



BEAT: Delegates and Wildfire fighters enjoy the drumming of the Rhythm Workshop at the opening of the Wildfire conference yesterday.

Scenario guru tells world fire experts "to think like foxes"

Global wildfire experts need to "think like foxes" in their planning for catastrophic events.

This means being able to respond quickly to change and take advantage of opportunities, the internationally respected scenario planner, Clem Sunter, told the International Wildfire Conference during his keynote address yesterday.

Sunter, who with Chantell Ilbury is the author of the bestseller "Mind of a Fox", outlined how wildfire experts needed to consider the bigger picture. This was particularly important as external changes were continuously impacting the scale of wildfires.

In writing the book he explained how he and Ilbury borrowed from the ancient Greek poet, Archilocus, who said there were two types of people, hedgehogs and foxes. A hedgehog leader was inclined to have a good idea and then march the organisation

collectively towards that vision.

"That's fine provided the future is how the hedgehog imagines it, otherwise they can march everyone over the edge of a cliff," he said. "Foxes, on the other hand, were natural contrarians constantly looking for new opportunities and then responding quickly with decisive action."

While organisations needed both types of people, survivors tended to think more like foxes. "Foxes are quick-witted, adaptable animals, which any organisation aspiring to be world-class has to be if they are to function in today's fast-changing environment,"

To think like foxes organisations (such as the global wildfire community) needed to think of their occupation as a game. "Games have much in common with business in that competing teams win or lose

based on skill, strategy and tactics. Moreover, games are full of risks and uncertainties. Their outcome often turns on factors that are beyond control or appear minor at the time they manifest themselves," he pointed out.

Crucial to the success of an organisation was the ability of its leaders to imagine a future using different scenarios and be able to adapt as events unfolded.

Sunter said, scenario planners were not focussed on budgets or bottom-lines but rather more philosophical issues that impacted on long-term health and survival.

"When we work with a business the first question we put to them is one that Socrates would ask 'Why do you exist?'" Answering that question often enabled an organisation to begin imagining different scenarios for its future, he said.

Rise up!

One in spirit, one in heart and mind
We are united, in this world of fire
Linked together arm in arm
Comrades to the end
Infernos blazing close at hand
But we will never bend

Chorus

Rise up, rise up!
Can you hear the cry
Vukani simunye!
The call of the wildfire
Like the phoenix from the ashes
We will always fly once more
Singaba phumelelayo
Rise the sun into blue skies

Protectors of our mother earth
And defenders of our nation
We serve with pride and bravery
And a deep determination
To do our duty without fail
It's what we love to do
Ready in one heartbeat
You for me and me for you

Chorus

We face danger all the time
And overcome our fears
Stick together through thick and thin
Through blood and sweat and tears
We have walked the hell on earth
And seen the darkest night
Overcome the blazing beast
And once more taken flight

Chorus

Rise up, rise up!
Can you hear the cry
Vukani simunye!
The call of the wildfire
Like the phoenix from the ashes
We will always fly once more
Singaba phumelelayo
Rise the sun into blue skies

* This song written by Jonny Blundell was written and performed by The Rhythm Workshop at the opening ceremony of the conference: for more information about The Rhythm Workshop see: www.therhythmworkshop.co.za

Words of wisdom from Nelson Mandela

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

"No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People must learn to hate, and if they can learn to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite."



Call for international collaboration at Wildfire conference

International co-operation through the exchange of technology and trans-boundary partnerships can reduce the impact of wildfire, Jose Antonio Prado from the United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), said in his opening address.

"This conference can provide the forum for this collaboration," he said. "The FAO is committed to working with interested partners to promote a strategy for international collaboration to reduce damage caused by wildfire worldwide."

Prada said new and more holistic approaches were needed to fight wildfire, especially the growing number of mega-fires that are becoming a major issue as the effects of climate change are felt.

The conference opening ceremony was a sea of yellow with 800 Working on Fire wildland fire fighters giving a spectacular display of African singing and dancing. European, Australian and American delegates said they were overwhelmed by the spirit and enthusiasm of the fire fighters who are drawn from the country's poorest and most remote communities.

