



Your details

Mr

Title

First name

Glenn

Last name

O'Rourke

Submission details

I am making this submission as

Emergency services personnel

Submission type

I am making a personal submission

Your position in the organisation (if applicable)

Deputy Captain Wollombi RFB

Consent to make submission public

I give my consent for this submission to be made public

Share your experience or tell your story

Your story

I have been a volunteer for the NSW RFS for over 20years. I am currently Deputy Captain of Wollombi RFB and have served as the Brigades Community Safety Officer.

I have extensive experience over 15 years leading and developing bushfire community safety programs for which I have been recognised with state and federal Resilient Australia Awards, NW RFS Commissioner's Commendations and RFS Best Practice Awards. I also have extensive national and international experience as a conference speaker on the topic of Bushfire Community Safety. I have also served on the Rural Fire Service Association Consultative Committee guiding NSW RFS

Strategy and Policy regarding community bushfire safety and bushfire survival planning.

I was involved in active fire fighting and community engagement during the 2019/2020 fire season including the Little L Complex, Crumps Complex and Owendale fires.

Terms of Reference (optional)

The Inquiry welcomes submissions that address the particular matters identified in its [Terms of Reference](#).

1.2 Preparation and planning

BACKGROUND

Since the Black Saturday fires of 2009 rural fire services across Australia have invested resources and focused activity to build a community engagement capability within their organisations and have made significant improvements in the field of community safety.

The NSW RFS specifically has made significant progress and delivered a number of key initiatives that improved the safety of communities threatened by the impact of bushfire - reducing the loss of life and the loss of property and other important community assets. These include - The NSW RFS Community Engagement Strategic Directions 2017-2021 | Development of a revised Guide to Preparing a Bushfire Survival Plan | Statewide Get Ready Weekend | Fires Near Me website and smartphone app | Bushfire Warnings and Alerts as well as revised Fire Danger Ratings. The RFS also has a number of new initiatives including Project Firestorm.

THE ENGAGEMENT CHALLENGE

The NSW RFS currently quote that 80% of the community have a Bushfire Survival Plan...a great result and a significant increase on the historically low levels of prior years.

However in many cases the Survival Plans when tested are not 'fire proof', with many saying they have a plan to leave. When challenged on what is their trigger or when do they plan to leave they are unable to clearly answer this question and effectively their plan is a 'wait and see', ie wait to see fire and smoke, then leave plan...the most dangerous life threatening plan.

In practice many in the community do not have a realistic understanding of their bushfire risk and how to prepare for that risk for themselves, their families, their properties and their businesses. Many also struggle to understand the meaning of the Fire Danger Ratings and Warnings and Alerts...and most importantly what action to take in response these communications.

RESOLVING THE CHALLENGE - CLOSING THE CURRENTS GAPS

To deliver highly effective and integrated community engagement, safety messaging and in response effective community survival decisions I believe we should implement the following:

- 1] Culture - Develop a culture within the RFS that promotes and resources Community Safety Engagement as a core function of the service equal to that of the activity of fire mitigation and fire fighting.
 - 2] Strategy - Formulate the next 5 year update (ie 2022-2026) of the Community Engagement Strategic Directions
-

3] Structure - Develop and implement an operating structure that is integrated across all levels of the organisation to enable the timely and effective implementation of both immediate (ie 2020/2021 Fire Season) and long term strategies and initiatives. Detailed as follows:

> HEAD OFFICE - continue to build and resource the existing team of communications and engagement staff with experienced and appropriately qualified professional specialists

> DISTRICT OFFICES - appoint specialist / professionally qualified communications and engagement officers in each District Office. Currently this role is fulfilled by a generalist 'district officer' which in many cases is inadequate, as well as not being a long term dedicated function of the assigned officer.

This role would be responsible for the i) developing effective Bushfire Risk Management Plan based community engagement strategies 2) guiding and supporting Brigade Community Engagement volunteers in the development and delivery of effective local risk based community bushfire safety strategies and programs - by coaching and mentoring, sharing knowledge and experience as well as cascading of information and supporting brigade level capability building 3) drive communications during fire events as part of the Incident Management Team as a communications specialist. (NOTE: this considered a major gap in our community safety capability as an organisation.)

