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Government  
of South Australia



RESCUE

# Emergency Management

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## SOUTH AUSTRALIA'S DISASTER RESILIENCE NEWSLETTER

### Lessons to be learnt in respect to recovery

I would like to highlight some often overlooked factors influencing long-term recovery following a disaster. These are generalisations and by no means are they universal.

While I was chair of the Kinglake Ranges Community Recovery Committee following the Victorian bushfires (2009) and a member of the Community Advisory Committee to the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund, I have also been involved in various capacities in the recovery efforts following a number of different types of disasters.

Firstly, I would like to point out that what we do in response, relief and the early stages of recovery has a direct effect on long-term recovery and is closely linked to the future resilience of an impacted community.

Two examples. If essential infrastructure can be protected during the disaster this will facilitate a speedier recovery. The second example involves the supply of free goods and services. While this is of benefit immediately post disaster, if it goes on too long it will destroy the local economy and businesses, the lifeblood of smaller communities, many of which may never recover.

It should also be recognised that the drivers for each stage of recovery are different and do not necessarily lend themselves to achieving the best outcomes.

Taking a cynical look and recognising that while everyone has the best of intentions to help, the media invariably print stories as to why money is not getting out to those in need more quickly when it is recognised that not all benefit nor make the best decisions when they receive funds too early.

Similarly governments of all persuasions want to be seen to be doing the right thing but also want to be re-elected so often make hasty decisions. In recent times disaster events have taken place towards the end of a government's election cycle, not at the start. They also like to be seen to be doing something different from what was done elsewhere, often re-inventing the wheel rather than learning from past experience. Local government wants to transition back to normal as soon as possible.

Agencies compete for more and more funding, want to be seen to be seen as the lead agency, and thereby lift their profile rather than truly collaborate to achieve the best outcomes. Communities suffer.

True recovery takes longer than most imagine. We tend to talk about, but in practice ignore, the fact that each person and each community is different, more complex, less complex, more connected, less connected, more resilient, less resilient. In practice we tend to go along with one size fits all as it is easier to manage.

Effective communication is a key yet no matter what we do we will never reach everyone. As a consequence we need to impress upon everyone that they need to take responsibility in recovery for themselves, their neighbours and their friends, to stay informed.

Needs change over time. For example early on the need for high-end

trauma counselling is high. This drops over time. Those that will go of their own volition tend to go early on. Over time the need shifts to re-engage those that are often disengaged within their own communities for a variety of reasons, particularly men, children and youth. Once they re-engage they are more likely to be open to counselling. Yet we tend to do more of the same, the service becomes increasingly underutilised, and we falsely conclude that there is no longer a need rather than there being a latent need.

Children and youth are two categories needing particular attention. They tend to become disengaged and fall behind at school, even those who were the best or better scholars. Transitions become particularly problematic, kindergarten to primary, primary to secondary, and behavioural problems emerge, including truancy. Yet services within schools are often inadequate, sporadic and are withdrawn far too early. Counsellors frequently change and relationships built with students are difficult to build and maintain, and issues of trust arise.

As far as the provision of services are concerned, whether medical, psychological or those provided by local government, the trend is to go back to what was normal prior to the event, not what has become the new normal for many and for those communities at large.

Often money has been given to community groups far in excess of what they have ever had to manage in the past. Some excel, many do not, and over time this has led to problems that have the potential to divide communities. Little thought has been provided in the way of governance and other training to facilitate increased capacity and capability building within these communities and community groups above token, often introductory, overviews of such issues.

Whilst disasters are terrible events with significant consequences they are also, with an optimistic eye on the future, an opportunity-laden circumstance.

The Kinglake Ranges Foundation (KRF) was established to facilitate recovery and renewal well into the future to better facilitate true long-term recovery. The Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund recognised the potential and created three additional foundations with similar aims. Among other things the KRF also facilitates capacity and capability building to facilitate resilience building through its community resource officer.

If we can keep the need for power, control and ego in check across all jurisdictions, including those that exist in communities, and work in true collaboration, recognising that recovery is not necessarily time bound, more will be achieved with each dollar spent.

In conclusion all that I have referred to above has a base in human behaviour. We all need to understand more of how that contributes to the decisions we make.

