

## **Wednesday 10 December 2014 - Number 602**

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Current National Security Alert Level: **High**

### **GENERAL**

This is the last Commissioner's Corner for 2014 and I would like to wish everyone, and your families, a very merry and safe Christmas and a happy new year.

#### **Salamander Bay and Cardiff fire stations officially opened**

On Tuesday 2 December, I officiated at the opening of a new \$1.9 million fire station at Salamander Bay to replace 402 Nelsons Bay, and then the opening of the \$2.4 million upgrade of 251 Cardiff Fire Station.

Both stations provide modern facilities for the permanent and retained crews that serve and protect their local communities. It was pleasing to see so many serving and retired firefighters, and members of the community, at each event.

#### **Death of South Australian Firefighter**

It is with great sadness that I write to inform you that a South Australian Country Fire Service (CFS) member died yesterday 9 December 2014 as a result of a vehicle accident on the fire ground.

It is a tragic event and our thoughts are with the family, friends and Brigade at CFS who will be suffering as a result of this tragedy.

This tragedy serves as a reminder to stay safe while you are at work, be aware of your surroundings and look out for your work colleagues.

#### **Help shape FRNSW's bullying and harassment policy and procedure**

I have communicated extensively about bullying and harassment in the workplace, including the "zero tolerance" policy that all of us must ensure is practiced everywhere and at all times. This includes having the courage to speak up when witnessing wrongdoing or disrespectful behaviours.

In the last few years there have been a number of developments in relation to the prevention of workplace bullying and harassment. As a result, FRNSW's Preventing and Managing Bullying and Harassment policy was recently reviewed and it is now available for consultation and feedback. The revised policy and procedures aims to strengthen understanding of behaviours which may amount to bullying and/or harassment and those that do not. It also seeks to clearly articulate the responsibilities of employees at all levels in preventing and responding to such situations.

I strongly encourage you to review the draft and discuss it with your colleagues and staff. For more information and to access the draft documents, see the [intranet story](#).

## Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry report and firefighter health

The Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry report has been released and reviewed by FRNSW's Health and Safety staff in relation to firefighter health. Part 4 addresses health and wellbeing and section 4.4 specifically examines the issue of firefighter health. The report can be accessed at: <http://hazelwoodinquiry.vic.gov.au>.

In the report, the main health concern for firefighters was carbon monoxide exposure. The report states that by the time of FRNSW's deployment to Morwell, protocols were in place to manage carbon monoxide exposure for firefighters and the incident was being managed as a hazmat incident. I personally know this as I attended the site on 2 separate occasions and each time had my CO levels checked both when entering and leaving the site. This protocol applied to everybody and was rigidly enforced.

Based on the report findings, no risk of serious health effects in relation to carbon monoxide is expected. However, if you require further information or if you have any concerns in relation to your participation in the Hazelwood mine fire effort, please contact the Health & Safety Branch on 9265 2800.

## Get your ideas on the 'One Fire & Rescue' tablecloth

You may have seen them around, heard about them, or scribbled on one. 'One Fire & Rescue' tablecloths are illustrative tablecloths to help us talk about where we are now, where we'd like to be in the future, and how we'll get there together.

The tablecloth depicts what we are trying to achieve as an emergency service. It provides space to write down your ideas as well as to raise important issues. All ideas will be collated and presented to my Participative Council, who will help the Executive Leadership Team and I to transform them into action. If you have any questions, suggestions and ideas, or want more information about holding a conversation around the tablecloth, contact your tablecloth champion or email [OneFRNSW@fire.nsw.gov.au](mailto:OneFRNSW@fire.nsw.gov.au). See the [intranet article](#) for more details.

## A new and better AIRS is coming

In the last financial year, FRNSW attended 126,966 incidents, with a total of 187,428 responses. Across approximately 1,000 Station Officers, Leading Firefighters, Captains and Deputy Captains, that amounts to a lot of data entry. I am pleased to advise that from April 2015 this job will become considerably easier when the new eAIRS is rolled out across FRNSW. An eAIRS consultancy group of Station Officers, Captains and Deputy Captains from across FRNSW has been instrumental in advising the eAIRS team in delivering the new streamlined reporting system. Together, the team has taken the extra time to make sure we get eAIRS right.