In addition each District should establish a Community Engagement Committee - chaired by the District Officer and with members comprised by the volunteer Community Safety/Engagement Officers of all Brigades. This committee should drive the Districts Community Engagement Program

> BRIGADES - ensure all brigades appoint a Community Safety/Engagement Officer and that this person be a member of the brigade executive and be appropriately trained to NSW RFS standards for the assigned role. As well Brigades should be adequately resourced with the physical equipment required to formulate and deliver effective community safety programs and initiatives - both before and during fire events. These resources should include - laptops, projectors and speakers etc for community presentations/workshops, standardised NSW RFS community safety presentation materials, as well as field display/engagement resources such as marquees, engagement trailers with power generators, radios and display boards for use both before and during fire events.

OUTCOMES and BENEFITS

The design and implementation of the above will continue to improve community safety and survival during fire events resulting in

1] reduced loss of life

2] reduced property loss

3] increased community resilience - a community better able to confidently and safely respond to the threat of bushfire and importantly better able to recover effectively from the impact of fire...should it occur.

I have attached a summary of the 2018|2019 Program of Community Engagement delivered by the Wollombi Rural Fire Brigade - included is measurement of the effectiveness of the program in regard to Bushfire Risk, Preparation and Survival Decision Making as rated by the local community attendees. The results and attendee comments demonstrate the power and effectiveness of local community safety programs and engagement delivered by local brigade members to their own local community.

Supporting documents or images

Attach files

- FIREWISE Report.2018.GOR FINAL .pdf
-



WOLLOMBI RURAL FIRE BRIGADE community engagement program 2018

“Attending was the most worthwhile thing and very empowering knowing that planning and staying informed and vigilant saves lives and properties”





program

GET READY WEEKEND

- 23 September 2018
- 20+ local bushfire risk and survival plan discussions

GET READY Wollombi Market Day

- 1 October 2018
- 25+ local bushfire risk and survival plan discussions

BUSHFIRE SAFETY Information Session

- 7 October 2018
- Local bushfire risk, preparation and survival plans
- 50 locals – Refer Feedback Summary

CHAMBER of COMMERCE Guest Speaker

- 8 October 2018
- Local bushfire risk and business survival plans
- 40 local business owners and operators

EVENT and ACCOMMODATION PROVIDERS

- 22 October 2018
- Local bushfire risk, personal and guest survival plans
- 7 local event / accommodation providers – Refer Feedback Summary

BUSHFIRE SURVIVAL PLAN WORKSHOPS x 2

- 27 October 2018 - 2 workshop sessions, plus followup practical session
- Local bushfire risk, preparation and survival decision making
- Facilitated personal survival planning
- 28 locals - Refer Feedback Summaries





results

ENGAGEMENT

- **120 plus locals** participated | engaged with the various elements of the program.
- **Positive community feedback** re the value of the program , plus the quality of the information, resources and presentations.
- **100% of participants would highly recommend** the survival planning workshop to friends or family.
- Establishment of **new networks plus strengthening of local connection** with the brigade, as well as between neighbours and other community locals.

SURVIVAL PLANNING

- Significant lift in community understanding of
 - **local bushfire risk**
 - **property preparation**
 - **how to make the survival decision to Leave Early or Stay and Defend.**
- Significant lift in **new Bushfire Survival Plans**, plus **improvement [fire proofing] of existing Survival Plans.**







BUSHFIRE SAFETY INFORMATION SESSION

07 October 2018

FEEDBACK SUMMARY

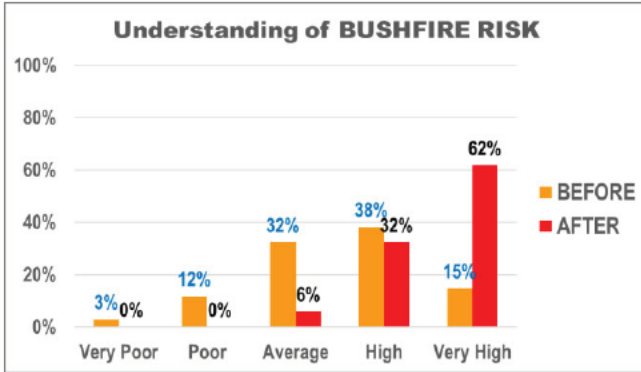
participant feedback and comments

HOW FIREPROOF IS YOUR PLAN?