Bill Gale



Each decision and action makes us more vulnerable to disasters – or more resilient to them. Thus disaster risk reduction involves every part of society, every part of government, and every part of the professional and private sector." United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction.



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## SAAS celebrates!

On 27 October SA Ambulance Service (SAAS) hosted its annual graduation and presentation ceremony at the Crowne Plaza in Adelaide.

The ceremony was an opportunity for SAAS to recognise and celebrate recent graduates and also those who received long service awards and special awards for going above and beyond the call of duty.

It was a glorious spring day and along with the sunshine came more than 250 smiling faces of staff members, partners and special guests from all over the state.

Standout awards from the day include the CEO Commendation for Australian Helicopters pilot Richard Butterworth who safely completed an extremely difficult emergency landing of the retrieval helicopter with MedSTAR Emergency Medical Retrieval Service team and patient on board.

The team that created SAAS's Operational Safety Program was also recognised. This award-winning program educates staff on how to keep safe, including: behavioural awareness, re-familiarisation with mental health issues, the use of communication skills to defuse situations and some self-defence techniques.

In addition to this, the team who developed SAAS's new Vehicle Crash Simulator (VCS) were acknowledged for their hard work. The VCS is a custom-made Holden Commodore which can be dismantled section by section to simulate an extrication rescue therefore providing realistic training in a safe and controlled environment. The VCS can be transported anywhere in the state and was funded by Heath Workforce Australia.

Recently qualified ambulance volunteers and career staff were also acknowledged at the ceremony. So too were staff members who completed additional qualifications to improve their already excellent skills. These recipients came from all areas of SAAS, including on the



Australian Helicopters pilot Richard Butterworth (left) receives the CEO Commendation from SAAS CEO Robert Morton.

road, in the Emergency Operations Centre and in the office.

There were 19 National Medals presented, representing 15 years of service for recognised government and voluntary organisations that risk their lives or safety to protect or assist the community. Clasps to the National Medal were also awarded to those who have reached 25, 35 and 45 years of service.

## Val Smyth is leaving the building...



Val took the request for budget cuts  
VERY literally .....!!

Val Smyth, who retired last month, has been the Director of the Emergency Management Unit at SA Health for many years.

Through her leadership, insight and tireless work she has been responsible for improving the systems and plans required by the agency to cope with major events and disasters in South Australia.

In association with her colleagues around Australia, she has also made a significant contribution to improve National Medical Disaster Management arrangements.

Val was integral in providing systems and support to the South Australian members of the Australian Medical Assistance Team during deployments to the Kangaroo Island bushfires in 2007, to Samoa following the earthquake/tsunami of 2009, and to the floods in Pakistan in 2010.

She has been active on more than a dozen councils, committees and working groups in the emergency management sector at both state and national levels and coordinated and managed the SA Health emergency management response to the Swine Flu Outbreak in 2009 and the Extreme Heat Health Response Plan in 2010.

Val is looking forward to spending more time with her family, especially her grandchildren, and is hoping to undertake some further study.

The emergency management sector wishes Val all the best in her retirement and thanks for her valuable and significant contribution.





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## Interaction occurs every day, regardless of whether there is a natural disaster or not

South Australia Police (SAPOL) interacts with individuals, communities, businesses, non-government organisations and every level of government every day, regardless of whether there is a natural disaster or not.

Many policing activities are focused on building community confidence in police; a community confidence that is the trust between the public and police which underpins the community's feelings of safety and security, in their own environment without a police presence.

The South Australian community is familiar with many of these activities through WatchSA, road safety campaigns, youth programs and crime prevention activities. Operation Nomad is SAPOL's response to the threat of bushfires in South Australia, in support of the Country Fire Service (CFS), the control agency for bushfires. This operation is focused on disrupting persons of interest, high visibility patrols, zero tolerance to breaches of the fire laws and a coordinated approach in the investigation of fires.

To directly support the national framework for the prevention of bushfire arson, a specific work program of the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience, Operation Nomad has launched an additional component focused on educating the community about the importance of reporting signs of burnt-out spot fires or anything suspicious – no matter how insignificant it may seem.

