

# Best practice for tracking potentially traumatic event exposure and organisational responses



## RESEARCH TEAM

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## SUPPORTING ORGANISATIONS

Phoenix Australia

AFAC

Forest Fire Management Victoria

NSW Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS)

Country Fire Authority Victoria (CFA)

Victoria State Emergency Service (VICSES)

Natural Hazards Research Australia (the Centre)

The University of Melbourne

Project duration: 8 months

## Background

Emergency services workers can be exposed to potentially traumatic events (PTEs) through their role, and agencies need to be able to identify when repeated exposure poses a risk to workers' mental health. AFAC's Mental Health and Wellbeing Group is committed to creating workplace environments within the fire and emergency services that are conducive to psychological health and safety and where psychosocial risk management conversations are business as usual. The MWHG identified the need and benefit to determine best practice approaches for tracking and responding to cumulative exposure to PTEs.

## Project description

This project seeks to determine the most effective (best) practice for monitoring fire and emergency service workers' exposure to traumatic events, and organisational responses to them. This will involve reviewing published literature on current psychological risk management and tracking approaches for PTEs, and gathering and comparing information on such approaches currently used in emergency service and similar high-risk organisations in Australia and overseas. Once current practice has been determined, consultations with key representatives of the Australian emergency services sector will help to identify the principles of best practice tracking systems that would suit the needs of Australian agencies. Outcomes of the project will support Australian fire and emergency service agencies to assess their own current practice and consider necessary changes in their risk management systems in order to help protect the mental wellbeing of their workers.



## Intended outcomes

The long-term desired outcome of this project is improved psychological health and safety of emergency service workers through the use of effective systems for tracking PTE exposure and organisational responses by their agencies. To achieve this, the project seeks to increase sector-wide awareness, expertise, and collaboration around tracking and minimising the impact of cumulative trauma on workers. Individual agencies will have an enhanced ability to assess their current practice for monitoring trauma exposure against best practice principles and consider improvements to their current risk management systems. More broadly across the sector, an important desired outcome is the development of consistent and best-practice guidance for designing, selecting and implementing systems, infrastructure and tools that help achieve the goal of creating and maintaining psychologically healthy workplaces.

## Translation and implementation potential

The findings of this project have practical utility for supporting emergency services agencies in protecting the mental health of their workers. A guidance document will be developed for agencies to benchmark their current approach to psychological risk management against best practice for tracking PTE exposure and organisation responses. The document can also guide decision-making about selecting and implementing risk management systems around supporting emergency services workers who repeatedly experience traumatic events during the course of their work.

## Further information

For full project details head to: <https://www.naturalhazards.com.au/research/research-projects/best-practice-tracking-and-responding-potentially-traumatic-event>

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