

Media release: 18 August 2017

Fatigue management during extreme weather conditions vital for Australia's volunteers

Fatigue management of volunteers is impacting on emergency management agencies in the face of extreme weather events brought about by climate change, according to leading climate and emergency management experts speaking at the AFAC17 powered by INTERSCHUTZ conference and exhibition in Sydney, 4-7 September.

Over the last 12 months, Australia has seen an increase in harsh weather including unprecedented heatwave and rainfall events. South Australia experienced 11 'extreme' weather events between May and December 2016, an average of one per fortnight. During this period, South Australian State Emergency Service (SASES) experienced a staggering 50 per cent increase in requests for assistance compared to the previous 12 months.

Dr Blair Trewin, Senior Research Scientist at the Bureau of Meteorology, and a specialist in long-term observed climate change focusing on extreme events, commented on the collaborative roles scientists and the Bureau of Meteorology play in the development of effective emergency management plans.

"There is certainly a clear and unambiguous increase in extreme heat, and in sea levels, leading to a higher risk of coastal flooding. Increased occurrences of adverse weather combined with high-risk fire conditions is placing unprecedented pressure on our emergency response personnel.

"Our incalculable climate outlooks are playing an increasing role in planning, both our general seasonal climate outlook, and specialised outlooks, such as the seasonal tropical cyclone outlook, and our involvement in seasonal bushfire risk outlooks. Information on longer-term changes, both observed and projected, is also of high value in emergency response planning," concluded Dr Trewin.

The large number of severe and extreme weather events during 2016, saw the SASES State Control Centre activated 11 times to coordinate agencies, provide media and community updates and implement strategies, actions and response plans.

Stefanie Zakrzewski, an experienced SASES volunteer and flood response planning officer, commented on how increases in harsh and unpredictable weather has made South Australia re-evaluate resource management during back-to-back emergency events.

"The SASES volunteers are members of our community that repeatedly provide their time to

support those impacted by severe weather events. These volunteers have a multitude of other commitments that they put on hold when the need arises.

"There are a number of elements central to effectively managing volunteer fatigue, including lessening the time volunteers spend on the ground, improving agency communication and public alert warning systems, to ensure those facing immediate risk are provided with timely information and assistance. Increased training and response opportunities for both staff and volunteers will ensure a cohesive and coordinated approach," said Ms Zakrzewski.

Dr Trewin will examine the science of climate prediction on timescales and how it impacts emergency response during his keynote 'Climate Change and the Hazard Profiles in Australia,' while Ms Zakrzewski's will question how far volunteers and staff can be pushed, and how better planning of resources between multi-agencies can alter the way emergency responders are managed in her session, 'Groundhog Day: When weather systems arrive as frequently as your payslip – the importance of collaboration, intelligence and fatigue management.'

AFAC17 powered by INTERSCHUTZ - emergency management conference will take place at the International Convention Centre, Sydney, Darling Harbour, 4-7 September 2017.

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Notes to Editors:

- **Complimentary media passes are available, apply by sending name, position and publication title to jessica@zadroagency.com.au**
- Keynote speakers are available for interviews via the media contacts listed below
- Available for interview on request via media contacts below:
 - Stuart Ellis, CEO, Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Authority Council (AFAC)
 - Dr Richard Thornton, CEO, Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre (Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC)
 - Harvey Stockbridge, Managing Director, Deutsche Messe

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About AFAC17:

4 - 7 September | International Convention Centre Sydney

Collaborating for Success – Improving performance in emergency management

Collaborating and improving performance is essential for success in emergency management. Innovating in the face of disruptions and developing our people to successfully manage organisations of the future is a key challenge. Understanding what our people need to deliver and what communities expect is no simple task. Working together is how we will deliver the best results. AFAC17 will focus on how we can work together to improve our performance, what leading the way looks like and who will benefit from our collective effort.

Held over four action-packed days AFAC17 powered by INTERSCHUTZ will attract delegates and visitors from emergency and security services agencies, all levels of government, non-government organisations, research and education institutions from Australia and world-wide.

AFAC17 powered by INTERSCHUTZ is a joint venture between the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC) and Deutsche Messe, trading in Australia as Hannover Fairs Pty Ltd, and is co-produced with the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC.

Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC)

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Hashtag: [#AFAC17](https://twitter.com/AFAC17)





Images: (High resolution images are available on request)

1. Dr Blair Trewin, Senior Research Scientist at the Bureau of Meteorology



2. Ms Stefanie Zakrzewski, SASES volunteer





afac17
powered by **INTERSCHUTZ**

3. AFAC16 powered by INTERSCHUTZ show floor

