

EM Update

Emergency Management Australia provides national leadership in the development of measures to reduce risk to communities and manage the consequences of disasters. EM Update provides current information on activities and issues in the emergency management environment across EMA.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

2006 Australian Safer Communities Awards

The Australian Safer Communities Awards recognise best practice and innovation by organisations and individuals that help to build safer communities across Australia. The Awards work on two levels, state and territory winners are decided first and become finalists for the national awards.

The brochures containing information on the Awards and entry forms have been dispatched to state and territory coordinators and are also available at www.ema.gov.au.

Entries are encouraged for projects undertaken between January 2005 and the end of April 2006. The closing date for entries is 4 August 2006. State and territory winners are expected to be announced in September 2006 and the National Awards will be announced on 6 December 2006 at a ceremony at Parliament House, Canberra.

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Working together to manage emergencies

The Australian Government policy initiative, 'Working Together to Manage Emergencies', announced in September 2004, recognises the need to develop self-reliance at both the community and local government levels to build national preparedness for disasters of all types by providing practical support and recognition. The initiative comprises two funding programs:

- the Local Grants Scheme (LGS), to assist local councils to fund and develop emergency risk initiatives, security upgrades around critical infrastructure and provide training for staff; and
- the National Emergency Volunteer Support Fund (NEVSF), offering funding to emergency management volunteer organisations to boost recruitment, retention, skills and training.

On 8 December 2005, the Attorney-General, The Hon Philip Ruddock MP, announced the funding of more than 400 projects, valued at \$14 million through the LGS and NEVSF in financial year 2005/06. Funding

agreements have been negotiated with successful applicants and work on the projects is continuing toward completion.

Applications for funding in 2006/07 closed on 3 March 2006, with some 770 applications received across both programs. State Selection Committees have met to determine the priority of all applications and a composite national priority list is now being developed. It is expected that the composite priority list will be provided for the Attorney-General's consideration in early June, with an announcement of successful projects expected in Mid-July.

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School education

In February this year EMA commissioned Curriculum Corporation to conduct a national audit of state and territory primary and secondary school curricula and commercial resources to identify strategies to better integrate all hazards and emergency preparedness education into the school curriculum. This audit was completed in mid May and has led to the identification of gaps within curriculum and resource materials. This provided a clear understanding of the hazards and emergency preparedness needs in the Australian education system. This is an important step in preventing the duplication of resources and provides direction for EMA's and other emergency management sector organisation's efforts in this area.

The EMA schools webpage has also recently released a new teaching and learning resource aimed at upper primary/lower secondary school students, titled The Australian Natural Disaster Webquest. This webquest focuses on four prominent Australian natural disasters; Cyclone Tracy, Ash Wednesday, Newcastle Earthquake and the more recent Eyre Peninsula Fires. Students research the disaster from the perspectives of prevention, preparedness, response and recovery. It is planned that this resource is the first in a series of Australian natural disaster and preparedness webquests.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT *continued*

A webquest is a style of teaching tool that is being embraced by schools nationally and engages students in an inquiry-orientated activity in which some, or all of the information that learners interact with, comes from resources on the Internet. In most cases, students work independently and then come together in teams to complete the task. The Australian Natural Disaster Webquest can be viewed at www.ema.gov.au/schools and follow the webquest link.

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Inclusive Emergency Management with Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities (CALD).

At the Security Summit on 27 September 2005, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) noted the importance of a consistent and co-ordinated response by the Australian, state, territory and local governments at the onset of any national emergency.

All jurisdictions attending the summit reported on proposed initiatives aimed at strengthening links with Australian Muslim communities and promoting tolerance and understanding. The Australian Government, through the Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, has provided funds to the Attorney-General's Department (AGD) to undertake a number of initiatives aimed at helping the Muslim community to prepare for, respond to and ensure recovery from incidents, crises and other emergencies in Australia. The Protective Security Co-ordination Centre and EMA are the divisions within the AGD that have been given the responsibility for a number of these initiatives.

One of these initiatives is for EMA to bring together relevant emergency management personnel and multicultural community leaders, including Muslim community leaders, to participate in a National Workshop at Mt. Macedon. The purpose of this workshop is to review the Guidelines for Emergency Management in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Communities developed by EMA in consultation with state and territory emergency management agencies and multicultural communities in 2001.

