



‘Bushfire Prevention and Preparedness’



(A guide for residents and landholders)



Disclaimer:

You must read the following important information before you proceed.

Bushfire prevention and preparedness is **your responsibility** as the landowner, and as such, these materials have been provided to assist you in making wise choices. They do not contain all of the information available, but should provide a good starting point for you to start thinking and preparing yourselves, your home and your property for bushfires.

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*This information has been developed as a component of the
Lower Eyre Peninsula Bushfire Re-establishment Program
And amended as part of the EMA funded
'Where There's Smoke There's Fire' project*

Prepared October 2006
Amended June 2007

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INTRODUCTION

This package has been prepared to provide you with information about how to prepare your home, property and yourself for a bushfire. While it does not contain all information available on the topic, it will be an excellent starting point for thinking about preparing yourself and your property for bushfires.

This package is divided into three sections:

- What you need to know
- What you need to do
- Other useful information.

If you require any further information or assistance please refer to the 'Contact Details' provided.

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PREPARE FOR THE WORST

*“Prepare for the worst – but don’t worry about it”
– Alice, New Orleans resident*

It’s one of those days, the alarm didn’t work, the shower was cold, the cat chose the rug as a toilet during the night, and when you finally got to the car – the tyre was flat. It is at this point that you make a decision that reflects how you will respond in a disaster.

You decide to either:

- Keep trying to manage the situation *or*
- You decide to manage how you are responding to the situation.

Keep Trying

If your choice is to keep trying to manage the situation, the pressure is now on. Your short-term memory begins to fail (where ARE those wheel nuts), your thinking begins to fail (why doesn’t this spanner fit!!), and at each point your stress increases. By the time the tyre is on (with only 4 wheel nuts) you feel like using the car to run over the cat (yes I know some of you want to do that anyway) and the last thing you feel is successful. Remember doing this? At this point you are on a stress spiral. In our ‘normal’ daily lives we get through. By lunchtime we are starting to calm down (as long as nothing else went wrong) and by teatime – we’re back to our old selves.

Manage your response

If your choice is to manage your RESPONSE to the situation rather than the situation, you calm down, your short-term memory works fine; you think straight and the job gets done. You feel successful. Your day is looking like it could turn out after all - with a few alterations to your plans. For people who have practiced this, this ‘calming down’ takes a very short period of time. For many of us, we have to work at it.

Planning

Each day we plan to manage our daily activities. There is the expected (which we plan for) the unexpected (which we respond too) and the unpredictable. So if the event is too big, too quick, or too rare – our plans fail. **Recognising when your planning has failed is an important part of planning, but it is more important to our psychological safety.** People who can make this recognition are often the same people who take the second choice above – they stop trying to manage the situation and start managing their response to the situation.

PREPARE FOR THE WORST

Be Prepared

Imagine that it can happen to you

Being prepared for disaster, knowing your plans well and having practiced them is an essential part of planning for a disaster. Knowing your practical plan backwards means you can act on those plans even when you are stressed, and so can your loved ones. Knowing when to stop managing the situation and start managing your response also needs to be practiced – until you know it backwards.

No matter what the event, a natural disaster, a terrorist attack, violence, or an accident, preparing for it will ease the stress and decrease the emotional impact on you and your family. Preparation improves our chances of survival and makes us feel less helpless. **Knowing when to stop trying to control the situation and start managing your response is an action we can take to protect ourselves (think better during an emergency) and feel less overwhelmed (recover quickly from the trauma).**

Be Prepared Psychologically

STEP 1 ***Become knowledgeable about potential threats.*** The highest risk we have in a modern world is a car accident. Be aware, but not fearful, of this. Assess other risks; fire is a risk no matter where you live, and extreme fires are a common source of trauma in Australia.

STEP 2 ***Decide on your level of control of that event.*** You cannot stop your loved ones using cars, but you can support them being safe (seat belts etc). You cannot remove all fire threats. But you can be prepared for the most likely, have an evacuation plan, have a survival kit (drinking water, torch, shelter etc).

STEP 3 ***Know when the event is bigger, faster, or outside of your plans.*** Know that when this happens, it becomes more important to be in control of your response to the trauma than to continue trying to be in control of the situation.

