

Submission Number: NND.001.01201

Submission Of: Sukalpa Goldflam

Your Details

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What is your submission based on? I am making this submission based on my personal situation
What was your personal situation in relation to the 2019-20 Bushfires?
Where do you live? Bega Valley (A)

Your Submission

In your experience, what areas of the bushfire emergency response worked well?
We are only human, in that respect we all did what we could

Personally
We evacuated six times, we are in our 60's and I have chronic health issues We had a clear fire plan for the past 15 years we are, leave early people.
We had back up if we couldnt leave to evacuate to our neighbours as they are 'Stayers'
In our x2 vehicles a To Go bag - including spare battery + radio, water, gloves, mask, eye protection, protective clothes and shoes and a dry woolen blanket, packed every summer.

In your experience, what areas of the bushfire emergency response didn't work well?
Evacuation Centre, My learnings

ENVIRONMENT
- Threat of ember attack was not managed, no information was communicated to evacuees about what to do if a fire approached other than 'we may have to evacuate'.
- No layout of camping area so there were too many vehicles, trailers, boats which took up camping spaces.

PEOPLE
- Alot of older and older disabled people were sleeping in their cars, some with their animals, most had trouble accessing toilets.
■ Issues
They didnt feel okay being in the Pavillion ie privacy, public and institional scrutiny, worried about animal interaction (eg dog fights).
They didnt want to be separated from their animals.
They were able to access fire updates, it was hard enough getting to toilets, showers and meal access.
They were particularly affected by smoke and then rain.
It was very difficult for them to make decisions, and when it was okay to leave they were weary and needed basic help to make decisions and planning to get home.

EXAMPLES
I met one older women from Bermagui who hadnt driven to Bega in aprox 15 years, she didnt know how to drive home Bermagui.

SOLUTION
We set up a buddy system for her

Trees- started dropping branches when the big Southerly arrived Saturday 3.50pm, people and animals and tents could easily have been injured, tents, cars, floats etc damaged.

Water
▪ People overnight were filling up the urn with bottled water because the kitchen was kept locked o/n

SOLUTION
Kitchen people leave key O/N with thr facs o/n team for access

Animals
People were staying in their cars or in unsanctioned camping areas, or not evacuating because they wouldnt separate from their animals
Solution
Assess and in many cases treat animals as carer/companion animals, or plan for animal friendly motels or other

In your experience, what needs to change to improve arrangements for preparation, mitigation, response and recovery coordination for national natural disaster arrangements in Australia?
Evacuation Centres
My learnings

Infrastructure
SHORT TERM
- AUDIT ALL SHOWGROUNDS/IDENTIFIED EVACUATION POINTS
Showgrounds/Evacuation points need to be permanently 'emergency ready'.

EG

- Fire Plans, Fire Warden identified, Laminated Information, FF equipment, hoses, water supply, Drill for Evacuees to know and practice on site.
- Toilets in good working order including disability toilets.
- Planned camping eg mobility near pavillion eg up next to the pavillion with accessible portaloos
- Separare area for parking boats, spare cars, horse floats, trucks, except for in disabled/mobility area.
- Laminated Maps of Evac Centre and exit points, taps, electricity points, hoses, device/USB charging points.
- Communication set up for Fire Updates and Emergency announcements consider off grid option ie CB radios

Public education/Information & Fire Updates

- FB /twitter

- One big noticeboard, divided into clearly marked sections

- Radio

- Sceen & tech for live streaming announcements

▪ Storage of non perishables on site; disposable nappies, water bottles, P2 masks, toiletries, underwear, water purifiers, tents, bedding. Rotate to and from other Evac shires to manage used by dates.

ENTRY/EXIT POINTS

- Identify volunteers and train up to manage first arrivals and then ongoing arrivals.

- Have security/police (friendly/helpful in approach) onsite to manage opportunistic crime and possible interpersonal violence, possible child welfare issues etc.

- Direct people to Disability/Mobility areas...have f/up Red Cross to individually visit each of those people- special wrist band to identify fragility.

- Direct all others to main areas with direction for vehicle parking ie limit re cars to people ratio

- All boats, floats, trailers etc not in camping areas. Direct them to outside parking ONLY

-Wristband on entry ? to manage access, meals etc ?

IDENTIFY over flow sites and clear plan, as above

▪ Toilets in pavillion inaccessible to ppl with mobility issues sleeping in pavillion

▪ More showers

▪ Fans in cattery etc

Evacuation Showgrounds

Transport

▪ Alcohol Interlock, stuck in convoy GEO location start stop

Is there anything else you would like to tell the Royal Commission?

Ive been very specific about my learnings at the Evacuation centre

We didnt go there after the first x4 times as we had people who kindly put us up and one time we went to a motel.

Camping in our tent at the showgrounds in the ash and smoke was very difficult, I 'slept' with my mask on at night.

My partner and their friends built steps to the Porta loos while we were there as older people couldnt get into them.

We set up a hose system on the Saturday under the Horse pavillion as the embers were likely to hit Bega as everyone was camping in above 40 degree heat, we said it was to cool off but it was also in case of ember attack.

People and their pets came and got a hosing with cool water.

We helped people the whole time we were there and we were exhausted for months afterwards from

Little sleep

Worry

Working hard to help people etc

These fires are unprecedented and Climate Change is the reason.

We must mitigate this by taking local, State and Federal Action to drastically reduce our carbon emissions.

THANKYOU

Do you agree to your submission being published? Yes I agree to my submission being published in my name