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International Overview

California Wildfires November 2018 – death toll 50 +
Camp Fire 8,800 properties (Paradise) 130,000 acres
Woolsey Fire 177 buildings, 85,000 acres
70 mph winds – 250,000 evacuated
Firefighting methods
Media Content

- High winds determine speed of advance of fire front
- Description of fires based on % contained
- Warnings about poor air quality
- Fire may have started by power line in high wind
- Poor forest management blamed
- “Bone dry vegetation”
- Portable mortuaries used on site
- Fire jumped 300 feet across lake
Public Reaction

- Why weren’t more firefighters on scene
- Why were their houses left undefended
- Why wasn’t there more communication when fire broke out
- Will Government Funds be made available
Greek Fires July 2018

99 people confirmed dead
700 residents evacuated
4,000 affected by wildfires

Wind speed 77 mph
Damaged cable on utility pole
Possible Arson

Heads of Police and Fire Service replaced
Civil Protection Minister resigned
Police set up diversions for drivers that sent them into the path of the fire, according to one senior expert.

The alarm was not raised in time to give residents and tourists time to flee.

The Greek government blamed arsonists for causing the fire and has accused some residents of obstructing escape routes in the town of Mati by building illegally.
May 2017, destroyed about 3,500 hectares of forest and bog land.

2018 Wicklow, then there was Laois / Offaly
Firefighting required significant resources from a number of agencies.

High economic cost of damage caused.

High cost of firefighting operations.

Air quality, health effects, particular on urban areas.
When fires threaten homes and businesses the intensity of public and media attention increases.

The decision to evacuate is a difficult one to assess, residents will generally not want to leave. An early decision to evacuate, as a precaution is always safest.

The safety of fire crews must be the highest priority.
Wicklow
Incidents in Wicklow were initially of small scale but increasing in number.

They highlighted the risk posed by widespread tinder dry conditions.
A number of large scale fires broke out in the uplands.

There was no threat to homes or businesses. Road were closed, the response was deliberate and methodical.
In open rural areas where there are nearby bodies of open water, helicopters can make a significant contribution.

You still need boots on the ground in a targeted approach.
View from the Government jet.

The proximity of water sources.

The importance of “defence lines”.
Prime Suspects

There was a strong need for public awareness to emphasise the new and unique circumstances.
15-km from the fires in the Wicklow Mountains but completely different.

Rural versus Urban

- Scenario
- Impact
- Response
- Tempo
- Implications.
We had experience of fires on Bray Head.

We had dealt with them using one or two Fire Crews.

We relied heavily on natural and man made fire breaks.
Lessons Learnt

Annual meeting of response agencies and stakeholders.

Pre plan and identify defence lines, roads, streams, areas of rock and low vegetation.

The effect of terrain on the smoke plume.

The effect of vegetation height on fire spread and intensity.

WATER – WATER - WATER
Lessons Learnt

Fire prevention advice to public before Wildfire Season

Land use management advice to land owners

Physical limits of firefighters

The need to pause firefighting at night

The need for observers to remain through the night
Lessons Learnt

Urban vs Rural

Helicopters – liaison, communications, identify water sources

As much advance warning as possible to the public, updated regularly.

People ignore advice.

Safe Escape route must be identified and monitored.