

PROFESSOR KEVIN RONAN
OBSTACLES, ROADBLOCKS AND SOLUTIONS
 BUSHFIRE AWARENESS WEEK SPECIAL PODCAST.

What would be the roadblocks to preparedness? Are there things people report as obstacles to preparedness and how can we work with people to get around those?

Yes, there are some obstacles to preparedness. The first obstacle to preparedness, for many people, probably illustrated best by the findings and the research that even in high hazard areas – there 's been quite a bit of research done in the San Francisco area back in the United States, there's research that's been done in Wellington in New Zealand – both areas are very high earthquake hazard zones and despite the fact that they're very high hazard zones, where they have really high risks for some major earthquakes even within our lifetime certainly, that there's very low rates of preparedness. So when we entertain the question 'why don't people prepare?' one obstacle is people being motivated enough to actually have it be on their radar, such that they're going to feel like spending that time to prepare is actually worth their and their families while. Another reason that can prevent people from preparing is that they feel like the effort might be too much or might be a bit anxious and one of the things that underpins excessive anxiety is tendency to avoid, rather than to deal directly with things. So there are a variety of reasons that prevent people from getting ready but if I were to boil down 'what's the main issue?' – the main issue in terms of the primary obstacle for a variety of reasons is around motivation and so helping motivate communities, helping motivate families to become more prepared is something that our research very much gets on about. One of the main motivational reservoirs in any community are kids. We've seen preparedness programs that have been rolled out through schools systems in the form of

education programs for kids and one of the things about these education programs that really is quite useful is that kids appear to enjoy them. In fact, we have seen that kids who have, perhaps, some fears of hazards and the like, that when they go through these programs, when they finish the programs their fears of hazards are reduced. So they're, perhaps, feeling a bit more confident about their ability to deal with things because they're being provided advice. Part of that advice they then take home and share with their parents in the form of say, simple homework exercises. One of the reasons that going through schools, and kids, and families is that, we know that – after a disaster – that kids and families are one of the most vulnerable groups for effects that might happen. Kids in particular (particularly younger kids) are at higher risk for a range of problems including post traumatic stress and a variety of other kinds of problems. This is the long winded kind of response to your query Bronwyn, the issue is really, in our estimation, is really around motivation and one way to increase motivation in a community is through kids and through those sorts of education programs. But I would also add that in addition to those education programs that are carried out with kids and families through say schools and youth centres, we did a study in Canberra just recently where a study was carried out through a youth centre with 12 – 18 year old kids – really quite a successful program. But those kind of programs, we feel, can be coupled with larger, community-based efforts that can be carried out by the likes of an emergency management organisation or other organisations that are designed to help



people feel, perhaps, to get it more on their radar, to consider the question of – well maybe doing a few simple things that might have quite major benefits at a time of some sort of event like a bushfire, might be worth our while to consider doing.

What about using television to promote preparedness, rather than having reality shows about survivor, wouldn't it be interesting / helpful to actually have tips every week or a show that could just tell people how to prepare?

I could give you the long-winded response Bronwyn, but the short wended response is – yes.

The answer is, I think, that because I'm in the ivory tower I have to say; 'well that's an empirical question.'

But if we think about it in more common sense terms, how could that not have some beneficial effect, particularly if it's coupled with some messages that 'by doing this it's going to increase your ability to protect you and your family' and a variety of the other messages that can come along in these education programs. So I am now tending towards the now long-winded response, but yeah I think that would be quite a good idea.

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Recent papers by Professor Kevin Ronan on Preparedness and Disasters

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