

# Wednesday 9 July 2014 - Number 591

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Current National Security Alert Level: Medium

## GENERAL

### On leave

Jim Hamilton will be Acting Commissioner from Saturday the 12<sup>th</sup> July to Monday 21<sup>st</sup> July as I tick an item off my personal "bucket list". On Saturday I will fly to Okinawa in Japan for a week of intensive Karate training with two renowned 10<sup>th</sup> Dan Karate Masters. I have practiced Karate for about 40 years and it has always been my dream to go to its birthplace – I hope that the movie Karate Kid was not realistic, as I am already quite skilled at washing cars (lots of practice in the back yard of HQ many years ago) and painting fences!

### Japanese PM praises FRNSW

Yesterday the Japanese Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, addressed the Australian Parliament. He made special mention of the 52 FRNSW firefighters who responded as part of the Australian USAR Task Force to Minami Sanriku after the earthquake and tsunami in 2011, and paid tribute to Assistant Commissioner Rob McNeil, the Task Force Leader, who was in the public gallery to hear the Prime Minister's address. AC McNeil was asked to stand and received a standing ovation. Rob told me that it was a very emotional experience and that he was proud to represent the Task Force, which was made up of FRNSW firefighters, Ambulance Paramedics, trauma doctors, structural engineers, and a Police liaison officer.

Two of the people who deployed to Japan in 2011, Inspector Glen Launt and Supt Ian Krimmer, are currently in Japan on a private trip back to the devastated communities. Glen speaks fluent Japanese and as well as fulfilling a command role during the deployment, also acted as an interpreter.

### Illawarra station visits

Recently I spent 2 days in the Illawarra and met with permanent firefighters from 503 Wollongong, 422 Warrawong, 488 Shellharbour (including Hazmat), 277 Dapto and 241 Bulli to speak about a range of local and broader issues. I also had the opportunity to visit the new station being built at Albion Park which will be open with a 10/14 crew as well as the retained crew from 207 Albion Park Rail by the end of August.

One of the issues raised by firefighters was an item in Commish's Corner earlier this year concerning the Victorian deployment. My answer to an "ask the Commissioner" item that alleged an inequity in the dispersion of overtime resulting from the deployment could, it was pointed out to me, have been taken as suggesting that everyone who works in the Illawarra takes excessive amounts of sick leave and work excessive amounts of overtime. It was further pointed out to me that what was taken as implied criticism was unwarranted. In line with our organisational values, particularly that of "Respect", it is necessary for me to put the record straight on this - it was never my intention to be divisive or to cause ill feeling within or between sections of our workforce. The intent of my answer was to explain the logistical difficulties of including people stationed outside the Sydney area and the cost implications to the CFA if we did so. If the manner in which my answer was couched offended anybody, I sincerely regret this.

## Di Kozak retires

Chances are, if you have been ill or injured over the last decade and needed a return to work plan, you have had the privilege of knowing Di Kozak. Di returned to Head Office this week for a farewell afternoon tea. Dozens of people attended, including serving and retired uniformed and non uniformed personnel, some travelling from as far away as Coffs Harbour to wish her well. Those who have had contact with Di, a Return to Work Coordinator, know why she is held in such high esteem – she has often been referred to as an "Angel", and has helped hundreds of people through the worst times in their lives. Many people who despaired that they would never be able to work again, are still at work today because of Di's unwavering care, compassion and support. Di leaves huge shoes to fill in her role, but will now start a very well deserved and hopefully long, happy and healthy retirement. On behalf of all of us, thanks Di.

## Projecting a professional image

How we all conduct ourselves at work and whenever we are in uniform contributes to the way in which we are perceived by the public. It also says a lot about our own personal standards and professionalism. I recently wrote about on duty crews sitting down regularly at cafes, and the "bad look" in the eyes of the public. Only a handful of complaints had been received, and this was by no means a widespread issue. Hopefully my subtle reminder has registered.

Recently another query was received about dress standards at fire stations during a shift – specifically, whether board shorts, Mambo T-shirts and crocs are part of the FRNSW uniform or approved station wear more than an hour after change of shift. Again, an isolated case, but a wake-up call for anyone who might think that (a) this is OK, and (b) it promotes a professional image to the public. When at work, uniform must be worn and everyone must be ready to respond. There are no "ifs" or "buts" and Station Officers must ensure this is the case.