STEP 4 ***Practice being in control of your stress.*** This is a skill, and it needs practice.

PREPARE FOR THE WORST

Stress Inoculation Steps

Socialise

An ideal social circle is as follows:

- 1-2 exceptional friends, people we can talk to about anything, who support us and listen to us and are honest with us. We would see these people at least once a week, but usually more often.
- 5 – 10 people, who are similar to us, have the same ideals and beliefs and support us by just being there. We would see these people at least monthly.
- 15-20 people we know. These people are our 'pool'; we see them less regularly and when someone in our middle group leaves, or is seen as less supportive, we bring them into the middle group. We could see these people at least 6 monthly.

Have a hobby

A hobby is an activity, which you do not 'have to do' but rather choose to do.

The activity could be traditional hobbies (sport, music, needlepoint, football, quilting, scrap booking etc) or alternate hobbies (fixing stationary motors, collecting comics, making furniture out of driftwood), but whatever it is, it is pleasurable, and gives us a feeling of satisfaction. It is what we do more of when we want to feel good.

Be Positive

Practice looking for the positive in situations. Do this for small things and work your way towards more complicated problems.

PREPARE FOR THE WORST

Don't cycle thoughts

Most of our daily problems are solvable and we think about (cycle) the problem until a solution arrives. This becomes our pattern of problem solving.

Have you ever forgotten a name, and no matter how hard you try it will not come to you, but stop thinking about it and in it pops. Not thinking about a problem, or better still, sleeping on the problem, often brings the solution. This is particularly true for difficult or 'unsolvable' problems.

When a disaster occurs, 'unsolvable' problems come at us from all angles and many people use their normal problem solving method - thought cycling. As the problems are so difficult, we end up learning how NOT to solve the problem by cycling the same problem and the same solutions (or lack of them) around and around.

When confronted with life's problems, instead of thought cycling, consider giving it a break and let your subconscious do the work. Practice this regularly. When a trauma occurs your brain will automatically sort your problems; the hard ones are sent to the sub-conscious, and the easy ones to the conscious. Then you won't be thinking the same thought over and over and over and over.....

Relax

The skill in relaxation is to know the feeling. If you can close your eyes and imagine the feeling of relaxation, then you probably have the skill. For many of us we need to experience and notice the feeling of relaxation more, so that when we need it (following a trauma) we can recall it. You can practice relaxation and there are many resources available just for this purpose – just search for relaxation, meditation, tai chi, progressive muscle relaxation, visualisation, massage, etc.

PREPARE FOR THE WORST

Exercise

The stress response of your body gets you ready for 'action', so at some time you need to take the action – exercise gives your body the opportunity to produce relaxation, or 'feel good', chemicals. A healthy approach is to exercise daily for at least 30 minutes – go on, walk the cat.

Develop and maintain a sleep cycle

Many of us go to sleep when we are tired – in front of the TV, after tea, after the Big Brother up late show – and this works when everything is good in our lives. When stressed (following trauma) this no longer works and we are unable to sleep (why would you feel tired when there is so much to do). **Sleep is important to our ability to recover from trauma, and essential to our ability to think, learn, and use our memories.** Following a trauma, people without a sleep routine discover they are unable to go to sleep, so part of preparing for trauma is to develop a sleep routine. A sleep routine does not mean regular bedtime (although you do need 6 – 8 hours of sleep a night, and a regular bedtime helps). A sleep routine is series of steps, which you always do, in the same order before going to sleep. An example could be: Have a shower, make a glass of warm milk, and take it to bed, read a book, turn of the light and go to sleep. Practice this routine every night for 1 to 2 weeks and you will have a sleep routine.

When we acknowledge that we have the ability to heal psychological trauma, and that we can practice those skills and become masters at them, then we are better able to cope with devastating experiences and move through those powerless feelings. As we do we become stronger individuals – more resilient and compassionate towards others.

More information

Country Health SA, Eyre Peninsula, have a Mental Health Promotion Worker who can send out further information, provide education sessions and public forums. Contact the Promotion Officer on 8683 2083. **Monday to Friday 8.30am to 4.30pm.**

COMMUNITY FIRE SAFE

PROGRAM INFORMATION

What is Community Fire Safe?

