Easily achievable fire-fitness strategies normalise preparedness to become a routine part of daily life, narrowing the awareness-action gap.

Advancing public health in the context of natural hazards: normalising preparedness within a framework of adapted Protection Motivation Theory.

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This project proposes public health policy and processes to assist people to negotiate natural hazards in an increasingly hostile, climate change induced environment. This is achieved by normalising preparedness – to make “fire-fitness” routine and everyday. With data gathered from a diverse regional community in South Australia this predominantly qualitative research adapted Protection Motivation Theory (PMT) and used Thematic Analysis (TA) to identify strategies which favour beneficial outcomes for individuals, communities and their immediate social microclimates. Locally bespoke and societal-wide applications are recommended to help narrow the awareness-action gap, promote public safety and well-being and identify topics requiring further research.

FINDINGS

Proposed categories are:
- A new type of workplace leave: Catastrophic Day/Extreme Fire Weather Leave
- Financial incentives
- Effective use of the social microclimate – synchronous, synergistic delivery of information
- Acknowledging and rewarding best practice fire-fitness
- Adaptive rewards – that an action is gainful – and dynamic risk assessment
- Cropland fires: use of firebreaks, crop types and crop placement and planting around assets

Each of these strategies contributes to cultivating a culture of preparedness over the short, medium and long terms. Importantly, a fire-fitness program for any given group must be locally relevant and bespoke.

Future use of this research

The recommendations from this research are readily achievable and need only some visionary advocacy to instigate and trial. None require regulatory or legislative action to implement. These strategies are not intended to replace preparedness campaigns. Rather, they are designed to change the preparedness environment by establishing a preceding culture of fire-fitness as a routine social norm – to develop a precursive suite of lifestyle adaptations to confront and manage the “new reality” of extreme weather events.

It is important to note that while these strategies are able to be adopted and implemented quickly, they will optimally promote and achieve medium to longer term changes in the public’s level of improved fire-fitness, and in the perception among the wider population of the need to adapt to a worsening natural hazard environment.

The complete project can be accessed at:

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