BUSHFIRE RISK

1

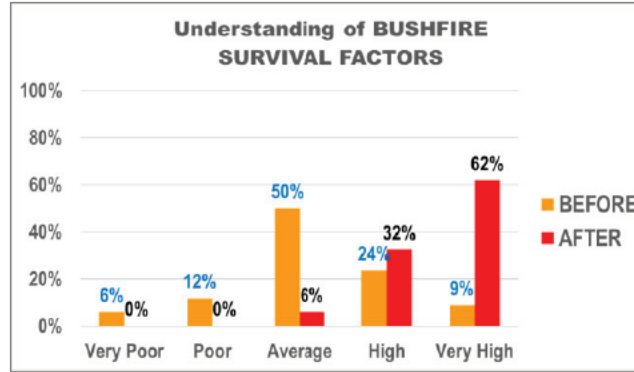
What was your level of understanding of the RISK OF BUSHFIRE and the importance of preparing a Bushfire Survival Plan?



SURVIVAL DECISION

2

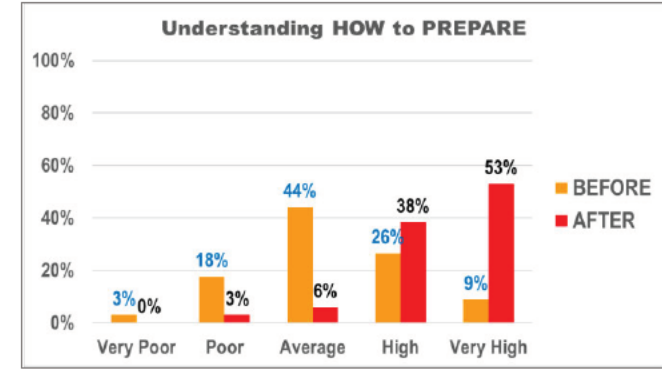
What was your level of understanding regarding factors to consider when deciding to LEAVE EARLY or STAY & DEFEND in the event of bushfire?



PREPARATION

3

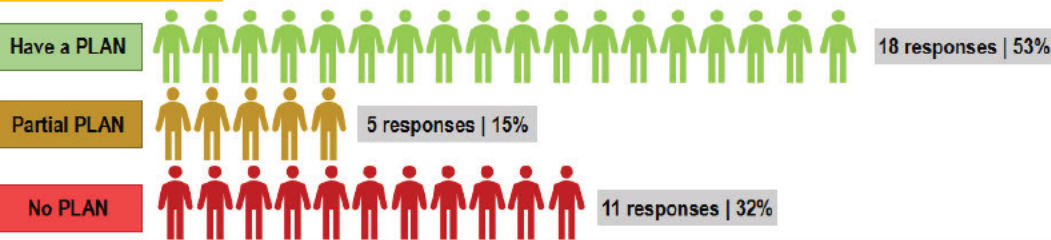
What was your level of understanding regarding HOW TO PREPARE for the risk of bushfire?



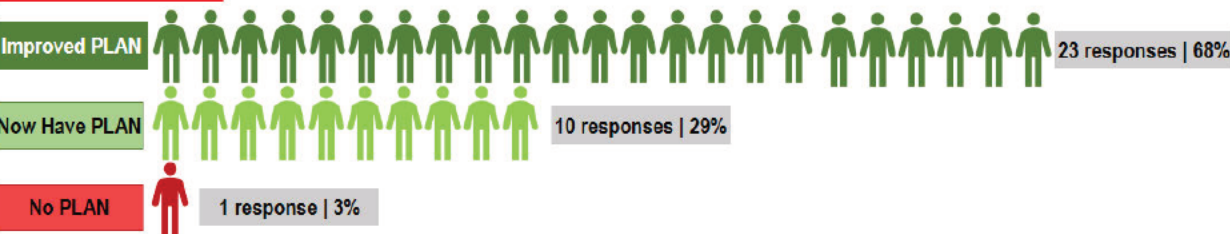
4

SURVIVAL PLAN

BEFORE Session



AFTER Session



Feedback Inputs

- 50 local community attendees [+ 20 brigade members]
- 34 responses
- 68% response rate [community attendees only]

07 October 2018 , Laguna Hall



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BUSHFIRE SAFETY INFORMATION SESSION

