



MEDIA RELEASE

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Emergency service volunteering is a family matter

Emergency service volunteers and their partners or spouses are being asked to comment on how their volunteer community role fits in with their family life.

“We know that volunteering as a firefighter or emergency worker puts a unique blend of pressures on volunteers and their families,” said Sean Cowlshaw, a Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre PhD student at La Trobe University in Melbourne.

“We have already interviewed volunteer managers and found evidence of many possible conflicts between emergency volunteering and family life. But now we need to hear from the volunteers, and most of all from their spouses and partners,” he said.

Mr Cowlshaw is working with agencies around Australia to find out about the impacts on families from a range of emergency services, like fire brigade and volunteer rescue. He is surveying emergency service volunteers and their spouses around Australia.

“Some of the things we know about include partners worrying when the volunteer is away for long periods. It also seems that some volunteers put the brigade ahead of the family on occasions—which probably doesn’t go down too well if it happens a lot,” he said.

“Not all impacts need be negative. Volunteering can lead to more social contacts in the local community, especially if you are new to the area.”

“The more families that take part and tell us about their experiences, the better the information that we can take to agencies. This can then inform them about what they can do to support the families of their volunteers and recognise the contributions they make to communities and Australia’s emergency response capabilities.”

The research is being supervised by Dr Jim McLennan, Manager of the Volunteerism Project at the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre. “This is ground breaking stuff!” said Dr McLennan. “Nothing like Sean’s study has been done anywhere else in the world.”

The acting chief executive officer of the Bushfire CRC, Mr Gary Morgan, said the study was an excellent example of researchers and fire agencies working together on a particular issue. “We are pleased to be associated with research partners who are looking at the issues that help them better understand their volunteers.”

Anonymity is assured and all information is confidential. To find out more, go to www.latrobe.edu.au/bushfirecrc or phone **1300 85 01 99** (free call). No records will be kept of any contacts.

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