Johann Georg Goldammer, director of the Global Fire Monitoring Centre in Freiburg, Germany, announced that Wildfire 2011 will be linked via video to the Third Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, currently meeting in Geneva, Switzerland.

Three panellists from Wildfire 2011 will be in discussion with three senior policy makers in



BELTING IT OUT: Jonny Blundell and The Rhythm Workshop performing at the opening ceremony of the Wildfire Conference. The words of the song - Rise Up - especially written by Blundell for the conference and sung memorably on the opening can be found on page 4.

Geneva. Their discussion, planned to focus on the implications of wildfire in developing communities, will be broadcast to an estimated 2 000 people in Geneva.

Goldammer also read aloud the message from United Nations Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon, in which he, too, asked for "a global spirit of co-operation."

Wildfire 2011 and the Disaster Risk Reduction meeting could galvanize efforts to reduce risk and vulnerability, Ban Ki-moon said.

Guy Preston, chair and national programme leader of South Africa's National Resources Management Programmes, outlined how South Africa's Working on Fire

Programme grew out of the Working for Water programme after team members removing alien vegetation lost their lives in a wildfire. He said there were opportunities to fight shack fires in South Africa's informal settlements using the same principles of early detection and quick response used by the forestry industry.

Wildfire conference warned of new mega-fires threat

Risk of mega-fire is on the increase worldwide as droughts deepen, fuel loads increase and landscapes change, Jerry Williams, former national director of Fire and Aviation Management for the United States Forest Service told the Wildfire Conference.

Williams said mega-fire was a new phenomenon and the most costly, devastating and damaging of all wildland fires.

"These are fires that exceed all control and can only be stopped through a change in

the weather or a break in fuel," said Williams. They were fires that defeated the objectives of ordinary wildfire protection.

Williams was presenting a paper, commissioned by the Food and Agriculture Organization, under a volunteer arrangement of authors from all parts of the world.

He highlighted the scale of the fires by reminding delegates that the "Black Dragon" mega-fire had destroyed one tenth of the world's forest reserve when it raged across China in 1987. The following year a mega-fire

broke out in the Yellowstone National Park in the US.

The causes of these blazes were often subtle and apparently unrelated to the actual event, Williams said.

"Sometimes no action has a consequence."

The causes of these mega-fires needed to be better understood especially because they were challenging some of the strongest wildland fire fighting programmes.

"The growing number of these incidents, along with the ever-higher suppression

costs, property losses, and environmental damages, beg a better understanding of the factors that may underlie their occurrence."

The global community was at a critical crossroad, he said. Until now fire fighters, managers and policy makers had attempted to match increasing wildfire threats with greater suppression force.

"But this approach is not answering the mega-fire problem. Even in developed countries, where, despite enormous investments in larger,

more able fire-fighting capacity, better predictive systems, increased technology, improved co-operation, and larger aviation fleets, mega-fires still occur," said Williams.

"The alternative is to take a step back and look at our ability to deal with these disasters and what should be done to prevent them."

Clem Sunter see page 4

Runaway wildfire poses new risk for British fire fighters

Wildfires raging through the United Kingdom over the past weeks have caused fire and rescue authorities to consider expanding the training of firemen to cope with these events, Paul Hedley, from the Chief Fire Officers' Association, said in an interview at the International Wildfire Conference.

Firemen in the United Kingdom are almost all "structural" fire fighters who are skilled at dealing with a burning building but are generally unfamiliar with how to control a flaming forest or moorland. "There has to be a renewed effort in raising public awareness of the risk of these fires, which all indicators

suggest are going to increase as the impact of climate change is felt," Hedley said. Particularly at risk would be moorland and woodlands. With a drier, hotter climate the risk of wildfire in these areas was likely to become "extremely high" more often, he predicted.

Hedley is attending the conference along with his colleagues Simon Thorp, director of the Heather Trust and vice-chair of the England and Wales Wildfire Forum, and Steve Gibson, a fire expert from Northumberland Fire and Rescue Services.

Wildland fire, never a serious challenge for the United Kingdom, looks set to become an increasing problem for Britain with the temperatures in March

and April this year the hottest on record for these months.

