CREATING HAZARD-RESILIENT COMMUNITIES: UNDERSTANDING HOW PEOPLE MAKE MEANING OF HAZARD INFORMATION AND HOW THIS INFLUENCES PREPAREDNESS

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Research has shown that a number of community and individual attributes can be used as indicators of resilience. These indicators include outcome expectancy, action coping, articulation of problems, community participation, empowerment, social trust and self-efficacy (McClure et al., 1999; Paton et al. 2000; Paton et al., 2005; Paton et al., 2006; Ronan et al., 1999). A model of community resilience which incorporates these attributes is currently under development; (Paton et al., 2006). This model seeks to outline the relationships between the different influences, and to make suggestions for increasing community preparedness.

To date, as part of the modeling process, research has focused on identifying predictors and defining the linkages between them to construct a model. However, there has been very little in depth study on the processes that influence specifically how individual, community and societal factors interact to determine how people render hazard information meaningful, and how this interactive process translates into preparedness actions. Research over the following three years will investigate this issue.

Following a literature review, and the selection of a conceptual methodology to work within, three community case studies will be chosen. The case studies will be carefully selected to ensure that the context of the environment (including key parameters) is broadly comparable. For example, one criterion of the selection of geographic locations will be the degree to the hazardscape affords comparable levels of risk for citizens. Locations will also be selected to ensure that risk management is undertaken within the context of similar legislative/regulatory frameworks and implemented through similar civic institutions.

Approximately 20 unstructured interviews will be undertaken with individuals in each community to explore how people make meaning of hazard information, and the factors behind why these people do, or do not, prepare. Communities will also be monitored over time to explore the effects of any subsequent education programmes and engagement strategies.

The ultimate aim of this research is to enhance community resilience to natural hazards. With a better comprehension of the influences and mechanisms that enhance sustained household and community preparation, we hope to contribute to the creation of effective policies for hazard management at central government and civil defence emergency management group level.