

Anxious people respond worst to bushfire threat

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Research from The University of Western Australia has found people who are anxious or easily stressed are less likely to be well prepared or respond well to bushfires.

It comes days after a new [bushfire](#) season campaign was launched by the State Government to raise awareness about the realities of catastrophic and severe fires.

UWA Psychological Science Senior Lecturer Lies Notebaert said only 16 per cent of the community had a bushfire plan, and those who were anxious had less ability to prepare and respond effectively.

"Our team has studied how extreme stress or anxiety affects the brain's cognitive functions during emergencies such as bushfires and we found [extreme stress](#) decreases a person's ability to think clearly or make good decisions," Dr. Notebaert said.

"Also, when something is worrying to them, such as preparing ahead of bushfire season, rather than confront the fear they will push it to the back of their mind."

Dr. Notebaert said [anxious people](#) were also less likely to respond well when a bushfire incident occurred.

"People under stress will often focus on negative outcomes and find it hard to be decisive. This does not work well if they find themselves needing to respond quickly in an emergency."

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

"Even if developing a fire plan is confronting, taking the time to do this is critical for [anxious individuals](#) because your decision making during a fire is going to be impaired," Dr. Notebaert said.

Provided by University of Western Australia

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