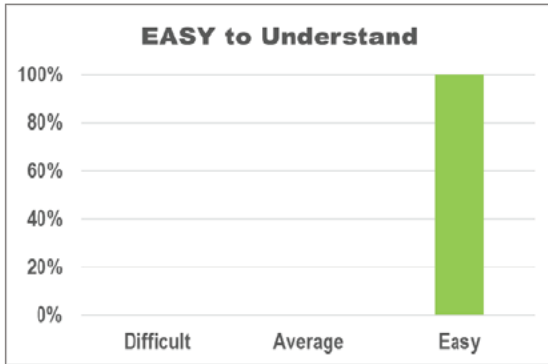
07 October 2018

FEEDBACK SUMMARY

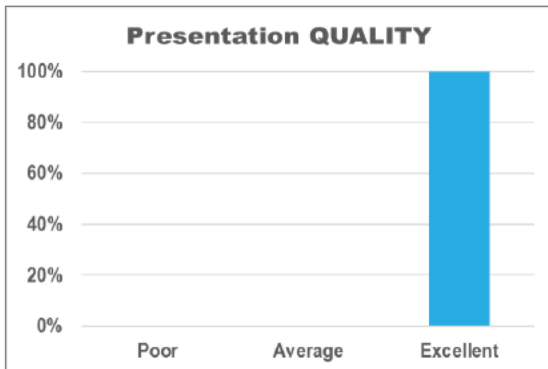
participant feedback and comments

HOW FIREPROOF IS YOUR PLAN?

5 PRESENTATION



Was the presentation easy to understand and follow?



How would you rate the quality of the presentation

6 COMMENTS

COMMENTS

- Very useful, thank you
- Really appreciated the effort of all
- Just moved into area [weekender] - very informative session
- As newcomers to the valley we find sessions like this so helpful
- Thankyou for all your efforts!
- New to area - still looking at organising a plan
- Excellent presentation, well done
- Left with a general plan, as we didn't cover details in the session
- Thankyou for your efforts to keep us safe.
- Very well presented and informative. Appreciate your efforts.
- One always keeps up to date.
- Consider establishing a UHF network and use a dedicated channel to communicate with community.
- This year we will document our plan and review it with Laguna RFS
- Having been through 1994 or 2000 we are committed to leave or not come to the farm
- Excellent locally based information. Thankyou.
- As a weekender our plan will be to stay away.
- Domestic / local problems being considered.
- Excellent information and resources

SUGGESTIONS FOR WORKSHOP IMPROVEMENT

- One area not considered was personal clothing etc. - in the films a lot of people were essentially unclothed.
- Radiant heat was mentioned, but more explanation would be good.
- Perhaps include a briefing for people with guest accommodation. We will be updating our listing to reflect that it will be necessary to leave on Catastrophic fire days [We only have guests when we are on the property]
- Break it up with other voices e.g. the local captains.
- Where to buy equipment. Trades people who will come out and apply screens, sprinkler systems etc
- Need further site specific advice for my situation



BUSHFIRE SAFETY EVENT & ACCOMMODATION PROVIDERS

22 October 2018

participant feedback and comments

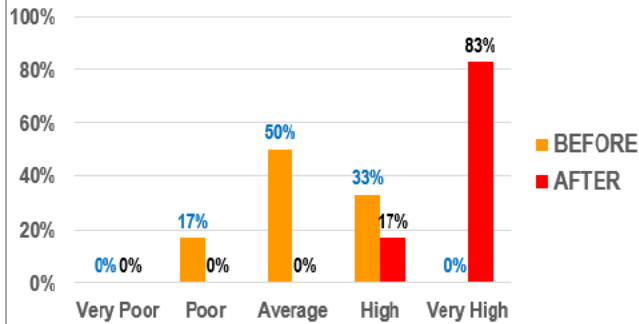
FEEDBACK SUMMARY

BUSHFIRE RISK

1

What was your level of understanding of the RISK OF BUSHFIRE and the importance of preparing a Bushfire Survival Plan?