“Community Fire Safe” is a program initiated by the CFS that encourages residents living in high-risk areas to form small action groups. These groups may consist of just a few families living in the same area, who face a common bushfire threat.

In these groups people learn how fires behave and how they destroy lives and homes. With this understanding, they are able to develop survival strategies for themselves and their local community – strategies that work because they have community ownership and support.

What support is available for groups?

Once a group has formed, a Community Fire Safe Facilitator, with the assistance of CFS volunteers, will provide ongoing support, technical information and resources.

This may take the form of a series of informal meetings where the group can discuss such issues as fire behaviour, fire prevention and house survival. It may also incorporate a property walk to help residents identify local fire hazards and familiarise themselves with the fire fighting equipment on their neighbours’ properties.

Once residents have been educated and strategies have been finalised, many groups may become less active, however the community networks developed during the education and planning stages remain and these can prove vital during a bushfire. To facilitate this, groups are encouraged to meet prior to each fire danger season to update their plans.

COMMUNITY FIRE SAFE

Program Outline

What topics are covered?

Objective **Topic/Issues**

***Personal
Survival
Plans***

Experiencing a fire

- What does a major fire look, sound and feel like?
- How much warning of a fire will I get?
- Will reticulated water, power and telephones work?
- What can I expect from the CFS, Police or other authorities?

Bushfire Behaviour

- What factors influence how intense a fire is likely to be?
- How will a major fire in this area be likely to behave?

Personal Safety

- What are the dangers to personal safety?
- How safe is my house? Can it provide shelter during the passage of a fire front?
- Are my family and I physically and psychologically capable of staying and defending our home?
- How safe is it to evacuate the area?
- What is the situation with roads and roadblocks?

Bushfire Action Plans (*Personal Survival Plans*)

- Should I stay or should I go?
- What do I need to ensure personal safety in either case?
- What if circumstances mean I can't follow my preferred plan?
- Are children and visitors considered in the development of survival strategies?
- Does planning include taking care of animals?

***Property
Protection
Plan***

Bushfire Behaviour

- How is a fire approaching my property likely to behave?

COMMUNITY FIRE SAFE

Property Protection Plan

How Houses Burn (and How They Survive)

- What are the ways in which houses can be ignited during a bushfire?
- What can be done to improve their safety?
- How can entry of sparks and embers be prevented?
- How can I reduce fire intensity around my home?

Street Walk, Property Inspections

- Do I have a realistic appreciation of my home's chances of survival?
- What are the risks to my home in the event of a major fire?

Bushfire Action Plans (*Personal Survival Plans*)

- What passive and active fire protection measures can I take to improve its chances of survival?
- What are the options for managing the risks and how can I achieve them?
- What do I need to do during the year, at the start of the fire season, on high-risk days or on days of actual fires?

Community Strategies

What are some of the community strategies our group can undertake to reduce risks in our street or area and improve our chances of survival? For example:

- Early warning systems or phone trees
- Nominating safe house / refuge
- Plans for less able bodied residents
- Working bees to reduce hazards and likely fire intensity
- Bulk buying fire fighting equipment
- Lobbying for improvements to water supply or reduction of hazards on public lands.

Who do I talk to?

For referral to your local Community Fire Safe Facilitator contact:

SA Country Fire Service
Level 7
60 Waymouth Street
Adelaide
South Australia 5000

Telephone (08) 8463 4200
Facsimile (08) 8463 4234

NATIVE VEGETATION REGULATIONS

Regulations relevant to bushfire prevention and preparedness

All vegetation clearance in the State is regulated under the South Australian Native Vegetation Act 1991.

This Act has brought an end to broad scale clearance in South Australia. Any clearance of native vegetation (that is not covered under a regulation) must be approved through a process of application to the Native Vegetation Council.

The Regulations under the Native Vegetation Act set out circumstances in which native vegetation may be cleared without the need for specific consent from the Native Vegetation Council. The regulations allow for the clearance of vegetation considered to be reasonable for property management.

Listed below are the explanations of the regulations that apply to bushfire prevention and preparedness. Outlining further information is the booklet 'A Guide to the Regulations under the Native Vegetation Act 1991'. This can be found at http://www.dwlbc.sa.gov.au/files/nv_guide_to_regs_sept_06.pdf.

