

# FIRE UPDATE

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## NEW ONLINE RESOURCE FOR PROTECTING FIREFIGHTERS

### SUMMARY

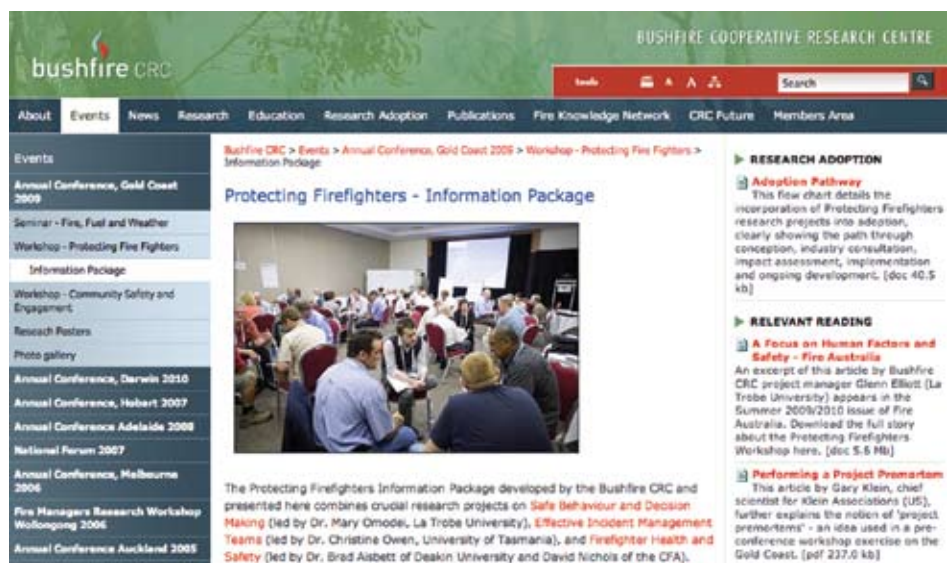
The Protecting Firefighters Information Package developed by the Bushfire CRC combines work from research projects on Safe Behaviour and Decision Making (led by Dr Mary Omodei, La Trobe University), Effective Incident Management Teams (led by Dr Christine Owen, University of Tasmania), and Firefighter Health and Safety (led by Dr Brad Aisbett, Deakin University, and David Nichols, CFA). The online Information Package includes summaries of various presentations made during the Protecting Firefighters Workshop held prior to the Bushfire CRC/AFAC Conference at the Gold Coast in September 2009, as well as supporting written materials. The Information Package is a dynamic research adoption tool that can be added to online as related products are developed, and is designed primarily to assist with sharing basic information about this body of research.

### CONTEXT

Exploring new fire behaviour models and studying the various effects of prescribed burning practices will always be of paramount importance to fire science researchers and end users – but the scientific community is also giving new weight to an ever-increasing field of fire research known as ‘human factors’.

Human Factors, broadly speaking, refers to how the mind and body ‘tick’, and incorporates elements such as risk assessment and decision making, physical fitness and well-being, and information flow and team dynamics – all of which play a crucial part in fighting fires. These subject areas were all explored by Bushfire CRC Program D: Protection of People and Property, under three specific research projects – Safe Behaviour and Decision Making, Effective Incident Management Teams and Firefighter Health and Safety.

In September 2009, the Protecting Firefighters Workshop was held prior to the Bushfire CRC/AFAC Conference at the Gold Coast – an event that highlighted the synergies inherent in this research. Forty-four participants



The screenshot shows the Bushfire CRC website interface. The main heading is 'Protecting Firefighters - Information Package'. Below the heading is a photograph of a workshop with many people seated at tables. To the right of the photo is a text box describing the package: 'The Protecting Firefighters Information Package developed by the Bushfire CRC and presented here combines crucial research projects on Safe Behaviour and Decision Making (led by Dr. Mary Omodei, La Trobe University), Effective Incident Management Teams (led by Dr. Christine Owen, University of Tasmania), and Firefighter Health and Safety (led by Dr. Brad Aisbett of Deakin University and David Nichols of the CFA)'. The sidebar on the right includes sections for 'RESEARCH ADOPTION' with an 'Adoption Pathway' link and 'RELEVANT READING' with links to 'A Focus on Human Factors and Safety - Fire Australia' and 'Performing a Project Promerium'.

▲ Find it here: To explore the Protecting Firefighters Information Package, visit the site pictured above at <http://www.bushfirecrc.com> or <http://knowledgeweb.afac.com.au/PFIP>

representing all states and territories (as well as New Zealand) attended the workshop, 22 of those representing fire fighting agencies, 12 representing fire and land management agencies, three from private plantation companies, one from local government and six representing various universities.

With the Bushfire CRC's emphasis on research uptake and adoption, the Protecting Firefighters pre-conference workshop provided an important opportunity to engage end users in the research adoption process.

The Bushfire CRC – in consultation with a steering group that included representatives from New South Wales Rural Fire Service, the Victorian Country Fire Authority and Department of Sustainability & Environment, and the Fire and Emergency Services Authority (WA) – decided to harness the enthusiasm of the event in order to create a specialist course and useful adoption product.