Understanding of BUSHFIRE RISK

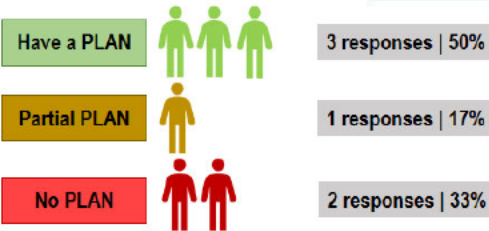


4

SURVIVAL PLAN

BEFORE Session

you



AFTER Session

you

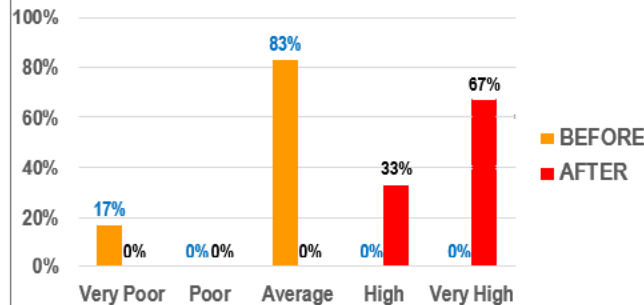


SURVIVAL DECISION

2

What was your level of understanding regarding factors to consider when deciding to LEAVE EARLY or STAY & DEFEND in the event of bushfire?

Understanding of BUSHFIRE SURVIVAL FACTORS



BEFORE Session

guests



AFTER Session

guests

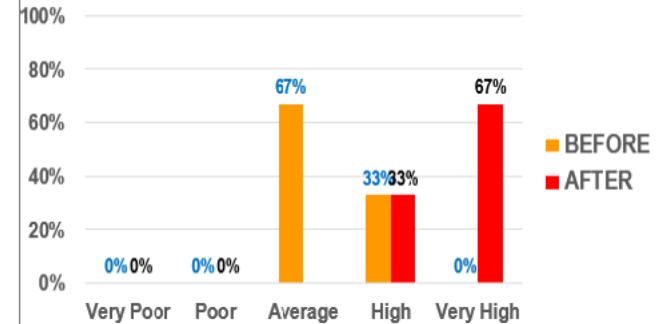


PREPARATION

3

What was your level of understanding regarding HOW TO PREPARE for the risk of bushfire?

Understanding HOW to PREPARE



Feedback Inputs

- 6 responses
 - 7 local event & accommodation providers
 - 100% response rate
- [Note – one provider = 2 participants]

22 October 2018 , Wollombi Fire Station



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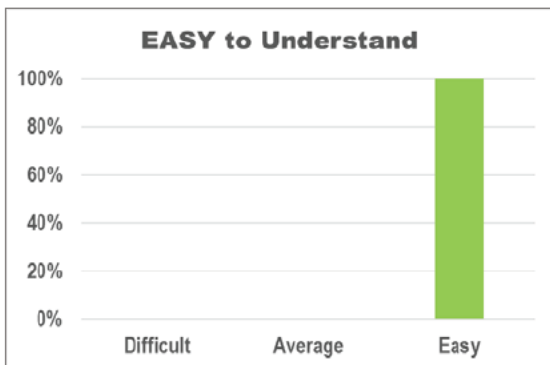
BUSHFIRE SAFETY EVENT & ACCOMMODATION PROVIDERS

22 October 2018

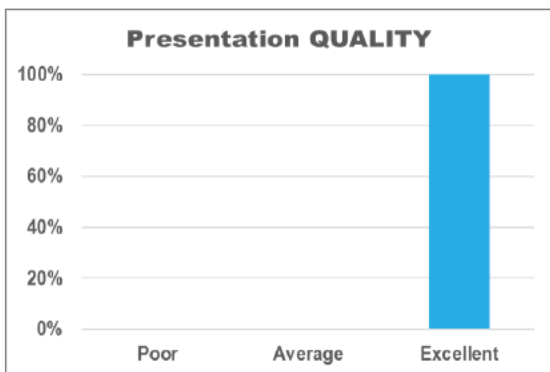
participant feedback and comments

FEEDBACK SUMMARY

5 PRESENTATION



Was the presentation easy to understand and follow?



How would you rate the quality of the presentation

6 COMMENTS

SUGGESTIONS FOR WORKSHOP IMPROVEMENT

- Stay engaged with Chamber (on Commerce) and Progress
- Think what to do and have a plan (12yr old son of AP)

OTHER COMMENTS

- Really great presentation. Thanks Heaps
- It was easy to understand as a child which is really good for future courses (12yr old son of AP)
- Thanks guys!!

