

Wednesday 3 September 2014 - Number 595

03 Sep 2014

Current National Security Alert Level: Medium

GENERAL

Funeral for Retained Firefighter Daniel "Howie" Howard

Last Wednesday was a very sad day for FRNSW, for 256 Cobar, for the Cobar community, and of course for the Howard family and Jenna, Howie's partner. Thousands of people attended the open air funeral service at a local football ground, and hundreds lined the main street of Cobar as the funeral procession led by three Police VIP motorcycles, our J series Bedford Pumper fitted out as a hearse, and Cobar's appliances made their way to the funeral.

I was immensely proud of the huge turnout of serving and retired retained and permanent firefighters from throughout NSW, admin and trades staff, and FBEU senior officials. Joining us were the Minister for Police and Emergency Services and senior representatives from the NSW Rural Fire Service (Commissioner), NSW State Emergency Service (A/Commissioner), NSW Police Force (Assistant Commissioner), Ambulance Service of NSW (Deputy Commissioner), South Australian Metropolitan Fire Service (Deputy Chief Officer), Queensland Fire & Rescue Service (Assistant Commissioner), Country Fire Authority Victoria (Assistant Chief Officer), and the ACT Emergency Services Authority (Commissioner). Every NSW emergency service was represented by dozens of uniformed members, signifying the close bonds that we share, and that when one of us is killed or injured in the line of duty, it hurts all of us.

I thank everyone who has assisted in any way since the tragic fire on 17 August. I also appeal to all staff to always put health and safety first. FRNSW has lost four fine people in recent weeks through illness or misadventure, and that is four too many – Daniel Howard, SF Matt Steanes from 25 Mosman, John Leahy from our Fleet Unit and SF Adam Parer of 320 Hamilton. My thoughts remain with the Howard family, Jenna, Howie's many friends, serving and retired members of 256 Cobar, and also with the Steanes, Leahy and Parer families.

Annual AFAC and Bushfire CRC Conference

In my role as AFAC president, I am in Wellington New Zealand this week for the 2014 AFAC/Bushfire CRC Conference which runs 2-5 September. Our theme this year is 'After Disaster Strikes: Learning from Adversity'. In the Strategic Challenges stream I will be giving a presentation on future industry directions. Other FRNSW presenters are Assistant Commissioner Mark Brown who is talking about FRNSW use of a dynamic cover tool, Chief Superintendent Chris Lewis on the Quakers Hill Nursing Home fire and Inspector Rob Jansen on the Sydney Olympic Park Aquatic Centre multiple vehicle fire.

With the current strong emphasis on interoperability, strategic directions and industry reform, this annual event is allowing representatives from across the emergency services sector to discuss key issues and challenges alongside international experts and lead researchers.

Graduation of Recruit Class 3/2014

Last Thursday I had the pleasure of joining the Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Stuart Ayres, at the State Training College at Alexandria for the graduation of Recruit Class 3/2014. After successfully completing the intensive 13-week course, the 24 graduating firefighters will now be posted to fire stations across greater Sydney. During the ceremony National Medals were also presented to Captain Andrew Evans, Retained Firefighter Paul Vaughan and Deputy Captain David Johnson.

Proving that firefighters come from diverse backgrounds and all walks of life, the recruits include a chef and sommelier, lifeguards, a CBS producer, six defence force personnel, a professional inline skater, a paramedic, an RFS volunteer and even a great white shark attack survivor. I would like to extend my personal congratulations to each of our 24 new firefighters, and particularly Recruit Merit Award winner, Kaitlyn Matuschka. I wish you all a safe and rewarding career with FRNSW. For photos and more details see the [intranet story](#).

Young drivers get street smart

FRNSW participated in the annual [bstreetsmart](#) initiative for NSW school students in years 10, 11 and 12 at Allphones Arena, Homebush from 19-21 August. The initiative aims to reduce the fatality and injury rates of young people by promoting safe behaviour as drivers, riders and passengers.

The three-day event continues to attract greater participation each year. It gives students and teachers an understanding of their responsibilities as a driver and as a responsible passenger, as well as information and strategies to avoid serious injuries and death. In addition, it creates greater awareness of the consequences of distracted/dangerous driving, inattention, speeding, drink and drug driving and driver fatigue.

Thanks to all those who put in the time to prepare and deliver the FRNSW presentation, including Qualified Firefighter Peter Kirwan, Training Officer Rescue/BLS, Zone Commander Greg O'Connor and crews from 15 Burwood, 62 Bankstown, 30 Lidcombe and 16 Concord fire stations along with the Community Engagement Team. The event received strong media coverage, [click here](#) to watch the video of the Channel 7 news segment.

Change in aviation partner for FRNSW

FRNSW has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with Southern Region Surf Life Saving Australia Helicopter Rescue Service (better known as Westpac Life Saver Rescue Helicopter) for the provision of aviation resources. This replaces the previous MoU with the NSW Police Force that had been in place since 2003.

