

MEDIA ALERT

Monday 12 October 2009



Fire Action Week 11–18 October 2009

Preparing psychologically for bushfires – Updated resource for the public

Fire Action Week provides a valuable opportunity to raise awareness of the importance of being prepared for fires. Experts from the Australian Psychological Society (APS) stress that psychological preparedness is a vital component of being prepared for any disaster such as a bushfire. It is common for people to make practical preparations for the bushfire season and even run a 'fire drill' to practice the procedures, if a fire or emergency should happen. In the same way, it is important to do a mental run through of what you might think and feel should a disaster occur. Will you feel frightened? How can you prevent fear overwhelming you? Do you have a strategy to calm yourself down?

The APS will be launching an updated psychological preparedness tip sheet during Fire Action Week that will be available for free download on the APS website to assist people to do an inventory on their potential thoughts and feelings during a bushfire and provides tips for managing anxiety.

Being psychologically prepared

Being directly involved in any potentially life-threatening emergency situation can be genuinely terrifying. People often don't have prior experience of being in natural disasters or knowledge of just how stressful this can be. When people are under severe stress they are not able to think as clearly as usual and this can affect decisions and reactions. These are normal, although not always helpful, responses to a possibly life-threatening situation.

Being psychologically prepared can assist people to think more clearly and reduce the risk of serious injury and loss of life or property.

There are three main steps to being psychologically prepared

1. Anticipate the anxiety and concerns that will arise (e.g. racing heart, shortness of breath, fatigue, nausea, headaches)
2. Identify uncomfortable or distressing thoughts and feelings that may cause further anxiety (e.g. *I can't cope, I'm so afraid, I don't know what to do*).
3. Manage responses so that the ability to cope remains as effective as possible (slow down your breathing, replace frightening thoughts with more helpful ones – *relax, calm down*.)

For full details, click on the Psychological Preparation for Natural Disasters tip sheet - www.psychology.org.au/bushfires or go to www.psychology.org.au and click on the Bushfires Resources link on the front page.

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APS President, Professor Bob Montgomery, will be available for comment during the week.

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The APS is the largest professional association for psychologists in Australia, representing more than 17,500 members. The APS is committed to advancing psychology as a discipline and profession. It spreads the message that psychologists make a difference to peoples' lives, through improving psychological knowledge and community wellbeing.