100% HIGHLY RECOMMEND
the workshop to friends or family



BUSHFIRE SAFETY SURVIVAL PLAN WORKSHOP

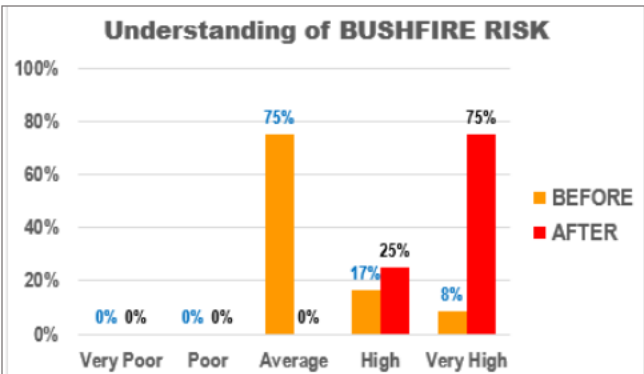
27 October 2018

participant feedback and comments
Session 1 - AM

FEEDBACK SUMMARY

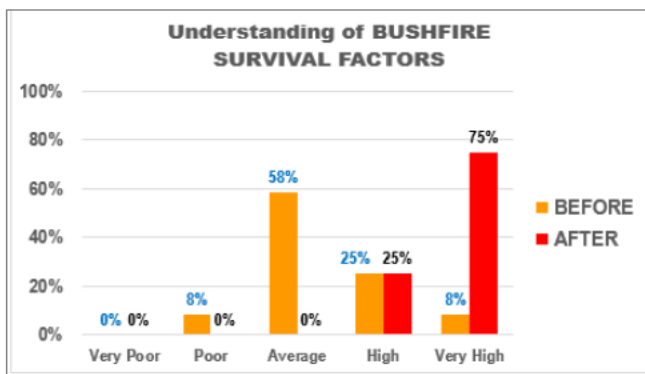
BUSHFIRE RISK

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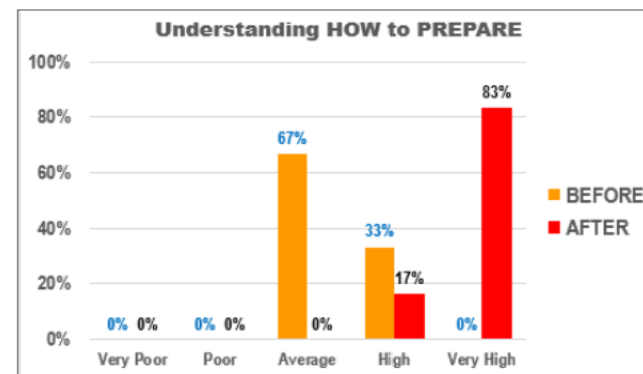
SURVIVAL DECISION

2 What was your level of understanding regarding factors to consider when deciding to LEAVE EARLY or STAY & DEFEND in the event of bushfire?



PREPARATION

3 What was your level of understanding regarding HOW TO PREPARE for the risk of bushfire?



4 SURVIVAL PLAN

BEFORE Session



AFTER Session



Feedback Inputs Session 1-AM

- 12 responses
- 12 local community attendees
- 100% response rate

27 October 2018, Wollombi Fire Station



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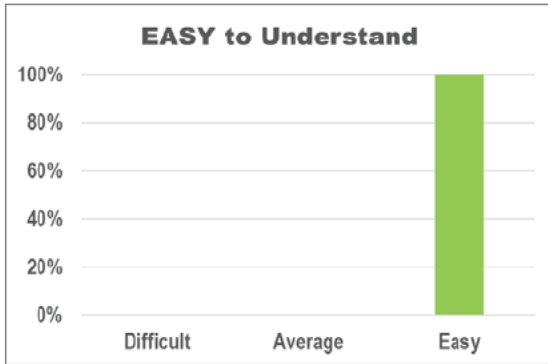
BUSHFIRE SAFETY SURVIVAL PLAN WORKSHOP

27 October 2018

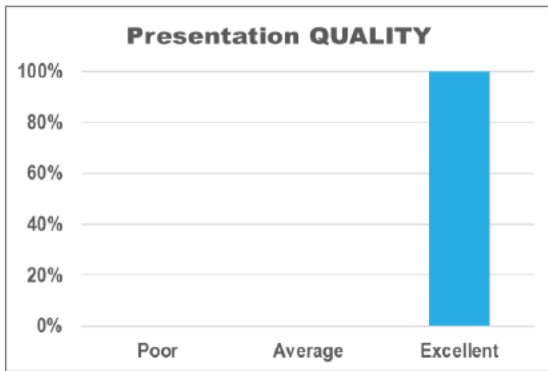
participant feedback and comments
Session 1 - AM

FEEDBACK SUMMARY

5 PRESENTATION



Was the presentation easy to understand and follow?