Westpac Life Saver Rescue Helicopter operates a BK-117 from their state-of-the-art purpose-built base at La Perouse, the same type of aircraft as Fire Air 1, and is recognised as a world class aviation emergency rescue service. The response protocols regarding use of helicopters have been revised, however any requests for aviation support are to continue to be made through the Communications Centres. We look forward to a long and successful partnership with Westpac Life Saver Rescue Helicopter.

Compressed air foam symposium

AFAC held a compressed air foam (CAF) symposium at the Hobart Police Academy on Thursday 21 August. Around 80 representatives from various Australian fire services attended the symposium with presentations given by personnel from QFRS, ACTFB, CFS, TFS, FRNSW and EPA Tasmania. The aim of the symposium was to discuss the development of CAF within the various agencies, share information, and map a way forward for future developments with this technology. TFS personnel demonstrated CAF being pumped through an aerial appliance and applied to a structure.

Four people from FRNSW – Acting Assistant Commissioner Gerry Byrne, Superintendent Kim Reeson and Senior Firefighters Nick Coney and Phil Agius – attended the symposium. Gerry Byrne presented on use of CAF within FRNSW including lessons learned, technological challenges and future developments. Dr John Gorrie from EPA Tasmania also gave a very informative presentation on foam and the impacts on the environment.

Metro South leads the way in Manly

Last Sunday morning I was pleased to attend day two of the Metro South Captain's Leadership Training Workshop at the Australian Institute of Police Management (AIPM) in Manly. As the second event in an ongoing program of leadership training organised by Acting Assistant Commissioner Gerry Byrne and Acting Chief Superintendent Phil Lindsay, the two-day workshop aimed to expand participants' leadership skills and their ability to think strategically while still focusing on day-to-day operations.

AIPM facilitator Phil Langdon (former Chief Supt from the RFS) and FRNSW Leadership Training Officer Dave Walton led an intense first day of strategic thinking combined with the skills of communication, interpersonal relationships, negotiation, empathy and initiative. On day two participants benefited from the fresh ocean air as they worked on issues during a 5km walk from Collins Beach to Little Manly.

The workshop was attended by 36 Metro South Captains, Deputy Captains, Duty Commanders and Zone Commanders.

R U OK?

When was the last time you asked your mates if they're ok? It's a simple question, but one which can have a profound effect on us all – recent events have brought this home to many of us. On Thursday 11 September, [R U OK? Day](#) seeks to remind us of the importance of those three little words, and how by offering support we can make a big difference to each other's wellbeing. You might hesitate to ask because you're afraid of opening a can of worms that you don't know how to deal with. But all you really need is to know where to go for help. A whole range of support is available to FRNSW employees and their families, to find out more read the [intranet article](#). On 11 September, and every day, I urge you to start a conversation that could change a life.

Preparing for the storm season

With spring now upon us, the SES has launched its 2014 StormSafe campaign with StormSafe Week taking place from 8-15 September. Together, the [StormSafe](#) and [FloodSafe](#) campaign websites feature simple advice and a range of resources to educate and assist the community. As we continue to work closely with our colleagues at SES on a daily basis – and respond to thousands of calls relating to storms, floods and other severe weather events every year – I encourage you to take a look at these websites to find out how we can be better prepared and offer better support and advice to the community.

PPC replacement in the Pacific

If you donated your old PPC when the new PPC was issued, you have played a direct part helping to strengthen the capacity of fire and emergency services in the Pacific Islands. In a mammoth 12-month project overseen firstly by Chief Supt Gary Picken then by Superintendent Chris Jurgeit, thousands of redundant over-trousers and turnout coats were collected, cleaned, sorted and dispatched to Pacific island nations. The PPC, which will replace shorts and thongs for some firefighters, has been gratefully received by agencies including the Samoa Fire and Emergency Service Authority and the Royal Solomon Islands Fire Service. For more information, see the [intranet story](#).

INCIDENTS

Collaroy gas leak and driveway collapse

At 0504 hours on Tuesday 19 August, FRNSW crews were called to a gas leak at a construction site in Collaroy. Heavy overnight rainfall had caused the side of a major excavation site to collapse, rupturing a 20mm gas main and filling the site with water, trapping a digging machine. The driveway of a 3-storey block of units adjacent to the site also partially collapsed, hindering resident access. 68 Narrabeen initially responded and immediately conducted a safety assessment. There were fears that further collapse of the site could impact a number of residential properties and firefighters assisted several residents to move to safety. The gas company were called but due to further threats of collapse were unable to isolate the appropriate gas valves.

Firefighters continued to monitor the atmosphere for dangerous gas levels until gas supplies were finally isolated around 0820 hours and the construction company erected fencing to block off the area. As the adjoining apartment building was also threatened, FRNSW USAR specialists set up lasers to monitor any risk of building collapse and engineers attended to assess the apartment building's stability. Continuing heavy rain hampered operations throughout the incident and caused further erosion at the site.

After further consultation with engineers, more residents in a house to the south and the 12 units in the apartment block were evacuated. Rubble and soil fill were sourced to fill the pit. Site control was handed over to the Police in the afternoon, however FRNSW continued to provide logistic support with USAR specialists and equipment remaining on site for a further two days. The incident attracted a lot of media coverage.