Other initiatives EMA will be undertaking are related to the development and delivery of education and training programs. They include an emergency management awareness program, a train the trainers program and learning materials for existing EMA programs.

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EMA Library

The annual Australasian Libraries in the Emergency Management Sector workshop was held at Mt Macedon 9 – 13 April 2006. The theme was 'Disasters, Terrorism, Corruption, Crime... a librarian's role in uncertain times'.

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AJEM BOOK REVIEW

by Mike Leonard, Bushfire Co-operative Research Centre

Pyne, Stephen (2006)
The Still-Burning Bush,
Scribe Short Books, Melbourne

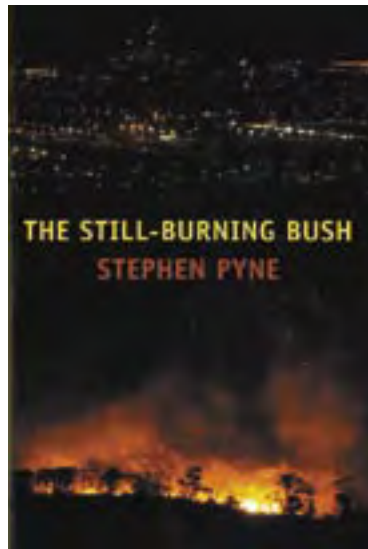
ISBN: 1-920769-75-7

Australia's size, and its federal constitution, perhaps more than any other factors have combined, at least until recent years, to limit the development of a truly national 'bushfire dialogue.' The evolution of the Australasian Fire Authorities Council over the last decade, EMA's national role, and most recently the establishment of the Bushfire Co-operative Research Centre are positive developments in this important area of public policy.

The arrival of Stephen Pyne's new book *The Still-Burning Bush*, is a timely, and welcome contribution to this emerging national debate. Pyne, a professor at Arizona State University is the author of some 17 books, a dozen of which deal with the history and management of fire. Included among these is the seminal *Burning Bush – A Fire History of Australia* (Henry Holt and Co. – 1991). Beyond the academy, Pyne spent 15 summers earlier in his life with a fire crew on the northern rim of the Grand Canyon.

His latest offering follows a recent fellowship at the Australian National University, at the invitation of Dr. Tom Griffiths. Dr. Griffiths is the author of another small, but growing list of essential bushfire related reading: *Forests of Ash – An Environmental History* (Cambridge University Press–2001). From Australia's perspective the 'Pyne–Griffiths' collaboration is a fortunate one indeed.

In an introductory 'Author's Note' Pyne suggests "Australia is among the world's firepowers. It has fires,



fire institutions, fire scholarship, and a vigorous fire politics. Only America has invested a comparable fraction of its national culture into the subject, so what Australia has to say about fire matters far beyond its own shores."

The book comes in four parts; the first two summarising how we came fire-wise, to the present—from both an aboriginal perspective and from the perspective of more recent arrivals as they struggled to come to terms with fire in the wild. The remainder of the book takes up where the author's earlier Australian book (*Burning Bush – A Fire History of Australia*) concluded, the 1983 Ash Wednesday bushfires in south-eastern Australia. And much would seem to have occurred in the past 23 years!

More than anything else this book is a testimony to what the author suggests is Australian fire's most potent symbol, "the inextinguishable firestick." Having studied and written about wildland fire around the globe, Pyne concludes that while Australia is one of the "Big Five in fire science,"

and while Australia often has, hectare for hectare more damaging fires, these are not the things that make Australia "fire's lucky country." Rather it is that "uniquely among developed nations, Australia kept a tradition of controlled burning."

Having paid previous generations, and particularly those who worked in forest and fire management in the post Second World War decades high praise, Pyne finds much of concern in some more recent trends. In discussing the on-going debates between 'environmentalists' and fire managers he quotes, approvingly, Winston Churchill's observation about Britain and America as two people separated by a common language. He notes the increasing subdivision of the paddocks surrounding Australia's parks and forests and the strain the 'tree-change' trend is placing on the backbone of rural fire protection—the volunteer brigades. He laments the constant re-structuring and fragmentation of public land management agencies and the often-associated de-skilling, and is concerned about a trend he observes in some quarters to view 'bushfire management' largely in terms of 'emergency response.'