NATIVE VEGETATION REGULATIONS

“**Native vegetation**” means a plant or plants of a species indigenous to South Australia including a plant or plants growing in or under the waters of the sea but *does not* include –

- a) A plant or part of a plant that is dead unless the plant, or part of a plant, is of a class declared by regulation to be included in this definition; or
- b) a plant intentionally sown or planted by a person unless the person was acting –
 - (i) in compliance with a condition imposed by the Council under this Act or by the Native Vegetation Authority under the repealed Act, or with the order of a court under this Act or the repealed Act; or
 - (ii) In pursuance of a proposal approved by the Council under Part 4 Division 2; or
 - (iii) in compliance with a condition imposed by a Minister, statutory authority or prescribed person or body under –
 - (A) The River Murray Act 2003; or
 - (B) The Natural Resource Management Act 2004; or
 - (C) Any other Act prescribed by the regulations for the purposes of this paragraph.

5(1)(m) Fire prevention and protection

The aim of this regulation is to allow for clearance to **reduce combustible material** on land as long as the person/s who carries out the clearance does so within the requirements of a management plan prepared by either the landowner or the district bushfire prevention committee (Fire & Emergency Services Act 2005) and approved by the Native Vegetation Council.

A fuel reduction management plan does not have to relate to a single property. A group of adjoining landholders can submit a single plan setting out a coordinated burning program across their properties. Alternatively, the local bushfire prevention committee can prepare a plan encompassing one or more properties for approval by the Native Vegetation Council.

5(1)(n) Fire protection, dwellings and buildings

The aim of this regulation is to provide for clearance of native vegetation around **dwellings or other buildings** for the purpose of **fire protection**.

However, in some instances clearance more than 20m from dwellings or more than 5m from other buildings may be necessary. The Native Vegetation Council has prepared guidelines for clearance for fire protection beyond the 20m or 5m zones so that necessary clearance can be undertaken without the need for clearance applications. Any clearance undertaken must comply with the guidelines.

NATIVE VEGETATION REGULATIONS

5(1)(t) Clearance for Vehicle Track

The aim of the regulation is to provide the establishment or maintenance of a **track** reasonably required **for vehicle access**, and there is no practical alternative to siting the track that would involve no clearance. For example, the track might be reasonably sited in a fuel break or otherwise previously cleared land, or land that where the native vegetation is more degraded.

The track may be for general access to a property or for fire access purposes. However, the regulation is restricted to access tracks for use by vehicles with four or more wheels. Thus it does not allow for clearance of tracks for motorbikes, bicycles or walkers.

This regulation does **not** apply to native vegetation growing on road reserves. A separate regulation applies to that situation.

5(1)(v) Fuel breaks

(5m, 7.5m, up to 15m)

The aim of this regulation is to provide for the establishment of **fuel breaks for fire control purposes**. This regulation only applies if adjacent land is not already cleared (eg. for a track, or an area approved for clearance).

A **5 metre** fuel break may be established anywhere in the state.

A **7.5 metre** fuel break is permitted in certain circumstances, but only in regions of the state approved by the Native Vegetation Council. The wider fuel break is considered reasonable in areas where there is extensive native vegetation on either side of the fuel break, such as mallee vegetation.

A **7.5 metre** fuel break is not exempt where the adjacent land is cleared, and multiple fuel breaks running in similar direction must be 100m apart.

To cover the circumstances where a wider fuel break is considered necessary for fire prevention purposes, a fuel break up to **15 metres** in width is permitted if it is to protect property solely used for primary production and the relevant district bushfire prevention committee has given its consent to the clearance. Clearance of a **15-metre** wide fuel break on such a property must also incorporate any adjacent land that has already been cleared for other purposes.

In determining whether to approve such clearance, the district bushfire prevention committee must have regard to guidelines prepared by the Native Vegetation Council, and the fuel breaks must be at least 200 metres from another fuel break.

This regulation does **not** apply to native vegetation growing on road reserves. A separate regulation applies to that situation.

NATIVE VEGETATION REGULATIONS

5(1)(w) Fuel breaks

(extensive)

The aim of this regulation is to provide for the establishment of more **extensive fuel breaks** than contemplated by the regulation for fuel breaks for fire control.