Already this month firemen have fought to control a wildfire in Swinley Forest, Royal Berkshire, about 80 kilometres from London. At the same time wildfires were also burning in the Scottish Highlands and Islands, Lancashire, West Yorkshire, North Yorkshire and Wales.

"The Fire and Rescue Service in the United Kingdom has never had to deal with wildfire on this scale. If this is what climate change means we have to change our approach," Hedley said.

Thorp said there was a commitment from all partners involved in land management to work with Fire and Rescue Services to understand the risks associated with wildfire and to



RUNAWAY WILDFIRE: The Fire Rescue Service in the UK has never had to deal with wildfire on this scale.

establish strategies to control a wildfire.

"There are partnerships in place in parts of the country where wildfire is an issue, like Northumberland, but these partnerships have to be expanded into more communities," he said.

Wildfire had always been an issue in Scotland, home to 75% of the world's heather, he said. "Heather has to burn,

it is part of its natural cycle, but it has to be managed to ensure it regenerates and is not destroyed."

Gibson said forest managers now had to consider the risk of wildfire in the development of new plantations. "Until recently trees have been planted with no thought given to wildfire, it cannot stay that way," he said. "Wildfire is now, more than ever, a global issue."

NOTICEBOARD

Transport arrangements from Sun City to OR Tambo International Airport

If you have any queries regarding return transport arrangements to OR Tambo International airport please contact Chandra at the registration desk between 9:00 a.m. and 12:00 a.m. Alternatively call her on 073 0127939.

Shuttle Buses

* Sun City has agreed to provide additional buses to assist delegates transfer between the various hotels in the complex and the conference centre.

Programme Updates

* Daily programme updates are posted on the notice board in the foyer.

Post-conference fire tour to the Kruger National Park (14th - 16th May 2011)

Dear participants, Please can you complete the information form for the tour that is posted at the delegate information centre in the main foyer at the conference centre. We will be departing Sun City for Kruger Park at 9am on Saturday 14th May 2011 in three vehicles (meeting point will be given later).

For more information, please can you contact Navashni Govender on 0846252006

SAFETY AND SECURITY

Delegates are reminded to take particular care of their possessions and keep valuable items with them at all times. This is especially applicable to cameras, laptop computers and mobile phones. Orange backpacks must be clearly marked to avoid embarrassing situations where one bag may be mistaken for another.

"Stay or Go" has come and gone, says Aussie fire boss

by Graham Barlow

In a searching address, Naomi Brown, CEO of the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authority Council (AFAC), pinpointed the difficulties of the contentious 'Stay or Go' approach to wildfire.

This common position was adopted by the AFAC in 1993 as the 'prepare, stay and defend, or leave early' concept, and generated much discussion at the 2007 Wildfire Conference in Spain.

Brown pointed out this complex concept became known colloquially as the 'Stay or Go' policy, a simplification in word and process she feels predicated the eventual failure and inevitable criticism of the policy.

On Saturday 7 February 2009 in Victoria, Australia, the practice was sorely tested through the catastrophic fires now known as the "Black Saturday Fires". Tragically, 173 people lost their lives during this destruction of 450 000 ha

of land that caused (Australian) \$4 billion (R29bn) worth of damage.

In the wake of this disaster, focus inevitably fell on the simplified 'Stay or Go' policy, and a Royal Commission was promulgated to investigate the calamity. This commission highlighted six major aspects of wildfire that needed examination.

Six Issues

Brown itemised these six issues and gave insight into what has happened in Australia subsequently.

Primacy of life was the obvious principal focus in the wake of public, government and media questioning: saving lives is non-negotiable, regardless of potential loss of property.

The other five major concerns were: additional options – middle ground between staying and leaving; adequate warnings;

the decision-making processes governing 'Stay or Go';

vulnerable groups and the concept of shared responsibility.

Until recently, community fire safety issues were left to fire agencies and attracted little attention from government; however the shock of "Black Saturday" brought unprecedented focus on fire policies nationwide.

While this is in itself a good thing, it has the potential of generating a "top-down" policy designed by bureaucrats with little or no fire experience, and a reliance on technology that does not take local conditions into account.

