

# Using crime prevention theory in bushfire arson prevention

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## Bushfire arson in Australia

AIC research (Muller 2009) found that:

- Approximately half of bushfires are suspicious or deliberately lit
- Crime is easy to commit and conceal
  - Because of this, arsonists are not often caught making it difficult to learn about their motivation
- According to various research,
  - approximately 31 percent of bushfire arsonists caught are under 18 years of age
  - where arson offenders are convicted, fewer than a third receive a prison sentence
- Most arsonists do not exclusively commit arson- offenders tend to have extensive criminal histories, particularly characterised by violent and property offences
- Bushfires are quite patterned (e.g. time, place), therefore there is potential to map and predict where fires are most likely to occur.

## Risk factors for bushfires in Australia

- Weather (e.g. drought, topography, local vegetation)
- Time and day
- Rural – urban interface
- Socio-economic factors.

## Why use crime prevention theory in bushfire arson prevention?

- Provides a framework to target what we know about bushfire arson
- It is important to focus on primary prevention due to low probability of arsonists getting caught
- Situational Crime Prevention and Routine Activities Theory focus on disrupting arson occurring by making it harder to commit
- They suggest crime can only occur if there is a suitable target, absence of a capable guardian (that is, someone who could prevent or stop arson from occurring), and a motivated offender
- This is often called the *crime triangle*.

- To prevent bushfire arson, you need to remove one or more elements of that triangle, usually by proposing interventions that look at altering the physical environment, targeting the offender, and/or targeting the potential victim.
- Prevention activities need to:
  - Reduce rewards of bushfire arson
  - Increase risks of committing the bushfire arson
  - Increase the effort to commit bushfire arson
  - Remove excuses for the behaviour
  - Remove provocation for the behaviour.

## How do we apply crime prevention theory to bushfire arson prevention?

- Prevention strategies often require cooperation or partnerships with fire agencies, police, and the local community
- Adequate time, resources and commitment are required to properly implement successful projects

### *Bushfire arson prevention workshop booklet resources (in development)*

- Based on research and crime prevention theory
- Developed with stakeholders in workshops in the ACT and NSW
- Provide a step-by-step guide on the processes involved in developing bushfire arson prevention strategies
- Illustrate case study examples of successful bushfire arson committees and projects
- Provide worksheet resource templates for each element of the process outlined to assist in BFAP development
- For use in planning prevention strategies and as workshop exercises.

Muller D 2009. *Using crime prevention to reduce deliberate bushfires in Australia*. Research and Public Policy Series no. 98. <http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/current%20series/rpp/81-100/rpp98.aspx>

