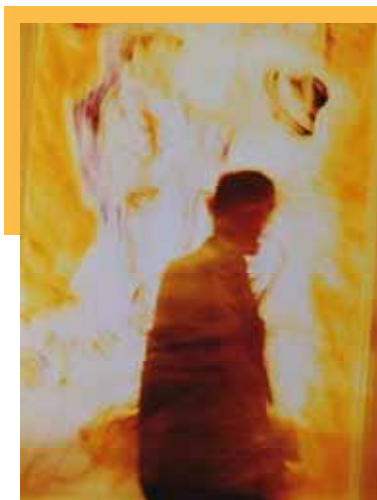


FIRE-BUGGED

Matthew Willis

Project C3 – Bushfire arson
Program C – Community self-sufficiency



This project aims to reduce the impact of deliberately lit fires in Australian bushland environments. Through an understanding of the incidence of deliberately lit fires and their patterns, the project aims to develop a knowledge base that can be used to inform and build capacity in the areas of investigation, prosecution, education, prevention and the treatment of offenders.

Bulletins

BushFIRE arson bulletins are one-page factsheets that provide a broad range of information related to the deliberate lighting of fires.



The bulletins are released fortnightly through a mailing list linking to the AIC web site. Copies are also distributed within some stakeholder organisations and accessed directly from the web site.

A principal aim in producing the bulletins is to generate a two-way flow of information between researchers and end-users that will cross all levels of end-user agencies.

Web page and bibliographic database

The AIC web site is a central point for policy-makers, researchers, students and others seeking objective factual information on a wide range of criminological topics.



In December 2004, the JV Barry library at the AIC added a new web page on the topic of arson to the web site. This section will provide a central reference point for information arising from the AIC's bushfire arson project.

A bibliographic database available through this area of the web site includes literature gathered for the literature review and has been regularly updated since its inception. As well as information on bushfires, the database includes literature on the more general topic of arson, increasing its value to stakeholder agencies and other users.

Literature review

Bushfire arson: a review of the literature was released through the Australian Institute of Criminology's Research and public policy series in December 2004.

The report attracted significant media attention on its release and again in January 2005, particularly in relation to the deliberately lit fires around Perth. An online version of the report on the AIC web site received over 11,000 hits between December and February.



The monograph provides a review of previous studies on arson and deliberate firesetting, beginning with an examination of Australian and overseas research on arson in urban-structural settings.

The main areas covered in the report are:

- motives and profiles of people who light fires
- factors underlying arson in Australian bushland settings
- applying knowledge from other studies to bushfire arson
- impacts of deliberately lit bushfires
- prevention and treatment
- firesetting by children and firefighters
- future directions.

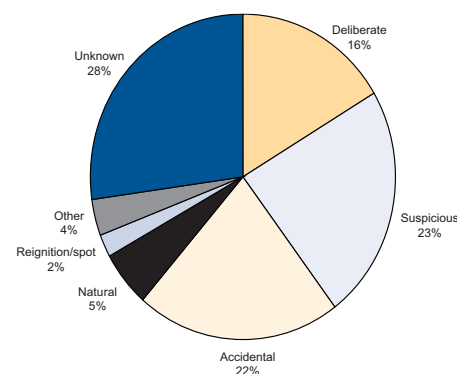
Data collection

A major aim of this project is to fill a considerable gap in our knowledge concerning the incidence of deliberately lit bushfires. While a number of reports have identified the rates of bushfire causes in some areas during some periods, there is no comprehensive picture of the incidence of bushfires, their causes or patterns on a national basis.

Sixteen data sets, covering 20 agencies and comprising 470,000 records, have been gathered for analysis.

Preliminary analysis shows that across Australia deliberate and suspicious ignitions cause 39 per cent of all bushfires.

Causes of bushfires – Australia



Source: Australian bushfire causes (AIC file).

Why do people light bushfires?

Proposed typology of deliberately lit bushfires

1. Bushfires lit to create excitement or relieve boredom:
 - vandalism
 - stimulation
 - activity
2. Bushfires lit for recognition and attention:
 - heroism
 - self-esteem/impress others
 - pleading
3. Bushfires lit for a specific purpose or gain:
 - anger
 - pragmatic
 - material
 - altruistic
4. Bushfires lit without motive:
 - psychiatric
 - children
5. Bushfires lit with mixed motives:
 - multiple
 - incidental

Want to know more?

If you would like to access outputs from this project, or find out more about bushfire arson, visit the AIC web site:

www.aic.gov.au/topics/arson

or

contact the researcher:

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