The outline below provides insights into why this new policing strategy is being undertaken and how the community can engage with police to improve its own safety and security.

### Arsonists may be practising in your local area. Don't let them perfect it. Report it.

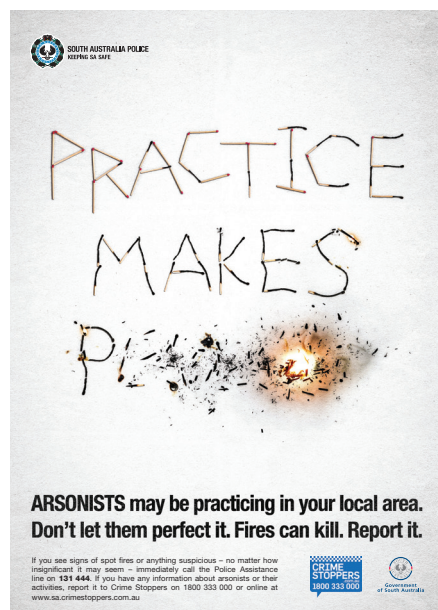
The Fire Danger Season can be an anxious time for many South Australians, especially those living or working in rural areas. Fires can be started by a range of causes, some natural and some accidental, but unfortunately a large number of fires are deliberately lit. By being vigilant and reporting the signs of deliberately lit fires we can work together to stop arson burning a trail of destruction through our communities.

The Australian Institute of Criminology (2009) estimates that arson, the act of intentionally and recklessly destroying or damaging property through the use of fire, costs the Australian people around \$1.6 billion a year. Between 45,000 and 60,000 bushfires occur annually and of these it is estimated that between 13,000 and 18,000 fires are caused by the criminal act of arson.

In South Australia between November 2012 and April 2013 there were 735 bushfires throughout the state. This number comprised of 79 fires being deliberately lit, 11 suspicious, 89 unknown and 455 non-suspicious. This means 24% of these fires were preventable (South Australia Police, 2013).

SAPOL acknowledges that bushfire arson devastates communities, livelihood and property, and in the worst case, kills people. Rural areas are particularly vulnerable to arson by their isolated location, open, accessible boundaries and readily ignitable materials.

Arsonists are known to often ignite small fires, practicing their methods before escalating to larger and potentially more devastating bushfires. What may appear to be a seemingly insignificant fire may hold vital evidence and demonstrate an arsonist's pattern of crime. If this type of behaviour is left undetected, the arsonist may continue lighting fires, which could lead to devastating results.



As farm owners and community members you may see small areas of burnt grassland on the side of a dirt road, near bridges, or even on your own property. If the fire has self-extinguished and no damage has been caused to property, the incident is often dismissed. To prevent arson attacks in your community YOU need to take positive action. Police should be notified of any remnants of a fire, no matter how insignificant it may seem. Crime scene Investigators may be able to gather evidence including the ignition source and other details to track and apprehend arsonists

Make your property less attractive to arsonists. There are some simple crime prevention strategies you can implement to reduce the risk to your family, your property and your community:

- Erect fences and gates to identify your property boundaries - indicating private property.
- Immediately repair or replace any damaged sections of fencing or gates.
- Ensure security and warning notices are visible to people entering your property.

- Keep fertilisers and other chemicals in a secure location.
- Store petrol, diesel or other flammable fuels in secure areas and locked away when not being used.
- Inspect your property regularly to ensure rubbish, including glass bottles, are disposed of immediately.
- Remove hay from fields as soon as possible after harvesting and store it away from fuels, flammable goods and homes.

SAPOL is committed to identifying, apprehending and prosecuting anyone who deliberately lights fires, but we need your help.

If you see signs of spot fires or anything suspicious – no matter how insignificant it may seem - immediately call the Police Assistance line on 131 444.

#### Helpful details to make note of include:

- Location of the suspicious activity i.e. RPA number and property name, road name, or identifying landmarks.
- Vehicle details i.e. registration number, make, model, colour and any distinguishing features (e.g. dents, stickers).
- Characteristics of anyone acting suspicious such as their age, sex, weight, height, hair colour, or clothing.