In such circumstances a management plan justifying the need for the fuel break must be prepared by the landowner or district bushfire prevention committee and approved by the Native Vegetation Council.

A management plan need not relate to a single property. A group of adjoining landholders can submit a single plan setting out a coordinated program across their properties. Alternatively, the local bushfire prevention advisory committee can prepare a plan encompassing one or more properties.

This regulation does **not** apply to native vegetation growing on road reserves. A separate regulation applies to that situation.

5(1)(x) Roadside Vegetation

(fire management)

The aim of this regulation is to provide for fire management in roadsides.

A road reserve is defined here as the whole area of land surveyed and defined as public land for the purpose of establishing a road. It includes the made road itself and the strip of land on either side of the made road extending to the boundary of the adjoining land. That boundary is usually fenced but this is not always the case.

Person/s carrying out clearance must be acting on behalf of a local bushfire prevention advisory committee under the Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005 with consent from the local council in accordance with advice or guidelines from the Native Vegetation Council.

MYTHS & MISCONCEPTIONS



The myth:

That there will be enough fire trucks to protect every house – particularly during a big fire.

The reality:

Fire trucks are a limited resource and will be deployed to best combat the fire, which may mean that you do not see a fire truck during or after the fire event.

That someone will knock on your door during a fire and instruct you as to when to leave.

While every effort will be made to ensure the public is supported as much as possible, it is your responsibility to have planned to go early or stay and defend, and your responsibility to keep up to date by listening to local ABC radio coverage.

That a structure will not burn down during a fire because it survived the last one – and that you need not do any preparation.

While a structure may endure one or more fires, the difference in fire behaviour and intensity means that unless you have prepared your home appropriately there is no guarantee that it will survive.

That fuel tanks will explode while sheltering in a vehicle during the passage of a fire front.

While your cars tank may vent (particularly if you have an LPG cylinder) during the passage of the fire front it will be much safer for you in the car than without protection from the radiant heat.

MYTHS & MISCONCEPTIONS

Other Misconceptions:

Australian research has identified that houses generally burn down from the inside out. A number of consistent factors have emerged from the research:

- Reports of houses 'exploding' have no basis in fact;
- Fires generally start due to the entrance of flame, embers, burning debris through openings such as ventilators, eaves and windows; and
- Where able-bodied people remain with a house, the chances of house survival increase significantly.

The misconception:

Relying on certain plants being 'fire retardant'

The reality:

While different plants burn differently, under certain fire conditions, particularly high intensity fires when you and your home are most at risk, all plants will burn. Published lists of "fire retardant" or "hard to burn" plants may be out of date and may recommend plants that are also weeds. Some lists may refer to "fire resistant" species – this is describing the capacity of the plant to recover from a bushfire.

Taking shelter in pools and dams is safe

The air above the water will be dangerous to breath because of heat and smoke, and may be deadly when inhaled.

Sheltering in water tanks is safe

Avoid elevated water tanks as a safe refuge. Once immersed in water, the body will quickly absorb heat. If the ambient temperature is in the high thirties and a bushfire raises the temperature of the water a further ten degrees the water/body temperature will be un-survivable.

MYTHS & MISCONCEPTIONS

The misconception:

Getting in the swimming pool is safe

The reality:

The use of swimming pools as a safe refuge is discouraged. A house that has been adequately prepared against ember attack will provide a safer refuge than a pool. Although pools may provide adequate protection to parts of the body below the water line, the most sensitive parts of your body (face, head, lungs) will be exposed to radiant heat, smoke and superheated air.

Cellars are the safest refuge

Seeking refuge in a cellar or underground garage should not be considered. If you have a purpose built area for fire protection, details about its use should be incorporated into your "bushfire action plan". When taking refuge from radiant heat you must continue to patrol for ember attack and observe the behaviour of the bushfire from a suitable point inside your house. This will enable you to move outside onto burnt ground if your house catches alight. It is not possible to do this when hiding in a cellar that has no windows and only one exit.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This package has been put together using information available from many sources. These are listed below in alphabetical order:

- ACT Emergency Services Authority Website
 - Community Fire Safe Program, SA CFS
 - Country Fire Authority (Vic) Website
 - Department of Water, Land and Biodiversity Conservation – Native Vegetation Unit
 - Planning SA – Department of Transport and Urban Planning
 - SA Country Fire Service Website.
-
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 - Australasian Fire Authorities Council. Interim Position Paper on Guidance for People in Vehicles During Bushfires
 - Individual Property Fire Management Planning Kit, 2002. Balancing Fire Safety with Conservation of Bushland Plants and Animals. SEQ Fire and Biodiversity Consortium
 - Living in the Bush, CFA Website 2006. Bushfire Survival Plan Workbook. CFA Publication.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The following people provided information and advice:

- Jane Carey – Landholder, Little Swamp
- Di Delaine – Senior Environmental Consultant, Rural Solutions SA
- Mark Dennis, Landholder, Koppio
- Chris & Sally Deslandes, Landholders, Wanilla
- Andrew Freeman - BMA, EPNRM Board
- Vaughan Habner – Facilitator, Rural Solutions SA
- Robert Maddern – Landholder, Yeelanna
- John Probert - Regional Prevention Officer SA CFS Region 6
- Joe Tilley - Fire Management Officer, DEH
- Simon Vogel - Regional Operations Officer, SA CFS Region 6
- Joe Whillas, Landholder, Greenpatch.

*This information has been developed through the efforts of
Ann Letcher (Project Officer, Rural Solutions SA),
as a component of the
Lower Eyre Peninsula Bushfire Re-establishment Program.*

WEBSITES

Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre (CRC)	www.bushfirecrc.com
Department for Environment and Heritage	www.environment.sa.gov.au
District Council of Lower Eyre Peninsula	www.lowereyrepeninsula.sa.gov.au
District Council of Tumby Bay	www.tumbybay.sa.gov.au
Eyre Peninsula NRM Board	www.epnrm.sa.gov.au
Guidelines for Firebreaks and Access tracks	http://www.forestry.sa.gov.au/publications/index.stm
Native Vegetation Council of SA	www.nvc.sa.gov.au
Planning SA	www.planning.sa.gov.au
Port Lincoln City Council	www.portlincoln.sa.gov.au
South Australian Country Fire Service (SACFS)	www.cfs.org.au
Victorian Country Fire Authority (CFA)	www.cfa.vic.gov.au

CONTACT DETAILS

If you want to:	Please Contact:
Report a fire	Dial 000
Get information on a fire	1300 362 361 or www.cfs.org.au or tune in to ABC radio

If you require assistance with:	Please Contact:
Completing your home bushfire plan	Community Fire Safe / CFS Regional Prevention Officer
Obtaining a copy of your local bushfire prevention plan	Your local council
Understanding your legislative requirements as a landholder	CFS Regional Prevention Officer / Council Fire Prevention Officer
Fire prevention measures for building a home & adaptations to an existing home	Planning SA website / local council / architects / CFS Building Assessment Unit
Hazard reduction	Local CFS Brigade (see under Fire in the White Pages) / Council Fire Prevention Officer
Information about burning off – permits etc	Your local Council
Native vegetation - regulations - removal	Native Vegetation Council website / Revegetation Consultant / NRM Officer, Southern Eyre

Planning gardens / plantings for fire prevention	Revegetation Consultant / Vegetation Consultants / CFS Regional Prevention Officer / Garden Design consultants
Fire fighting equipment	Regional Prevention Officer / Fire Equipment Resellers
Joining the CFS	Your local CFS Brigade (see under Fire in the White Pages) / Your regional CFS Headquarters

CONTACT DETAILS

Useful Contacts	Phone numbers
SA Country Fire Service, Region 6 Headquarters	8682 4266
CFS Building Assessment Unit	8391 6077
Community Fire Safe Program	8463 4200
District Council of Tumby Bay	8688 2101
District Council of Lower Eyre Peninsula	8676 2106
Port Lincoln City Council	8682 3033
Fire Prevention Officer	Contact your nearest District Council office
Department for Environment & Heritage (Port Lincoln)	8688 3111
Eyre Peninsula Natural Resource Management Board	8682 5655
PIRSA/DWLBC/RSSA Offices; Port Lincoln Cleve Streaky Bay	8688 3400 8628 2091 8626 1108

Personal Contacts	Phone Numbers