In addition to a much better design, some of the improvements you can look forward to include: integration with eOccurrence Book, ESCAD and SAM; access to eAIRS reports via the eOccurrence Book portal anywhere in the FRNSW network; no attendance report requirements for supporting brigades at AFA incidents where a 700 stop code is recorded; and AIRS reports will no longer be required on stand-bys, move ups, or code 2s.

For more information on eAIRS, including screen views of the new report, visit the [eAIRS toolkit](#) or contact the eAIRS project team at [AIRSReplacement@fire.nsw.gov.au](mailto:AIRSReplacement@fire.nsw.gov.au).

## Recognising our CFU members on International Volunteer Day

Friday last week was International Volunteer Day, a global celebration of volunteering. Our Community Fire Unit members are among the six million Australians who contribute to their local communities as volunteers. We originally set up the CFU program following the devastating 1994 bushfires. The program has grown steadily and today is made up of more than 6,900 volunteer members operating across 592 units in metropolitan and regional areas. CFU volunteers are trained by our firefighters how to prepare themselves, their families and homes ahead of the bushfire season, how to make informed decisions about whether to leave early or stay and defend their property when bushfires threaten, and how to mop up and deal with embers before and after a fire front passes. I thank all our CFU volunteers for their commitment and support in increasing bushfire awareness and preparedness in their local communities.

## Annual report now available online

Our *2013/14 Annual Report* is now available online. The report highlights our performance across the broad range of services we provide to the community. It also provides a snapshot of our service, the challenges we are facing, and our achievements over the last 12 months. Click on the following links to access the report on our [intranet](#) and [internet](#) websites.

## Posthumous service medal presentation

On Friday 28 November I presented a FRNSW Long Service and Good Conduct Medal to the family of John Leahy. John was a valued member of the team at the workshops and unfortunately passed away suddenly earlier this year before he had a chance to receive his award. John's partner, son and parents attended the Greenacre workshops where I was able to present his son with the Medal in front of John's work colleagues.

## Christmas trivia with the Young People's Network

On Monday, I was pleased to attend FRNSW's [Young People's Network \(YPN\)](#) Christmas trivia event. Given that I only know important things, I knew that I wouldn't do well, so I acted as Trivia Master. Teams grappled with difficult questions like "what is a quarry?", "what is 27's truckie famous for?", and my favourite, "what is the number plate on the Commissioner's car?" With around 60 people attending, I also gave a brief review of the year, and addressed some comments and concerns that arose from the last YPN session.

YPN is a newly-formed group of FRNSW employees (operational, administrative and trades) who work together to further opportunities for professional and personal development of young employees (around 35 years or under) at FRNSW. The YPN has hosted three events so far, including a tablecloth session, group discussion facilitated by Deputy Chief Executive Rosemary Milkins, and small group conversations addressing perceptions in FRNSW. The group is open to all who are interested, and will be hosting its next event in early 2015.

## NSW Ambulance Service graduation

On Friday 5 December I was pleased to join Commissioner Ray Green ASM, Chief Executive NSW Ambulance, at the NSW Ambulance 2014 graduation ceremony at Sydney Opera House. The event celebrated the achievements of 183 newly qualified paramedics, 24 newly qualified intensive care paramedics, 10 extended care paramedics, 68 control centre officers and assistants, 20 patient transport officers, nine rescue paramedics, 15 helicopter paramedics, 10 special operations team members, and 80 NSW Ambulance staff who have completed the nationally recognised Ambulance Management Qualification. It was an honour to attend as a guest of our colleagues who do such wonderful work in the community.