If you have any information about arsonists or their illegal activities report it to Crime Stoppers on 1800 333 000 or online at [www.sa.crimestoppers.com.au](http://www.sa.crimestoppers.com.au). You can remain anonymous.

SAPOL, the CFS and the community can work together to prevent the devastation of bushfire arson this Fire Danger Season.

More information and a link to Arson Prevention Fact Sheets is available online at <http://www.sapolice.com.au/component/content/article/4-news/18509-operation-nomad-stamping-out-arson.html>

#### References:

Australian Institute of Criminology (2009) *Bushfire Arson Bulletin No. 59*, Australian Institute of Criminology. Canberra.  
South Australia Police (2013) *Fire data November 2012 to April 2013*, South Australia Police, South Australia.



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## Resilient award winners announced



South Australian Resilient Australia award winners from 2013.

It is well understood that when it comes to emergency management some of the most important work is undertaken long before disasters strike.

Building the resilience of our nation to disasters is a collective responsibility of all sectors of society.

The Resilient Australia Awards are sponsored by the Australian Government Attorney-General's Department in conjunction with the states and territories.

The South Australian ceremony for the 2013 Resilient Australia Awards was held on 2 October 2013. It recognised the outstanding work of South Australia communities, local councils, government, and emergency services agencies in finding new and innovative ways to help build more resilient communities.

Twenty one nominations were received this year for awards across multiple categories.

Congratulations to the following 2013 state winners and also those who won commendations.

Details about all of the projects are found on the SAFECOM website – refer [http://www.safecom.sa.gov.au/site/emergency\\_management/resilient\\_australia\\_awards/2013\\_resilient\\_australia\\_awards\\_sa\\_winning\\_entries.jsp](http://www.safecom.sa.gov.au/site/emergency_management/resilient_australia_awards/2013_resilient_australia_awards_sa_winning_entries.jsp)

- Port Neill Emergency Ready Committee (PNERC)
- Central Local Government Region of Councils, in partnership with Regional Development Australia and Northern and Yorke Natural Resources

Management Board

- The Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure, Building Management
- Department of Environment, Water and Natural Resources (DEWNR), Climate Change Unit and Local Government Association of South Australia
- SA Fire and Emergency Services Commission (SAFECOM), in partnership with SA State Emergency Services (SES), Zone Emergency Management Committees and the Department of Planning, Transport, and Infrastructure, Building Management

Entrants in the last category, the 'Australian Government and multi-jurisdiction' are assessed only at national level by the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department. This year South Australia received two entries in this category.

- Torrens Resilience Institute - Community Disaster Resilience Toolkit
- Australian Broadcasting Corporation (Local Radio) – Emergency Broadcasting

We know there are many other great initiatives being implemented across the State and encourage you to think about entering the 2014 Awards.

If you wish to be advised when 2014 entries open please email [NDRPcoordinator@safecom.sa.gov.au](mailto:NDRPcoordinator@safecom.sa.gov.au) to be included on the direct promotion list.

## Keeping Safe in Emergencies Guide

The State Recovery Office has just completed a project to engage South Australian culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) organisations in disaster recovery.

The project, funded by Natural Disaster Resilience Grant (NDRG) scheme, aimed to establish relationships between CALD organisations and the State Recovery Office.

During the project a disaster exercise and extensive discussions identified that CALD communities require a much wider range of translated information than is currently available. This includes translated information being available before, during and after disasters, and in a range of media including electronic, audio and hard copy.

In response, the State Recovery Office has arranged for the translation of the Keeping Safe

in Emergencies guide into 12 languages. All of the following languages are available electronically, with a limited amount of hard copies available of the first eight languages listed.

Electronic and hard copy	Electronic only
1. English	9. Greek
2. Arabic	10. Serbian
3. Italian	11. Nepali
4. Khmer	12. Polish
5. Persian	13. Cantonese
6. Vietnamese	
7. Mandarin	
8. Korean	

All hard copies of the guide are in a flip chart format and come with a plastic sleeve and magnet so it can be kept in a prominent place on the refrigerator door. The electronic versions will soon be made available via the State Recovery Office's external web page:

<http://www.dcsi.sa.gov.au/services/disaster-recovery/keeping-safe-in-emergencies>

For hard copies, please contact the State Recovery Office;

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