bushfire CRC

Fighting the Flames:
Wildfire, Resilience and Recovery in West Melton, New Zealand

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Background

Wildfire can be devastating; the effects on a community can be extensive. The impacts are multi-faceted encroaching on all members of the community. However, individuals are affected to varying degrees. This can impinge on relationships and highlight existing fissures within the community. It is important to explore a community's resilience to and recovery from wildfire in order to maintain the social fabric of the community

West Melton fire, December 2003

• Significant fire for Selwyn District community in rural/ urban interface that connects it with Christchurch.
• Fire caused by 3-week-old debris fire.
• One house, many buildings, machinery, private forest blocks, fences destroyed and many more homes evacuated.
• Community predominately consists of smallholdings/'lifestyle' properties.

Aims

• To investigate factors, which influence the capacity for community members to adapt to and recover from wildfire.
• To understand social ramifications of wildfire in a New Zealand community.
• To understand how the dynamics of West Melton affected the way the community reacted and dealt with social implications of the 2003 fire.

Required understanding

•Understanding of community to understand fire and its effects.
• Understanding of different groups that make up the community and their reasons for choosing to live in West Melton.
• Understanding of reaction and recovery to the fire to help strengthen their resilience for future fires.

How do we understand the Community?

Need to identify how its members relate:

1. To each other
2. To the land
3. To the District Council/Government

Preliminary findings from interviews

Conflict between two groups:

1. Old and new lifestylers – criticism of each other's preparedness and prevention of 2003 fire and for future fires.

2. Conflict between lifestylers and Council/Government – lifestylers are critical of Council's preparedness and its use of fire bans.

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