## Alcohol consumption during the festive season

As the summer festive season approaches, I take this opportunity to remind all employees, for your own health and wellbeing, if you drink alcohol, to do so responsibly. All staff are reminded of their obligations and responsibilities regarding the consumption of alcohol as set out in the [Alcohol and Other Drugs Policy](#). Adherence to these requirements ensures a safe working environment for all. No staff member is to consume alcohol while on duty or come on duty under the influence of alcohol. We now have a random drug and alcohol testing program in place. This means that random testing WILL occur over the Christmas/New Year period and testing can occur during any shift and at any FRNSW work location. If you are experiencing a substance misuse issue, our Employee Assistance Program is available to help. For further information contact EAPS directly on **1300 360 364**.

## Gifts and benefits and attendance at Christmas functions

As the gift giving festive season approaches, I remind all staff of their responsibilities with regard to gifts and benefits. As a general rule, FRNSW employees offered gifts are expected to decline these offers, especially from suppliers, lobby groups or organisations to which we provide services. Further, gifts of alcohol cannot be accepted at any time as stated in the [Alcohol and Other Drugs Policy](#). ALL gifts are to be declared by completing the [Online Declaration Form](#).

At this time of year FRNSW staff may receive invitations to attend Christmas functions. Such invitations may include gifts of hospitality, e.g. dinner and drinks. These offers should be declined. Offers of gifts or hospitality – whether accepted or not – should be declared using the [Online Declaration Form](#) or by emailing details to

[workplacestandards@fire.nsw.gov.au](mailto:workplacestandards@fire.nsw.gov.au). If you have any questions or concerns about offers of gifts or hospitality you should report them to Workplace Standards on 9265 2826.

## **Tragic house fire at Bayview**

Last Sunday 30 November I attended the scene of a tragic house fire at Bayview on Sydney's northern beaches which resulted in the deaths of two people. This fire fatality hit particularly close to home for our FRNSW NSW family. Tragically the victims were the father and sister of SF Mick Wasley from Narrabeen Fire Station. On behalf of all staff, I passed on our deepest sympathy to Mick and his family today at the funeral, which dozens of FRNSW staff and senior officers of the RFS attended. Mick has expressed his sincere gratitude but has also asked that all enquiries and messages of support be sent via the Station Officers at 68 Stn Narrabeen, particularly SO Scott Bennett, rather than directly to him. He told me that he has been overwhelmed and humbled by the support he has received.

## **Salvation Army Christmas Appeal**

We have been holding our annual Salvation Army Christmas appeal for the last 16 years. This is another opportunity for us to help provide a brighter festive season for those less fortunate or in difficult circumstances. We are asking for donations of canned/packages of food, new toys and new clothing for the appeal. All donations should be either delivered or sent to the reception area in Head Office (Level 10) where a large donation box is set up next to the Christmas tree. Donations close on Monday 15 December to allow time for distribution, so please be quick if you want to contribute. Thank you in advance for your support to the tireless Salvos and those whom they assist on a daily basis.

## **INCIDENTS**

### **NSW storms**

The last 12 days has seen extensive responses to storm activity right across the State with forecasts that the eastern part of the state will continue to be impacted for the remainder of this week.

While many drought affected areas across the State are receiving welcome rain, the east coast has experienced slow moving low pressure troughs creating severe weather conditions on almost every day. Both the south and Central Coast of NSW have experienced constant torrential rainfall periods with FRNSW crews responding to reports of flooding in numerous areas.

### **Wednesday 3 December**

On 3 December, during the late afternoon and night, FRNSW crews responded to more than 400 storm related incidents. There were numerous reports of lightning strikes to structures, trees and power poles across the metropolitan area. At around 1630 hours an above ground electrical kiosk was struck by lightning in Pyrmont causing an intense fire with flame heights over 10 metres impinging directly onto the balconies of a nearby five storey block of residential units. All 25 units were evacuated as a 2nd Alarm was responded to provide protection to exposures. The 11kv kiosk continued to burn for well over an hour as stretched energy authority crews attempted to isolate the power to the unit. Good strategies by attending crews prevented any major damage to the unit block.