How would you rate the quality of the presentation

100% HIGHLY RECOMMEND the workshop to friends or family

6 COMMENTS

SUGGESTIONS FOR WORKSHOP IMPROVEMENT

- Need to emphasise the need for drills, especially for stay and defend
- Reduce the situation packages - just 2-4 randomly in packages
- Provide information on what to do when leaving house i.e. curtains / blinds open or closed, room doors open or closed; outside blinds up or down.
- More discussion about communications

IDEAS FOR COMMUNITY TO BE BETTER PREPARED

- Investigate the possibility of organising a communication system local to people's housing area. Potentially groups of 3/4 houses depending on local topography. Nominate a key person from each group to communicate with other groups
- Problem is complacency. Have you done letterbox drops on "can you answer these questions?" if not attend a session
- Create through geography / roads smaller communities and establish communications between members.
- Not sure - regular membership drives??
- Keep the awareness campaign and workshops going. Excellent work.

OTHER COMMENTS

- Would recommend the workshop without a doubt. Mandatory for everyone
- In the timeframe the presentation was very concise and to the point. Glenn did not allow it to wonder off point. Well handled, thought and managed.
- Thank you!! Good job.
- Thanks to everyone for all the work to keep us and our property safe
- Emails worthwhile
- Thankyou! Fantastic. Feeling empowered through information.
- Session was a great help and very much clarified my thinking. Thankyou. Charlie was fabulous.
- This info everyone should have. Thank you!! Good job.
- Everything covered so completely! Size of group was excellent.
- Attending was the most worthwhile thing and very empowering. Knowing that planning and staying informed and vigilant saves lives and properties.
- Thanks to Glenn and all the volunteers.



