



# MEDIA RELEASE

**Media Office**

sydney.edu.au/news

@SydneyUni\_Media

After hours

0402 972 137

## **Sydney bushfires and hazard burns linked to 200 deaths and 1200 hospitalisations: Medical Journal of Australia**

Experts call for health risks to be factored into fire management

17 April 2018 – for immediate release

As a [major blaze continues to burn today](#) in Sydney's south-west, a University of Sydney report in this week's [Medical Journal of Australia](#) reveals bushfires and hazard reduction burning caused 197 premature deaths and over 1200 hospitalisations in Sydney between 2001-13.

The researchers say that even short-term exposure to air pollution acts as a stressor on the human body and exacerbates existing health conditions.

“Additional deaths caused by air pollution are more likely to occur in vulnerable groups, such as the elderly and those with chronic diseases,” says [Associate Professor Geoffrey Morgan at the University of Sydney](#).

“Because we made conservative assumptions about air pollution exposure and health impact estimates, these findings are likely to under-estimate the true health impact of fire smoke in Sydney.”

Many fires burn every year throughout Australia and some cause substantial health and social impacts. For example, seventy-seven deaths in New South Wales were directly attributed to bushfires during 1901–2011.

“Our study indicates that a substantial additional health burden is associated with the indirect effects of smoke from bushfires and hazard reduction burns.

“While hazard reduction burning is important for reducing risks to lives and property, and averting tragedies, we recommend that the health risks of fire smoke pollution be factored explicitly into managing fires through collaboration between health, environment, and fire management agencies,” Dr Morgan said.

### **Media enquiries: University of Sydney**

Associate Professor Geoff Morgan: mobile 0417288692 or Dan Gaffney: mobile 0481004782