## National conference for women in firefighting

The fifth biennial conference of Women & Firefighting Australasia will be held 15-16 August in Canberra. This year the Conference will focus on how women are innovating in the firefighting sector and will feature presentations from leaders in disaster management, social media and research. The Conference aims to motivate, inspire and educate women and those working in the industry. It will provide valuable networking and mentoring opportunities, as well as leading edge training for delegates in a range of skills using top level trainers and facilities. We are sponsoring 10 places at the conference and invite expressions of interest of no longer than 1 paragraph to [officeofthecommissioner@fire.nsw.gov.au](mailto:officeofthecommissioner@fire.nsw.gov.au) For further information on the conference, visit the [website](#)

## Guide to ceremonial procedures

By now every Inspector and above and every station should have received the new pocket-sized Guide to Ceremonial Procedures. Many older members would remember the blue pocket guide which was out of print, outdated, and difficult to source. Retired Assistant Commissioner Bob Dobson AFSM, AM took it upon himself after he retire to re-write the guide. If you've ever wondered about the proper way to salute, which side to wear various medals on, how to be part of a funeral bearer party, or when to wear medals instead of ribbons, its all there. The guide is also available on the intranet at [http://home:81/documents/code\\_of\\_conduct/Procedure%20-%20Guide%20to%20ceremonial%20procedures%20\(Versio%2003\).pdf](http://home:81/documents/code_of_conduct/Procedure%20-%20Guide%20to%20ceremonial%20procedures%20(Versio%2003).pdf)

## Spate of home fires prompts winter fire safety warning

After a mild autumn, winter has now definitely arrived with nighttime temperatures dipping below zero in many parts of the State. FRNSW crews have been kept busy responding to residential fires – 330 since the beginning of June, causing 51 injuries and 1 fatality. As in previous years, around half of all these fires – 156 in total – began in the kitchen.

As you know, the theme of our Winter Fire Safety campaign this year is 'Don't leave your fire safety to chance'. We are using digital and local press advertising to urge people to do a home fire safety check by visiting the website [www.homefiresafetyaudit.com.au](http://www.homefiresafetyaudit.com.au). It is vital that stations take every opportunity to continue promoting winter fire safety messages including on their community noticeboard, in their local media, and through their

community engagement activities. For more information and key messages, see the [Winter Fire Safety Toolkit](#) on the Intranet.

## **Pymont Station redevelopment goes ahead after extensive consultation**

On Wednesday 25 June, we issued the tender for redevelopment of the heritage-listed 38 Station Pymont. This followed extensive consultation throughout the planning and design phases via a Metro East Command workplace engagement group which included Pymont firefighters. The architects and engineers passed along ideas and options to the engagement group who reviewed these and fed back comments and concerns. Various options were canvassed and assessed at different stages, with the staff engagement process vital in helping to refine the design.

38 Station is being extensively redeveloped and the building modernised internally. The renovated premises will consist of the ground floor fire station, plus two floors above which will provide office accommodation for some short term contractors as well as 'touchdown' facilities for staff needing a temporary city base after Head Office moves to Greenacre. Once a builder has been selected, 38's crews and appliances will be temporarily relocated to No. 1 City of Sydney during the construction phase.

Today I visited the station and on duty Platoon with our Minister, Stuart Ayres, and he showed a keen interest in the work that will be undertaken during the renovation.

## **FRNSW celebrates NAIDOC Week**

This year NAIDOC Week runs from 6-13 July under the theme of 'Serving Country – Centenary and Beyond'. NAIDOC Week provides an opportunity for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians to join together and recognise the valuable and continuing contribution that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians make to this country. It is also a celebration of significant reconciliation and of 'closing the gap' between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people by promoting understanding, acceptance and harmony, regardless of cultural background. FRNSW is continuing to work in partnership with Aboriginal communities and to progress initiatives identified in our Reconciliation Action Plan and our Aboriginal Employment and Development Action Plan. Cultural Awareness training has been developed and will be rolled out shortly.

This year, we honour all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women who have fought in defence of our country. On Thursday, we will recognise our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander firefighters who have helped to protect the people of NSW. All staff are invited to attend a BBQ at City of Sydney Fire Station at 12pm. I hope to see you there.

I encourage staff where possible to take part in NAIDOC Week celebrations that are happening across the State, and I congratulate all of our serving and past Aboriginal firefighters and other staff for the proud and valuable service they provide in all aspects of our work. For further information on NAIDOC Week, visit [www.aidoc.org.au](http://www.aidoc.org.au).

## **Firefighter Championships at Swansea**

On the weekend of 19-20 July, crews from around the state will battle it out in Swansea in the latest round of the Regional Firefighters Championships. This is the last Championships round before the State Championships at Kelso in October. I wish all competing crews the best of luck as you hone your skills in what promises to be another strongly contested Championship round.