BUSHFIRE SAFETY SURVIVAL PLAN WORKSHOP

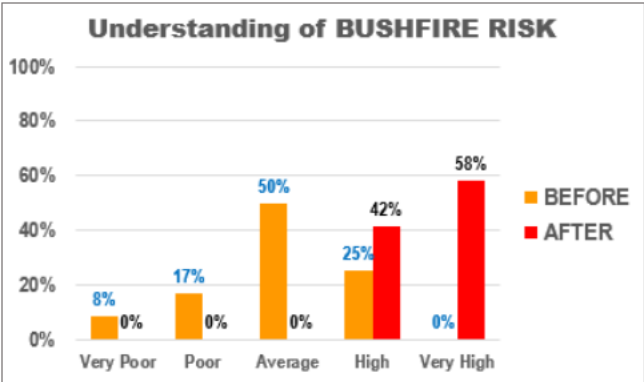
27 October 2018

participant feedback and comments
Session 2 - PM

FEEDBACK SUMMARY

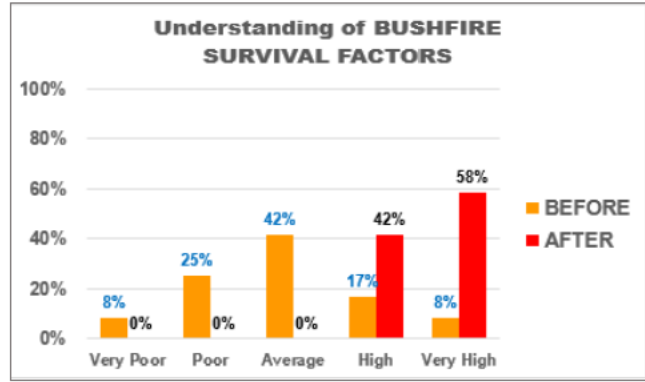
BUSHFIRE RISK

1 What was your level of understanding of the RISK OF BUSHFIRE and the importance of preparing a Bushfire Survival Plan?



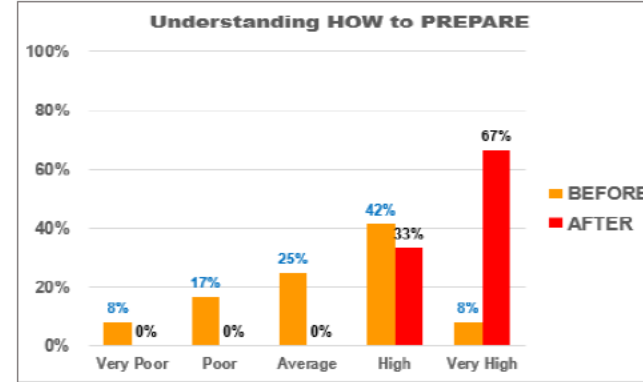
SURVIVAL DECISION

2 What was your level of understanding regarding factors to consider when deciding to LEAVE EARLY or STAY & DEFEND in the event of bushfire?



PREPARATION

3 What was your level of understanding regarding HOW TO PREPARE for the risk of bushfire?



4 SURVIVAL PLAN



Feedback Inputs Session 2-PM

- 12 responses
- 16 local community attendees
- 75% response rate

[Note - some responses as household]

27 October 2018 , Wollombi Fire Station



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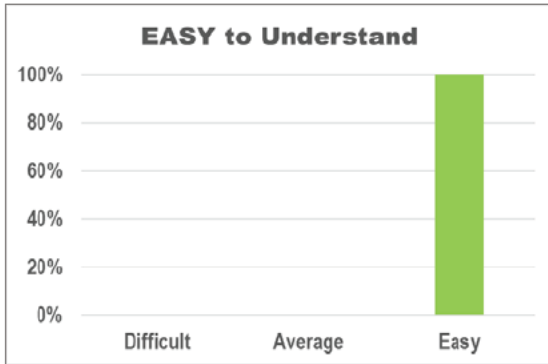
BUSHFIRE SAFETY SURVIVAL PLAN WORKSHOP

27 October 2018

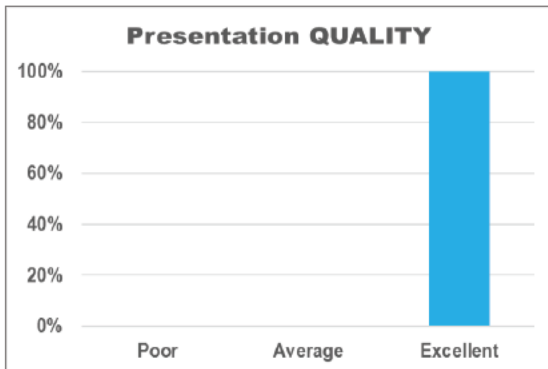
participant feedback and comments
Session 2 - PM

FEEDBACK SUMMARY

5 PRESENTATION



Was the presentation easy to understand and follow?



How would you rate the quality of the presentation

100% HIGHLY RECOMMEND the workshop to friends or family

6 COMMENTS

SUGGESTIONS FOR WORKSHOP IMPROVEMENT

- More information on technical aspects re fire fighting equipment e.g. pump type, clothing etc
- None - a very good workshop | Nothing
- Excellent presentation. No additional comments.
- Concept to put tables together of people who live near each other very well done!
- Another break closer to the start. Hot day
- All bases covered already. Informal discussion was really helpful.

IDEAS FOR COMMUNITY TO BE BETTER PREPARED

- Two way radio communications for the neighbours and the community
- Talk to the neighbours
- Wider reach of this workshop - but how do you get people to attend??
- Get ready!
- Encourage neighbours to meet and work together
- Set up link with fire service re water tanks/advise when leaving early etc
- Strengthen links with each local brigade
- Maybe better advertise community safe spaces
- Network with neighbours
- Consider a pre-arranged evacuation meeting place for valley residents on days of catastrophic ratings

OTHER COMMENTS

- Well done. Thanks for such a valuable afternoon. Now all we have to do is follow through on all the excellent suggestions/information. Great work all!
- Deeply appreciate your guidance, advice and support. Thankyou immensely!
- Excellent | Thank you!!
- Concerned about ABC radio - no reception
- Excellent | Thankyou very much for doing the workshop.
- Thankyou!

