive to fire growth
- during total fire bans



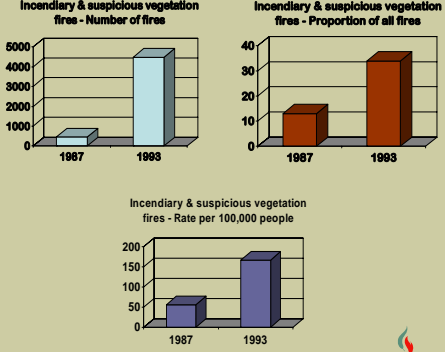
Frequency of deliberately lit bushfires

Number of fires which are deliberately lit:


- varies between time and place
- 25 to 50 percent in most situations
- appears to be increasing



Frequency of deliberately lit bushfires




Year	Number of fires	Proportion of all fires	Rate per 100,000 people
1987	~1000	~15%	~50
1993	~4500	~35%	~180



Frequency of deliberately lit bushfires

Apparent increases may be due to:

- greater awareness
- improved reporting
- better investigation
- definitions



Why do people light fires?

Most common motives for general arson:

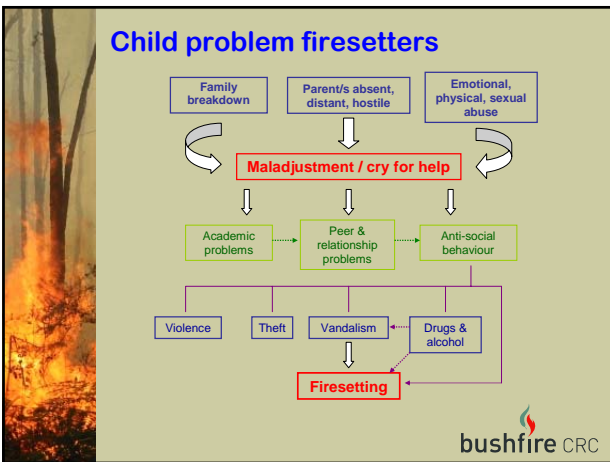
- revenge
- excitement
- vandalism
- attention or recognition-seeking
- financial gain
- crime concealment
- political
- no motive / psychiatric
- mixed motives
- child firesetting



Why do people light fires?

Child firesetters

- Fireplay & experimentation
- Problematic firesetting



Why do people light *bushfires*?

Most common motives for general arson:

- revenge
- excitement
- vandalism
- attention or recognition-seeking
- financial gain
- crime concealment
- political
- no motive / psychiatric
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A bushfire arson typology?

Bushfires lit:

1. to create excitement or relieve boredom
2. for recognition and attention
3. for a specific purpose or gain
4. without motive
5. with mixed motives


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A bushfire arson typology?

1. Bushfires lit to create excitement or relieve boredom
 - vandalism
 - stimulation
 - activity

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A bushfire arson typology?

2. Bushfires lit for recognition and attention
 - hero status / praise
 - self-esteem / impress others
 - pleading

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A bushfire arson typology?

3. Bushfires lit for a specific purpose or gain

- anger
- pragmatic
- material
- altruistic

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A bushfire arson typology?

4. Bushfires lit without motive

- psychiatric
- children

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A bushfire arson typology?

5. Bushfires lit with mixed motives

- multiple
- unclear
- incidental

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Where to next?

- motives and patterns
- data collections
- treatment and management
- prevention
- investigation and prosecution
- consolidated arson information
 - bulletins
 - database

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Matthew Willis
Australian Institute of Criminology

matthew.willis@aic.gov.au

(02) 6260 9232

0402 094 491

Questions?