

NSW Fire Brigades Community Fire Unit Program

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A report on the effect of major wildfires submitted to the U.S. Congress in 2003 stated "These types of events have the ability to quickly overwhelm local resources, causing catastrophic damage in a short time". Given that major bushfires have caused such catastrophic damage in NSW in the past, what steps can be taken to mitigate the effects of such major fires on the community. This paper outlines the benefits of the above program in building resilience amongst local residents with basic training and equipment, to prepare their neighbourhood to withstand such bushfires. A key feature of major bushfires is the loss of property through sustained ember attack. Human activity plays a significant part in mitigating these ember attacks, prevention and suppression activities, before, during, and after, ember attack are critical (Ramsay 1996). Given that fire services have limited resources to combat these overwhelming events, developing the community's ability to protect themselves, provides a more integrated approach to combating bushfires than merely relying on fire services. The Community Fire Unit Program takes prevention one step further by educating local neighbourhoods how to reduce fire risks through planning and preparedness, and, also providing them with the equipment and training to carry out first aid protection to their properties during a bushfire.

Facilitating increased community consciousness towards bushfires