Wildfire Fast Facts

What is a wildfire?
The term "wildfire" is used for uncontrolled fire that destroys forests and many other types of vegetation, as well as animal species. In some regions of the world wildfires are caused by lightning however, nowadays many fires are caused by people, either accidentally, as a consequence of carelessness, or arson. These fires often get out of control and spread very easily over vast areas. Depending on the type of vegetation or material being burnt, they are also called: forest fires, bush fires, grass fires, or peat fires

What are the elements most at risk of wildfire?
- Forest ecosystems and other vegetation (tree species and other plants, wildlife habitat, carbon sinks, etc.)
- Water catchment areas
- Agricultural production
- Human health, lives and livelihoods

How can communities be more protected against wildfires?
Here are some things that can be done to protect homes and communities from wildfires.

Before the wildfire:

- Limit development in high bushfire risk areas and clear the vegetation surrounding homes and other structures
- Avoid building in high-risk areas bordering forests, grasslands, or bushlands.
- Use fire-resistant building materials.
- Remove fuel sources, such as bush, understorey, small trees, dry leaves, twigs, and piled debris from around the home. This will reduce the chance of wildfire from spreading to the home.
- Do not store flammable material, such as firewood, gas or gasoline containers, near the home.
- Build fire breaks between the home and any forested or bush land areas, if a natural firebreak (such as a road or a river) does not exist. These are areas of land that have been cleared of vegetation in order

to provide corridors that block or suppress fires and assist fire-fighting operations.

- Plant vegetation of low flammability. For example, trees and shrubs that do not have fine branches, broadleaved trees and shrubs, plants that retain a large amount of water, deeply rooted plants with thick heavy leaves, and plants with thick woody stems that do not easily catch fire.
- Build in areas less fire prone. Flat ground is safer than sloping ground. The bottom of the slope is safer than the top.
- Build fire breaks around important buildings. These areas of cleared vegetation can help to prevent fire from advancing.
- Prescribed or controlled fires can be deliberately set by trained experts to reduce the build-up of fuels in forest and grassland. These fires play a vital role in maintaining healthy ecosystems and reducing the hazard of catastrophic wildfire caused by excessive fuel build-up in nature.
- Consult regulations to make buildings more resistant to fire. Regulations can ensure that homes are not built in dangerous, fire-prone areas, and that they are designed to withstand radiant fire.

Have an early warning system in place

- Provide community alerts about fire risks through fire danger rating systems. These systems forecast the potential for fire, based on recent rainfall, temperature, wind speed, and fuel on the ground. See: http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/fwf/EWS.htm

Raise community awareness about wildfire risks and vulnerabilities

- Since people are responsible for the majority of wildfires, educating the community and raising public awareness about the risks of wildfires is critical to preventing future fires. Raise public awareness about fire danger and prevention through, for example, television, radio, and billboard campaigns. Education should provide people with an understanding of the risks they face from wildfires, and the measures the community can take to minimize these risks. Campaigns provide advice on issues such as campfire safety, conducting fuel burn-offs, burning of rubbish outdoors, and proper disposal of cigarette butts

During the wildfire:
http://www.fema.gov/hazard/wildfire/wf_during.shtm

After the wildfire:
Draw lessons of past fires
Invest even more in mitigation measures

Statistics

http://www.em-dat.net/disasters/Visualisation/profiles/natural-table-emdat_disasters.php?dis_type=Wild+Fires&Submit=Display+Disaster+Profile

Good case studies
Australia
http://www.unisdr.org/eng/public_aware/world_camp/2000/PDF/Articulo%206%20Australia%20eng.pdf

http://www.unisdr.org/eng/public_aware/world_camp/2000/pa-camp00-kit-eng.htm

For Further Information:
http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/Manag/CBFiM.htm
http://www.fema.gov/hazard/fire/index.shtm
http://www.fema.gov/hazard/wildfire/index.shtm
http://www.fire.uni-freiburg.de/
http://www.smokeybear.com/prevention.asp
http://www.unisdr.org/eng/public_aware/world_camp/2000/PDF/Articulo%206%20Australia%20eng.pdf
http://www.ema.gov.au/agd/EMA/emaInternet.nsf/Page/Emergency_Management