



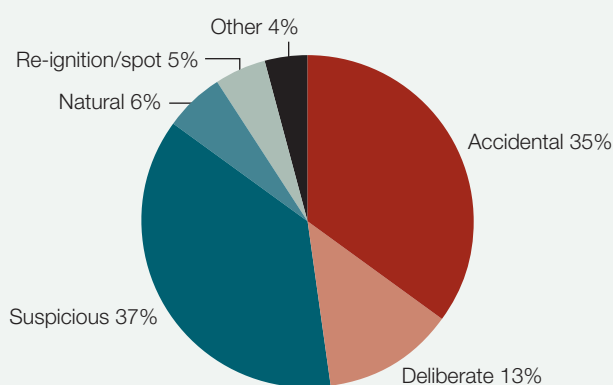
# BushFIRE Arson Bulletin

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## The number of fires and who lights them

The Australian Productivity Commission has calculated that between 2001–02 and 2006–07, the number bushfires in Australia varied from approximately 46,000 to 62,000 per year, with an average of nearly 54,000 fires per year (SGRSP 2008). This agrees quite closely with the average of nearly 52,000 fires per year calculated by the Australian Institute of Criminology (Bryant 2008) using data from fire agencies from 1995–06 to 2005–06. It is estimated that 30 percent of fires are either deliberately lit or suspicious in origin as shown in Figure 1.

**Figure 1 Percentages of bushfires by cause averaged over fire agency and year**



Source: Bryant 2008

In Australia, it is difficult to get a consolidated understanding of the profile of bushfire arsonists and their motivations, mainly because of the low numbers that are apprehended. There is quite a rich international literature where numbers are higher which suggests a distinct profile, that is, white male, mid-20s, patchy employment record, often above average intelligence but poor academic achievement and poor social development (Willis 2004). However, it is not clear whether this would translate to the Australian context. The results of studies that looked at levels of recidivism have been ambiguous (AIC 2007b). Between 2001 and 2006, 56 percent (n=615/1,099) of convicted structural arsonists and 37 percent (n=49/133) of bushfire arsonists in New South Wales had a prior conviction for a previous offence which suggests that arsonists are not generally specialist offenders (AIC 2007a).

## References

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