## **Giving blood in the Winter Blood Challenge**

We are now more than halfway through the 2014 Emergency Services Winter Blood Challenge which runs until the end of July. FRNSW staff have so far made 50 blood donations, which puts us third in the State in terms of number of donations. To see how we're doing in comparison with other emergency services, check the tally update at the [Australian Red Cross Blood Service](#). If you want to participate and haven't done so yet, visit the [Health and Safety intranet page](#) for more information. I thank all of you who have who have donated, you are performing a valuable community service.

## **FRNSW featured in upcoming ABC *Catalyst* program**

Next Thursday, 17 July, ABC1's *Catalyst* program will air a segment, *House on Fire*, which focuses on the science behind a fire in the home – how a fire takes hold and how people react. It will also examine home fire safety and prevention. FRNSW's Community Safety Directorate and Media and Communications Unit worked with the program makers to develop the segment and the Fire Investigation and Research Unit facilitated a bedroom burn at the CSIRO's facility at North Ryde. The aim of the room burn was to highlight how quickly a fire can reach flashover and how much heat and smoke can be generated in just minutes.

The *Catalyst* segment demonstrates that working smoke alarms and a well thought out and rehearsed escape plan will greatly increase people's chances of survival in a residential fire. The segment, which features interviews with Chief Superintendent Chris Lewis, is perfectly timed to support this year's Winter Fire Safety campaign and I encourage all staff to tune in. *Catalyst* airs at 8pm.

## 2014 Annual Plane Pull

A FRNSW team has been invited to participate in the 2014 Annual Plane Pull, organised by Law Enforcement Torch Run NSW, in support of Special Olympics NSW. The Plane Pull is a tug of war between a team of 20 people and a RAAF Hercules cargo plane, weighing approximately 50 tonnes, over a distance of 10 metres. Each team gets two opportunities to pull the Hercules with the fastest time recorded. The event will be held at the Richmond RAAF Base, Saturday 30 August starting at 9am. All proceeds go to help Special Olympics NSW (entry fee for team members is around \$50). If you want to participate, please email A/Superintendent Wayne Phillips, Staff Officer, [wayne.phillips@fire.nsw.gov.au](mailto:wayne.phillips@fire.nsw.gov.au), expressing your interest by close of business Friday 1 August. Click [here](#) for more information about the event.

## INCIDENTS

### 7th Alarm Somersby recycling plant fire

At 1953 hours on Friday 27 June, FRNSW and the NSW RFS were called to a fire in a recycling plant at Pile Road Somersby near the M1 Freeway. The incident was protracted and lasted for five days, proving to be one of the largest non-bushfire incidents experienced in recent times on the Central Coast.

On the Friday night and on into the weekend, fire crews from the Central Coast, Sydney and Newcastle worked around the clock to battle the blaze. The fire is believed to have started in a conveyor and spread from there into the roof area of the large 100m by 40m building. On the Saturday I attended the scene to watch 31 Busby's compressed air foam (CAFS) pumper at work, delivering foam via an aerial pumper. In my opinion CAFS was a "game changer" at this fire, and reinforces the recent decision to purchase a number of Class 3 CAFS pumpers and Class 1 CAFS tankers.

Once the main fire was out, crews were faced with 200 tonnes of smouldering plastic and paper in compacted bales. Over several days, backhoes were used to break apart each bale and fire crews dampened down the materials to extinguish remaining pockets of fire. Each bale was then checked with a thermal imaging camera and loaded onto a truck for the 15-minute journey to Woy Woy tip.

As a precaution, RFS tankers accompanied trucks until their arrival at Woy Woy tip where additional FRNSW and RFS crews continued to wet down all materials. This process continued until Wednesday 2 July when the incident was finally concluded.

### 5th Alarm school fire at St Clair

On Sunday 29 June at around 1:30am 77 St Marys and 78 Dunheved were dispatched to 000 calls to a fire in a school at St Clair. Firefighters saw a large column of smoke enroute and on arrival found smoke and flames issuing from a two storey building. An initial Red message requesting a 2nd Alarm was quickly followed by an upgrade to 3rd Alarm after entry was made to the school grounds.

The fire quickly spread throughout the building and ultimately a 5th Alarm was assigned.

The 2 level fire was fought defensively using lines of 70mm and 38mm hose as well as an aerial, with CAFS applied in Sector B to control flare ups. Operations continued in defensive mode until electricity could be isolated.

