

**Promoting Community Bushfire Preparedness:**

**Bridging the Theory – Practice Divide**

by

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## Publications and Statement of Co-Authorship

### Paper 1:

Paton, D., Frandsen, M., & Johnston, D. (2010). Confronting an unfamiliar hazard: Tsunami preparedness in Tasmania. *Journal of Emergency Management Australia*, 25(4), 31-36.

### Paper 2:

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### Paper 3:

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## Paper Presented at Conference

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## Abstract

The present study adopts a mixed-methods action research approach to examine the validity of a model developed to predict adoption of bushfire preparedness measures, and to subsequently apply the motivational factors found in this model to develop more effective and sustainable community bushfire preparedness initiatives. The research focuses on how individual, social, and societal factors interact to influence the adoption of protective measures against bushfire hazards. The premise upon which the Social Attachment Model of Bushfire Preparedness (Model) is based argues that it is not perception of threat or information *per se* that determines action, but rather how residents interpret this in the context of experiences, beliefs, and expectations that are developed and enacted in their social environment. These influential social processes were thus integrated into the development and implementation of a fire agency community bushfire preparedness pilot. The goal of this pilot was to increase the adoption and sustainment of community bushfire preparedness behaviour.

The first component of the present study was therefore to develop and test the theoretical Model of bushfire preparedness to assess the underlying individual, social, and societal influences of preparing for bushfires. Data for this analysis were collected from questionnaires delivered to participants living in four bushfire risk areas in Tasmania, Australia (Bagdad, Binalong Bay, Fern Tree, and Snug). Findings demonstrated that individual, community, and agency components of the Model interact to influence residents' decisions to adopt bushfire mitigation strategies.

The second component of the study utilised qualitative data obtained from telephone interviews with a sample of 34 residents living in the four target areas. Thematic analysis was used to elicit further insight into residents' bushfire preparedness decision making processes. These data were also used to validate the Model with major findings including the significant

influence of place attachment and responsibility on residents' decisions to prepare for bushfire.

The third component of the study involved the application of the Model to inform the development and implementation of a community bushfire preparedness program. The collaboration of the researcher with the Tasmania Fire Service's Community Development Officer, and the trialling of the Bushfire Ready Communities Tasmania Pilot (Pilot), provided an opportunity to conduct action research to determine how the Model findings could be practically applied to a bushfire preparedness promoting community initiative. This action research therefore bridges the theory-practice divide that commonly plagues hazards research.

The efficacy of the Pilot, and the value of the applied model findings, was evaluated by collecting data from feedback surveys, focus groups, and interviews with participating residents. Longitudinal qualitative data obtained from re-interviewing the original 34 participants following their participation (or not) in the Pilot activities, provided data on the long-term benefits and sustainability of its initiatives.

The findings indicate that developing community bushfire preparedness programs based on community engagement and empowerment principles results in more effective, sustainable, and economical ways of delivering preparedness education to communities. By utilising a community engagement approach, residents were more receptive of bushfire protective information and more likely to adopt these measures as information provided was more specific and contextualised, and communicated in a manner eliciting 'shared responsibility'.

Overall, the findings indicate that the conceptual Social Attachment Model of Bushfire Preparedness can be successfully applied to develop and implement more effective

community bushfire preparedness initiatives. These findings have important implications for emergency management agencies who wish to employ more effective community engagement strategies, and for communities themselves who aspire to increase the collective bushfire preparedness of their communities.

The thesis concludes with the caveat that for positive outcomes of these community engagement programs to be realised, fire agencies need to first realise the potential of community engagement principles to foster community bushfire preparedness, ensure that these messages filter down to their volunteer fire brigades (who represent the front line of this ‘dual process community engagement approach’), and provide support and training to the volunteer fire fighters to ensure that the effective implementation and sustainment of these initiatives are achieved. If these feats are realised, community bushfire preparedness, fostered through the reciprocal and complementary relationship between the community and the fire agency, will ensure that these measures are sustained and resilience to future hazards promoted.

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Jeg elsker dig.

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