CITIES AND VEGETATION FIRES
Cities must plan for vegetation fires long before they ignite

- Many cities encroach into ecosystems that burn naturally.
- Worldwide, most fire ignitions have a preventable human cause.
- Avoiding a vegetation fire disaster begins now and requires continuous action.

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Sydney harbour blanketed in smoke from nearby bushfires, Dec 2019 (photo: Gareth Byatt).

Cities have been built into and are abutting ecosystems which burn periodically to rejuvenate, including forests, moorlands, and grasslands. Building in a burnable area risks lives lost and infrastructure ruined. Human ignitions such as cigarettes, campfires, power lines, and arson change fire characteristics while in some regions, human-caused climate change can exacerbate weather drivers of fire. Examples are higher air temperatures along with longer and more severe droughts.

To avoid a disaster, cities to need start planning now and never stop. Prevention includes having strong, enforced building codes and engaging with people to discuss protecting themselves and their properties. Authorities must care for the land, reduce human ignitions, watch for flames, support fire resistance of properties, particularly stopping ignition from embers, and implement fire bans (with measures such as no barbecues) in times of high risk. Effective response requires maintaining personnel, training, and equipment to monitor and extinguish fires. Cities must provide warnings and guidance on mitigating the health impacts of fire smoke. All residents must have the knowledge, resources, and readiness to receive, understand, and act on fire warnings that are trusted, effective, and straightforward, including for evacuation and return after.

Vegetation fires are necessary. Disasters can be avoided.

More information:
- International Association of Wildland Fire https://www.iawfonline.org
- Global Fire Monitoring Center https://gfmc.online