



Tungilik (Own work), via Wikimedia Commons

Retention of volunteers

High turnover of volunteers in the emergency services creates high operating costs (recruiting, training and equipping volunteers) as well as reduced organisational effectiveness.

The Emergency Volunteers Project addresses the complexity of volunteer retention through three key themes.

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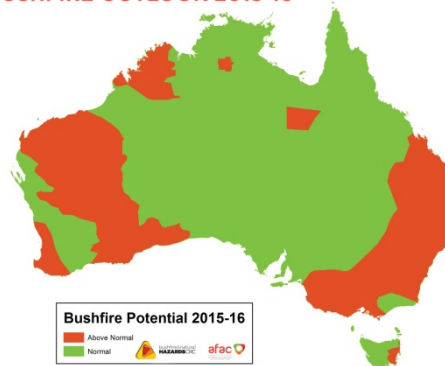
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SOUTHERN AUSTRALIA SEASONAL BUSHFIRE OUTLOOK 2015-16



The Southern Australia Seasonal Bushfire Outlook was released by the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC on 1 September 2015. To access the full report, see <http://www.bnhcrc.com.au/hazardnotes/010>



Emergency Volunteers Project

Improving the retention and engagement of volunteers in emergency service agencies

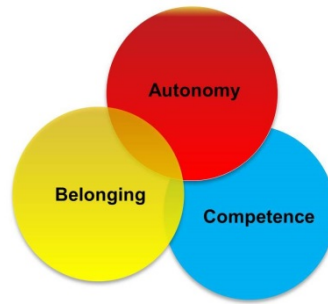
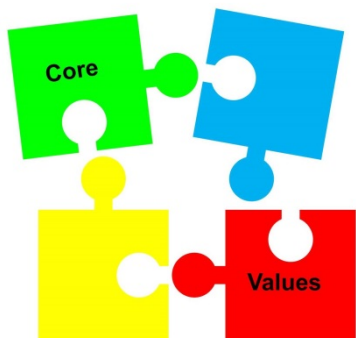
A Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC project

October 2015
<http://www.uowblogs.com/evp/>

Theme 1: VALUING VOLUNTEERS– RECONCILING VOLUNTEER EXPECTATION AND EXPERIENCES IN EMERGENCY SERVICES

The research, conducted by PhD candidate Bill Calcutt seeks to identify the distinctive and dominant personal and shared values that motivate volunteer participation in emergency services, and to evaluate the importance of individual, group and organisational values alignment for volunteer satisfaction, commitment and retention.

Volunteers in the NSW State Emergency Service (SES) and WA Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) are being surveyed as part of this study.



Theme 2: LEADERSHIP OF VOLUNTEERS: INSPIRE RETAIN ENGAGE (IRE)

The IRE program is based on Self-Determination Theory, the psychological theory of motivation. It explores the leadership skills necessary to create optimally motivating and supportive work environments for volunteers.

Leaders learn key strategies for meeting the needs of volunteers and are supported in applying these approaches back on-the-job.

Piloted with the NSW RFS and NSW SES in 2014, the feedback from participating volunteer leaders was overwhelmingly positive. The results of the research showed two main findings:

1. The leadership approaches taught in the program are directly linked to higher volunteer satisfaction and lower turnover .
2. The program achieved its aim of successfully training leaders to develop more constructive motivational leadership approaches.

Following its effective pilot, the IRE program is now available to other all emergency management agencies across Australia.

Theme 3: GENDER AND DIVERSITY: BUILDING ACCEPTANCE AND PRODUCTIVE DIVERSITY

Diversity is an issue that most emergency management agencies (EMAs) currently face. At this point in time, considering political and public attention (AFAC 2015), most are driving for increased diversity acceptance.

The challenge lies in successfully integrating and utilising the existing diverse volunteer base and leveraging this toward the achievement of organisational goals.



Using an experimental design, a training program will be developed in consultation with stakeholders to function as an intervention. The program comprises of three parts:

1. Introduces productive diversity. As a result, participants will begin to understand the functional benefits of increased diversity in their unit/brigade.
2. Focuses on sensitivity training. This aims to evoke empathy among audiences. It will be primarily video-based.
3. Builds awareness of participant's personal biases and the influence these have on us towards diversity acceptance.