Throughout the remainder of the afternoon and evening more than 100 FRNSW crews were responded to numerous other reports of localised flooding, leaking roofs, trees across power lines and live electrical cables across roadways. Apparently, at the height of the fierce electrical storm, one lightning bolt struck the copper bell tower dome at Woollahra Public School. The incident was not reported to FRNSW as there appeared to be no further issue, however apparently woodwork within the tower began to smoulder and it wasn't until 0046 the following morning that 11 Woollahra, located next door, was alerted to the now flaming structure. A 3rd Alarm was responded to the rapidly escalating fire. Quick action by crews, working both internally and externally with aerial appliances contained the fire to the roof area with only minimal damage to the remainder of the school. Department of Education officials have thanked responding crews for their great work in saving the heritage listed school building and enabling the school to continue functioning normally.

### **Friday 5 December**

Further storm cells swept across the city on 5 December causing approximately 40 simultaneous storm related incidents in just one hour. At the height of the storm, at 1739hrs, there were reports of a lightning strike at a block of units in Sydney Road at Balgowlah. A power surge caused a refrigerator in one of the units to ignite. The owner wasn't home at the time and a 2nd Alarm response was required to bring the fire under control. Although the unit sustained substantial damage to the kitchen area, the fire was quickly contained with no damage occurring to adjoining units.

## Saturday 6 December

Saturday 6 December saw similar weather patterns generating numerous callouts across Sydney, particularly to a multitude of AFAs generated by the severe climatic conditions. Lightning struck the administration building at Asquith Public School as more than 400 parents and children were preparing for a Christmas event. Power boards within the structure ignited and responding crews quickly contained the situation with only minimal damage resulting.

## Sunday 7 December

On 7 December a series of 'Super Cells' swept across mainly the northern suburbs, generating more than 100 callouts to lightning strikes and damaged properties due to strong storm winds and intense hail storms that impacted thousands of properties (and damaged No. 10 car). At 1726hrs crews were called to a house fire in Folini Avenue at Winston Hills after it was struck by lightning, causing numerous small fires in the roof and wall cavities. Quick responding crews contained the fire to the roof and kitchen areas.

As part of our preparations for the current spate of storms, the five newly commissioned water tankers were placed on standby and staffed in strategic locations across the Sydney metropolitan area. Additional staff were also allocated to the Sydney and Newcastle Comms centres in anticipation of the multitude of calls that were received.

## Thanking all involved

I wish to place on record my thanks to the call taking staff for their enormous efforts in processing the thousands of calls, AFA activations and other incidents which continue to be handled efficiently and professionally. It's important during these times that we remind the community that although FRNSW is a critical provider of emergency assistance during these type of events, the SES continue to be the lead agency for overall coordination of storm response and recovery. The SES should be contacted on 132 500 if the public wish to report storm damage or request storm recovery assistance. 000 should only be dialled to report immediate emergencies and life threatening situations.

My thanks to all crews who have worked so well in difficult situations over the past days. The forecast for the next few days could see similar storm activities occurring and I urge everyone to pay particular attention to severe weather warnings issued by the Bureau of Meteorology. It may also be a good time for crews to review and familiarise themselves with the Standard Operational Guidelines that relate to Utilities, in particular, guidelines relating to [14.3 Wires down](#), [14.4 Working near power lines](#) and [14.6 Poles, kiosks, pillar boxes and street fixtures](#).

## ASK THE COMMISSIONER

**Q.** With the introduction of the new tankers at select location around the GSA, why are firefighters who have been trained to operate the new tankers not being trained in off road driving? This limits the tankers to on road use only which seems a big waste to have a 4WD capable vehicle that can't leave the road.

**A.** In order to ensure that we could use the appliances as quickly as possible, we decided on a 2 phase training approach: (1)Familiarise qualified drivers with the characteristics of the vehicles and pumps so that they could be used immediately, and then (2) Provide follow up training in 2015 for off road operations. Education and Training Driver Training have worked very hard, with little notice, to train sufficient drivers to get the tankers operational. My sincere thanks to the trainers.

The thinking was as follows: The tankers will be staffed on days of Total Fire Ban and severe weather events such as in recent days. On these days they will rarely, if ever, be called upon to go off road. If the fire danger

rating is Severe or higher, it will be too dangerous to operate off road – efforts will concentrate on property protection. During severe weather events, the ground will generally be too wet to go off road.