Oil spill threatens creek at Rutherford

At 0730 hours on Thursday 28 August, FRNSW crews responded to a hazmat incident at Rutherford. An oily substance from an unknown source had spilled into a creek near the Rutherford Industrial Estate, threatening to contaminate the creek and surrounding environment. The spillage was around 1 kilometre long.

FRNSW resources in attendance were 455 Telarah, 374 Maitland and 260 Newcastle, and later 377 Minmi and 382 Morpeth. Environmental Protection Authority (EPA) representatives also attended. Rain made the incident more difficult to control as it tended to spread the oil. Crews used damming and booms to help contain the spillage, and the oil was then pumped out from the surface of the creek for safe disposal.

Paramedics attended because of a reported odour in the area. Firefighters carried out atmospheric monitoring which confirmed that the gas detected was not a risk to people's health nor was there a risk of fire or explosion. However as a precaution, nearby industrial premises were advised to keep windows closed and turn off air-conditioning.

EPA analysts tested samples of the material to confirm what it was and are investigating to identify the source of the spill. WorkCover were also notified. Cleanup operations continued the following day and FRNSW continued to monitor the situation.

ASK THE COMMISSIONER

Q. What is the latest on FRNSW issuing new torches?

The excuse has always been that many new models don't pass the Australian Standards, however we saw this to be incorrect when we visited CFA stations down in Victoria and they had approved, intrinsically safe torches. The current ones not only emit a poor light, they require you to hold onto them for operation, tying up one hand. There are ample 'upright' torches on the market that would sit in our jacket pocket and with new LED technology they deliver a far superior light.

Many firefighters currently use their own models anyway; however it would make more sense to have a brigade-issued torch.

A. We are currently consulting widely on the operational requirements and type of torches available as the issues you have been raised by many other firefighters. Engagement so far has been with a number of Station Officers and Duty Commanders, and shortly a survey using 'survey monkey' will be sent to all firefighters - I encourage everyone to have a say.

Q. Are all Fully Encapsulated Suits are being taken off pumpers? If this is true, how will FRNSW respond to hazardous material incidents?

A. Not all pumpers, but most. Analysis shows that too many Fully Encapsulated (FE) Suits are carried on front-line appliances, and most are never, ever used "in anger". This creates a range of problems with servicing, maintenance, training, and safety on the rare occasions that they do need to be used. The changes that have been discussed with the FBEU will not impact on our capability to deal with Hazmat incidents safely and effectively. Currently we have more than 2,000 FE Suits and we plan to reduce this to approximately 900 progressively over coming months. This will mean FE Suits will be taken off pumpers, with the exception of those that are located near identified risks e.g. a major hazard facility or plant with large amounts of chlorine or

ammonia, or identified high-risk and major transportation routes. At the same time, the number of FE Suits held in key locations such as Primary and Intermediate Hazmat stations and the Hazmat Technical Service Centre, will be increased.

This change is based on a comprehensive risk assessment that showed FE Suits are worn at less than two incidents per 1,000, and of these 29% did not require FE Suits to be worn i.e. Spillage/Splash Suits were the appropriate level of protection based on the substances involved. The allocation of Spillage/Splash Suits will remain unchanged. In regional areas, this change will commence in September and is expected to be completed by February. In Sydney, this change will commence in December and is expected to be completed by June.

Q. Is it true that FRNSW can issue fake fire call pages in order to drug test retained firefighters upon their arrival at the station?

A. No!

Q. Is it true that a directive has been given to Comms to turn out a Hazmat pumper alongside the heavy hazmat as a blanket rule, regardless of the type of call? And did this directive originate from the Commissioners Office without any consultation with the affected stations as to the practicalities of such a "one size fits all" procedure?

A. Yes, the decision was made as I received significant feedback that Hazmat Station Officers at Hazmat stations were not getting the opportunity to attend enough hazmat incidents, which could affect their confidence and ability. Also, the crew of 2 Firefighters on the Heavy Hazmat appliances were being called upon to do too many tasks at some incidents, and needed trained backup. The reduction in the number of Hazmat qualified personnel at some incidents was an unintended consequence of the Hazmat restructure and closure of No. 9 Station. Response protocols for the HART are also being reviewed to ensure that members retain skills, and expert backup and advice is readily available.

Q: Your recent e-mail re bullying and harassment was a good way of highlighting this issue, but hopefully it is not widespread. Workplace Standards was formed a few years ago but you never hear of any action against people. Was this a waste of money?

A: No, definitely not. We don't advertise the many cases that WS deals with, mainly because we have a legal requirement to protect the privacy of everyone, including perpetrators. I have said before that even if the legislation was different, I personally do not believe in publicly humiliating people – if they are found guilty, they pay a price. WS has actually published aggregated data on the number and types of cases it manages before, but it is hard to find. I have asked them to do quarterly reports giving general information about the types of things they deal with, and numbers. Individuals will not be identified, nor will locations. People need to be aware that complaints are dealt with promptly, confidentially, and are all taken seriously.

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To contribute a story, please contact the Media and Communications Unit: 9265 2907