



TELEPHONE TREES



What is a 'telephone tree'?

A 'telephone tree' is an organised and agreed method of communicating quickly between members of a defined community.

In its simplest form a phone tree may be a list of phone number of the members of a small community. In its complicated form it may have a defined structure and an agreed set of rules.

What is it used for?

Fires occur every summer and often without much warning. Phone trees provide a localised method for neighbours to give each other early warning of a fire.

Phone trees must not be relied on as a sole method of warning. Individuals should take responsibility for their own level of awareness.

What information should it include?

Obviously, the basic information to include in a phone tree is the name and home phone number of each of the group members. More information may provide added benefits but these need to be carefully considered. From experience: 'the simpler the better'.

You may also consider including work and mobile numbers but remember that there may be little residents can do if they are at work when there is a fire near their home. Attempting to return home through a fire affected area is a highly dangerous activity and should not be considered.

What form should it take?

There are four basic types of phone trees:

1. Simple – a list of numbers in no particular sequence.
2. Linear – a list of numbers with a well-defined start and finish
3. Circular – a list of numbers that may start and finish anywhere in the circle
4. Combination of circular and linear.

The size of your group will most likely determine the type of phone tree you develop. Ideally, irrespective of size, you should aim for the message to go around in 7 to 10 minutes. It may be necessary for larger groups to have a number of sub branches with the person(s) at the head of the phone tree needing to make two or three calls initially to set the process in motion.

Small Groups (less than 10 members)

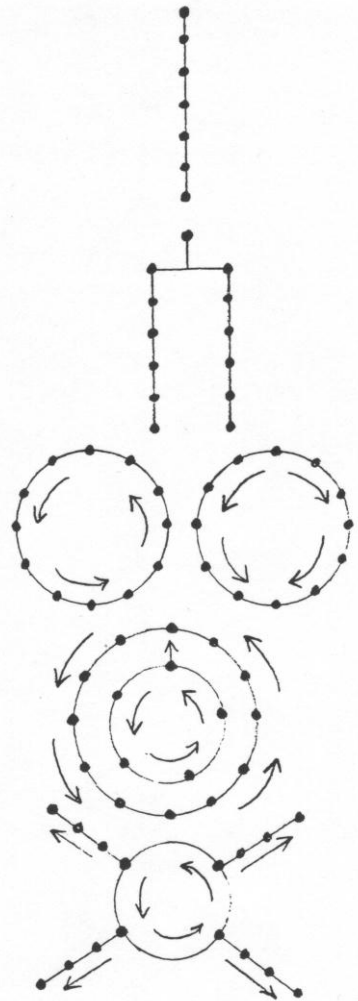
Usually a simple list will suffice. The person who activates the tree is at the top of the list and just rings the person after them, who ring the next person and so on.

Medium Sized Groups (10 to 20 members)

Once again a simple linear list may suffice. However, to speed up the process the person who activates the tree may ring two people who then each activate a separate branch of the tree. Alternatively, the phone tree could be in the form of a circle, which can be activated by any person who becomes aware of a fire. Using a circle also helps indicate when the message has gone around. If the person who activates the phone tree rings the person on each side of them this may speed up the process considerably.

Larger Groups (20 plus members)

This option may involve a couple of circles – an inner circle of people who are usually at home and an outer circle of work numbers and mobiles for people not at home during the day. The inner circle is activated first, then the outer circle. When groups include a number of different streets (or geographically isolated residents) each street or area can have its own phone tree branch and the activator of each branch belongs to the inner circle that is activated first.



Who should activate it?

A member of a group must be responsible for activating the phone tree. There may be a member who lives in a prominent position with good views of surrounding country side where the first signs of smoke are clearly visible. Alternatively, there may be a good member with his or her own listening set or scanner, which is programmed for appropriate radio channels. If you have designed a circular phone tree it will not be necessary to appoint one particular member of the group to activate it.

How should it be used?

When operating a phone tree allow the phone to ring until it rings out.

If no one answers, and no alternative numbers are provided, ring the next person on the list.

If the alternative number is a work or mobile telephone number consider ringing the next person on the list first to continue the phone tree as quickly as possible, then try the work or mobile number.

It is imperative to the operation of the phone tree that you speak personally to the person next in the line. If this is not possible, ring the next person as well to insure that the tree continues.

Inform the people above you on the phone tree if you are going to be away or unreachable during the Bushfire Season (if someone else is minding the house or if you are incapacitated in some way).

The evening before a **total fire ban day** may be a good time to do the above.