The book is also an eloquent plea for the continued nurturing of a "nose-to-the-ground sensitivity to match the variety of the...(bush)." To Pyne "the proper core of (bush) fire management...should be fire, fire in the quotidian of routine life on the land." The alternative, as Pyne sees it is "doing no better and perhaps doing poorly with huge force and cost."

There is also however much about Australia's approach to bushfire management that Pyne finds

positive. Beyond the admittedly increasingly troubled survival of the 'firestick', Australians, in Pyne's view, continue to be innovators. He notes, for example, the development of aerial incendiary technology using Cessna aircraft to facilitate broad area prescribed burning, while at the same time in the US huge air tankers were drenching wildfires with chemical retardant. He comments approvingly on the development of Victoria's Community Fireguard scheme, a development that "the rest of the industrial world is scrambling to emulate." Australia's innovations in terms of building design and construction in bushfire prone areas are again considered 'leading edge.'

As to the future Pyne is more cautious, noting that "especially with a matter like fire, which is

nothing if not a study in context, the particulars matter." He further suggests that "no outsider can master the requisite detail." Nonetheless, many of Australia's current dilemmas are not unique and Pyne's "few observations" are both thoughtful and perceptive. His comments on the aftermath of the 2002/2003 fire season may surprise some. In a brief review of the several inquiries that followed he finds the Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) report "a measured document, a grand expression of political technocracy, whose very reasonableness denied it cathartic power." While of the Victorian (Esplin) Inquiry Pyne concludes that it "confirmed the political triumph of the new order."

At 138 pages the book represents a very accessible summary of where we have come from 'bushfire-wise' in Australia, and of most of the key dilemmas currently confronting us. The author's views won't please all readers on all occasions, but his well-developed international perspective suggests that neither should they be ignored. His expression, on occasions, will displease some, but for much of the time his meaning is refreshingly unambiguous. Of the "recolonisation of rural lands in industrialised nations" for example, he suggests that in too many situations "newcomers, often retirees or recreationists, stuffed the landscape with wooden structures that appeared to fire as no different from logging slash."

USEFUL INFORMATION

Letters to the Editor

The Journal welcomes Letters to the Editor. Please note that letters should be no more than 300 words. Letters exceeding this limit may be edited or refused. Letters must focus on issues of emergency management or past AJEM content.

Letters must contain a name, address and contact information of the author. Unsigned letters or those submitted without contact information will not be considered.

Letters by the same author that reiterate opinions previously expressed may not be published. The editor reserves the right to reject or edit any Letter to the Editor.

Advertising in AJEM

Display and classified advertising may be accepted for publication with the agreement of the Editor-in-Chief. The editor reserves the right to insert the word "Advertisement" above or below any copy.

Conference Diary

Full details of local and international conferences relating to emergency management are available from the EMA website. For information, please visit www.ema.gov.au.

AJEM Community Safety in the Emergency Management context special edition – May 2007

A special edition of the AJEM, featuring a range of articles focussing on all aspects of community safety in the emergency management context, is to be produced in May 2007.

We are currently calling for papers focussed around this theme to be included in the special edition. If you are interested in submitting an article for the 2007 edition it must be received by the editorial team by 31 December 2006 and follow the Editorial Guidelines (www.ema.gov.au/ajem).

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interesting websites

Bureau of Meteorology

<http://www.bom.gov.au>

The Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) website consists of a wealth of information covering not just weather warnings. It includes details about the Bureau itself and joint Bureau and CSIRO collaborations, as well as forecasts and observations, climate and climate change, hydrology, oceanography and aviation weather.

Each individual state and territory in Australia has its own page, and there are also pages with information on global weather.

In addition to the forecasts and charts there are also dynamic radar and satellite images that help track the movement of weather systems as they pass through the Australian region.





Can you be an Australian Safer Community Awards Winner?

**Nominate for the 2006
Awards in your State
or Territory NOW**

The Australian Safer Communities Awards recognise people and organisations for best practice and innovation in emergency management.

For more information visit:
www.ema.gov.au

You can also download an entry form.
Entries close Friday 4 August 2006.