More than 120 firefighters worked throughout the morning to extinguish the fire which totally destroyed 80% of the building. I attended the fire and was very impressed with the fact that an adjoining 2 storey building, despite direct flame impingement, was saved through the tenacious efforts of firefighters.

## 5th Alarm factory fire and rescue at Alexandria

Around 0140 hours on Wednesday 2 July, crews from a number of inner city stations responded to reports of a building alight at Burrows Road, Alexandria.

En route to the fire, the SO from 13 Alexandria reported seeing large volumes of smoke and called for additional resources. Once on scene, firefighters found a single storey warehouse, which was full of old motorbikes and other equipment, well alight with exposures under imminent threat. One person was rescued from an adjoining building and firefighters immediately got to work mounting a defensive attack.

At 0159 hours the incident was upgraded to a 5th Alarm as crews battled to try and stop the fierce blaze from spreading the three involved buildings. While fighting the fire, firefighters saw a group of 11 people emerge through the smoke from a driveway. The group, who were living in shipping containers, an old mini bus and caravan, reported that four other people were in danger. Firefighters from 13 Station found four confused and frightened young foreign students and experienced great difficulty convincing them to leave the caravan. Radiant heat outside was intense, melting plastic components on nearby vehicles, and the firefighters, shielded the young people from the flames as they led them to safety.

With all people safely evacuated from the site, around 75 firefighters battled to extinguish the fire. I was very impressed by the efforts of all who attended, and the fire was contained by 0415 after a concentrated aerial and ground attack. Crews remained on site throughout the morning to extinguish hotspots. A total of 21 stations including two aerials were involved throughout the duration of the incident. Several structures were totally destroyed as well as caravans and vehicles.

The incident attracted widespread national and international media coverage highlighting major concerns about people illegally renting out sub-standard accommodation in such risky situations. One of the interviews I participated in was with a Tokyo television news channel.

## ASK THE COMMISSIONER

**Q.** My question to you is where wi-fi is installed in FRNSW stations, why are firefighters not given access to this?

The system is already in place and not being utilised, granting access would assist firefighters to use their own equipment such as laptops and ipads to complete assessments while at the station. At times it can be difficult to get things done with two or three firefighters sharing one computer to access required information on the intranet or internet. This forces us to print sometimes rather large documents wasting paper or prolonging the process of assessment completion.

**A.** Our IT section has invested in technologies that will enable wifi to be used securely across the organisation. That means that staff may use their phones, iPads, tablets and laptops in all 400 offices and fire stations to conveniently access the internet and FRNSW web-based applications (eg. ESS, Intranet, eLearning, email, etc). The service is scheduled to be made available as soon as September, at which time more information will be available on how to use it.

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**Q.** In 2005 the Auditor General released a review and report into rescue services. A number of robust points were made including, there is no over-arching strategy concerning rescue in NSW and that in most jurisdictions in Australia the fire service was the primary provider of general land rescue. The Audit office report also mentioned the need to reduce cross-agency duplication and consider economies of scale. To date not much has resulted from the review and report. That said, how binding is the recent NSW Public Service Commission Strategic Directions paper 2014-15 when rescue is concerned? The PSC document in part lists; be fiscally responsible and focus on efficient, effective and prudent use of resources, be flexible, innovative and reliable in service delivery and focus on quality while maximising service delivery.

Is it true that the PSC directions paper and adherence to the goals set out will see a complete review of rescue in NSW, with a view to rescue being efficient, effective and using resources in a prudent manner?

**A.** Not to my knowledge. The Auditor General also observed that in most Australian and international jurisdictions, urban fire services are the sole, or main provider of rescue. The 2005 report had a strong influence on the Ambulance Service decision in 2009 to transfer all rescue responsibilities in Sydney, Newcastle, Wollongong and the Central Coast to the then NSWFB. It worked well but was not without controversy. The State Rescue Board also developed a risk management methodology that has since rolled out across the state that prescribed response time standards in Metropolitan, Regional and Outer Regional / Remote areas. This led to further changes and some additional NSWFB (FRNSW) accreditations, eg 33 Engadine, 241 Bulli, 488 Shellharbour, 222 Belmont, and 464 Toronto. I have strong personal views about how rescue services can be more efficient and effective, and the best way of achieving this in partnership with other agencies.

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**Commissioner's email:** [Commissioner@fire.nsw.gov.au](mailto:Commissioner@fire.nsw.gov.au)

**Sandra Garcia, EA to Commissioner:** 9265 2930

**Ask the Commissioner:** [OfficeOfTheCommissioner@fire.nsw.gov.au](mailto:OfficeOfTheCommissioner@fire.nsw.gov.au)