Keeping in mind relevant AFAC groups including the Learning and Development Group, Rural and Land Managers, Workforce Management and Urban Operations, what emerged from the Gold Coast workshop was

### ABOUT THIS PROJECT

This Fire Update highlights an important new online tool for protecting firefighters, which makes use of research within Bushfire CRC Program D: Protection of People and Property, specifically, research conducted in Project D2.1: Firefighter Health and Safety, Project D2.3: Safe Behaviour and Decision Making, and Project D5: Enhancing Emergency Incident Management Team Effectiveness and Organisational Learning.

### AUTHORS

Bushfire CRC researchers who contributed material to the 'Protecting Firefighters Information Package' include Glenn Elliott of La Trobe University, Project Leader Dr Mary Omodei of La Trobe University, Project Leader Dr Christine Owen of the University of Tasmania, Dr Brad Aisbett of Deakin University and Project Leader David Nichols of the Victorian CFA.

For more information, contact relevant AFAC Group Managers Gary Featherston, Judy Gouldburn or Sandra Lunardi at [afac@afac.com.au](mailto:afac@afac.com.au)



Above and right: The Protecting Firefighters Workshop in September 2009 provided an important opportunity to engage the industry in the research adoption process.



the usefulness of an “Information Package” drawing together all the products of this related research to build knowledge of the work for personnel in varied industry roles.

The recommendation to build this package of material was taken to relevant AFAC groups in November 2009, with each group endorsing the strategy.

## INFORMATION PACKAGE CONTENTS

The first part of the Protecting Firefighters Information Package is a slideshow summary of the Gold Coast workshop, providing an overall snapshot of what was delivered over the course of a number of more detailed and specific presentations from researchers.

For those looking for more detail about the specific presentations from the workshop, the slideshows used by researchers have been added to the “Protecting Firefighters Information Package” website, and they include “How Healthy is the Australasian Inter-Service Incident Management System”, by Dr Christine Owen, “Making Safer Decisions”, by Glenn Elliott, and “Firefighter Health and Safety” by Dr Brad Aisbett.

In addition, there is a series of short video clip interviews with workshop participants discussing what they learned at the workshop, in the form of key takeaway messages.

The Information Package also includes a chart detailing the product’s Research Adoption

Pathway, which shows how the project has developed and will grow over time.

Recommended reading is also a strong part of the online presentation, and includes a workshop pre-reading document, an article explaining the notion of “project pre-mortems” – an idea used in a pre-conference workshop exercise – as well as a detailed article entitled “A focus on human factors and safety,” written by Glenn Elliott for publication in the Summer 2009/10 issue of *Fire Australia* magazine. (Note: The Human Factors Interview Protocol guide – developed by Bushfire CRC – is also relevant, and is available for sale online at the AFAC Shop. Visit <http://www.afacshop.com.au/catalogue/c73/p351>)

In addition to this, four relevant *Fire Notes* produced by Bushfire CRC researchers were selected as companions to the package, including:

- Issue 45 – *Organising For High Reliability In Emergency Management: An Empirical Link*
- Issue 44 – *How human factors drive decisions at fire ground level*
- Issue 43 – *Fitness for duty: legislative and scientific considerations*
- Issue 42 – *Observing teamwork in emergency management.*

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The penultimate activity in the Protecting Firefighters Workshop at the Gold Coast

## END USER STATEMENT

“The Protecting Firefighters Information Package represents something of a ‘coming of age’ for human factors in firefighting. It harmonises several aspects of human factors research to create a clear and coherent picture of their significance, and prompts robust and detailed discussion of the opportunities thus presented to agencies. It will enable the NSW Rural Fire Service to improve its ‘first generation’ human factors doctrine and training. Instead of such policy and practice consisting merely of adapted practices from other industries (notably aviation), it can now become based on sound, relevant and current research conducted in the Australian bush firefighting environment. That will not only help better protect firefighters, but greatly assist them in better protecting the community.”

– Phil Robeson, Manager, Workforce Planning and Development, New South Wales Rural Fire Service

consisted of conversations focusing on research uptake and adoption with small-group open-dialogue based on the question “How we can make a start on embedding the research findings into real world practice?”

After an hour of conversations, approximately 50 ideas were identified. All suggestions were able to be grouped into one of 11 themes, including: distribution of information and knowledge; incorporation into existing training; ownership of the process of adoption, engagement and commitment; keeping messages simple and accessible, and; champions and advocates to drive and lead. Suggestions ranged in complexity and cost of implementation from the relatively simple and inexpensive (e.g. Communication of research findings kept brief and simple) to more complex and time/cost demanding (e.g. The use of “staff rides” – going to the site of an incident to be walked through the event and communicate lessons to other fire agency personnel).

As stated in the summary of this *Fire Update*, the Protecting Firefighters Information Package is a dynamic tool that can and will be supplemented and augmented as work progresses. The AFAC Rural and Land Management group will take overall leadership of the progress of this work. The AFAC Learning and Development group will be presented with the package and asked to manage the training needs analysis at its first meeting in March 2010.