As a result, says Brown, "'Stay or Go' has gone, and 'leave before the fire arrives' is the preferred message, with evacuation as a consideration.

"But when wildfire threatens," Brown concluded, "the reality is that leaving or defending are still the only options available."

Ghana moves to reduce wildfire damage in rural areas

The International Tropical Timber Organization (ITTO) had made a massive contribution through a host of projects to the reduction of poverty in rural Ghana, David Duodu-Asare told the International Wildfire Conference yesterday.

Duodu-Asare from Ghana's Forestry Commission, presented a paper highlighting how ITTO projects in the West African nation had impacted the economies of rural impoverished communities, many living in tropical forests.

by Carol Campbell

For the paper Doudu-Asare with Edward Obiaw, director for the Forestry's Commission's Resource Management Support Centre, questioned 200 beneficiaries from 20 communities receiving ITTO aid, to draw lessons that could be used to improve similar projects.

"About 70% of Ghanaians live in rural areas surviving on an income of less than US\$1 a day. This compels these folk to engage in activities that impact

negatively on effective wildfire management and sustainable land use systems," he said.

He explained how traditional practices such as shifting cultivation, bush burning for hunting, farming and festive purposes; tree cutting for traditional medicines and the production of charcoal and alcohol were having serious consequences on the environment and in some cases leading to desertification.

"One must understand the poverty levels in such rural communities are so low that



SURVIVING: traditional practices can have serious consequences on the environment and may lead to desertification.

people engage in the above activities not as a matter of interest but for survival."

Most of ITTO's projects are governmental with agreements being signed with the respective national forestry

authorities that also implement the project. This arrangement indicates the collaborative efforts by these institutions to tackle the challenges of poverty as identified in the Millennium Development Goals, he said.

Global link-up for wildfire conference

The International Wildfire Conference was linked via video conference to the Third Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, currently meeting in Geneva, Switzerland last night.

The discussion centred on global forest loss and degradation which is estimated to cost the global economy between US\$2 trillion and US\$4.5 trillion a year in lost revenue. The Geneva conference heard that wildland fires affect up to 350 million hectares of vegetated lands annually.

The special round table, which included panellists from both the north and southern hemisphere, was organised

by the Wildland Fire Advisory Group. The discussion laid out the wildfire catastrophe currently facing the global community with all expressing eagerness for cross border co-operation.

The meeting was organised at the request of United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon who is attending the Third Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction.

The Global Platform is managed by the UN International Strategy for Disaster Reduction and is the world's foremost gathering of stakeholders committed to reducing disaster risk and building the resilience of communities and nations.

Over 2 000 policy makers and practitioners, from government, international organizations, NGOs, academia, and the private sector from both developing and developed countries are involved in the Geneva-discussions.

Doctor Professor Johann Georg Goldammer, director of the Global Fire Monitoring Centre in Freiburg, Germany, facilitated the discussion in South Africa.

South Africa-based panellists included Sundar Sharma, a professional forester from Nepal, representing the UNISDR-Regional South Asia Wildland Fire Network; Bambang Hero Saharjo, professor of forestry from Bogor Agricultural

University in Indonesia, and Kholiwe Luvuno representing South Africa's Working on Fire programme.

Paola Deda, chief of the Forestry and Timber Section of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe facilitated the discussion in Geneva.

The speakers in Geneva were Alexander Chupriyan, Deputy Minister for Civil Defence, Emergencies and Natural Disasters for the Russian Federation, Pilar Gallego, Director General of Civil Protection and Emergencies in Spain, and Phil Cottle, Managing Director of Forestry Ltd, in the United Kingdom.

Cottle said recent fires in Europe (Switzerland) and United Kingdom, near London, were unheard of and would change the insurance landscape.

"There is so much change happening we (the insurance industry) have to use (mathematical) modeling to see where the danger lies. Nevertheless, wildfires need not be catastrophic," he said, "we can do something about it."

As an introduction to the discussion, the Geneva delegates were told that it is estimated that fire-induced vegetation degradation contributes to about 0.6 billion tons of permanent carbon transfer to the atmosphere.

Welcome to our exhibitors

