

Reducing bushfire risk through improved household decision making.

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'Disasters work like a magnifying glass, showing what is good and what needs work in society. The problems before a disaster are the problems after a disaster, only worse, and this is as true of gender issues as any other issues.' [1]

What are the issues?:

- 6 of the 9 Wangary fire fatalities were women and children fleeing the fire in vehicles
- Gender issues play a key role in the application of the 'stay and defend or go early' policy
- The role of women in bushfire is often seen as quite passive
- What is an effective approach to educate women about the dangers of late evacuation?
- How can the bushfire resilience of women be enhanced?
- How can we integrate women meaningfully in the process that protects communities?

"I wasn't afraid. I had no intention of leaving. I decided I was going to stay."

Interview, July 2005 (With Project C7)

Port Lincoln, SA 2005



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"I realised we (the wives) were so ill-trained and ill-equipped without our men. We just always think (her husband's) in the CFS we'll be right but quite often they're out on a fire truck fighting somewhere else.....if we get a fire we don't know what to do, the wives don't. We don't know how to operate pumps.....you panic and you try to run away or you do something stupid because you panic."

Interview, July 2005 (With Project C7)

Research aims:

- To put gender issues in the foreground
- To further explore, and learn from, womens' experience of the Wangary fire
- To recognise womens' coping capacity and resilience
- To determine if women have access to the information that they need and/or want

"I was in the bedroom throwing a few clothes in a bag. He came running up and told me to get out now. I called the dog, hopped in the car because he told me to 'get out now' and took off. I could see the flames as I was driving up the driveway. I was overtaken by smoke and flames."

Interview, July 2005 (With Project C7)

Wangary Fire Case Study:

Primary material will be drawn from interviews and focus groups.

Participants will include:

- households that experienced the Wangary fire
- female fire fighters from the Lincoln and Tumby Bay Brigades
- representatives from the two fire-affected Local Government Areas
- CFS staff who conduct fire education programs in South Australia

Fieldwork will commence in Spring 2006



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[1] Natalie Domeisen, "The Role of Women in Protecting Communities from Disasters," *Natural Hazards Observer*, Volume XXI Number 5, May 1997, p. 7.