

Anxious Western Australians less prepared for bushfires

July 6 2016, by Jess Reid

A study carried out by The University of Western Australia has found that people who are anxious are worse off when it comes to being prepared for bushfires.

The study revealed that highly anxious people who were most likely to absorb bushfire information, were the least likely to take action to prepare.

Dr Lies Notebaert led a team of researchers from the Centre for the Advancement of Research on Emotion at UWA's School of Psychology that investigated the emotional and [cognitive processes](#) contributing to ill-preparedness for bushfires.

"We recruited residents from the community on Perth's urban-rural fringe, and assessed how often they experienced anxiety (trait anxiety), and how much attention they paid to bushfire-related information, using a computerised attentional bias task," Dr Notebaert said.

"We also used a new bushfire preparedness measure developed by colleagues within the School of Psychology at UWA, which meant that for the first time, individuals' level of bushfire preparedness could be properly assessed.

"Previous research shows that people who get anxious more frequently tend to be less prepared for [natural disasters](#).

"We wanted to examine whether paying more attention to bushfire-related information would allow [anxious individuals](#) to overcome this ill-preparedness, or whether it exacerbates it."

The findings showed that paying more attention to bushfire-related information had a detrimental effect on preparedness in highly anxious individuals, but a beneficial effect on individuals who were not anxious.

Dr Notebaert said the research had important implications for those involved in helping the community prepare for [bushfires](#).

"Now we need to find out what the link is between anxiety, [attention](#) to threat, and preparedness," she said.

"Perhaps it has to do with how these individuals cope with problems. Less anxious individuals may be more likely to tackle a problem head on, rather than stick their head in the sand.

"If we can find this link, we can use this knowledge to increase preparedness in anxious individuals."

Provided by University of Western Australia

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