

## **Wednesday 15 October 2014 - Number 598**

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Current National Security Alert Level: **High**

### **GENERAL**

#### **The future of training**

This morning I had the pleasure of opening the Education & Training Summit attended by more than 100 people from all areas of FRNSW. The outcomes of the summit will help us to map out a new future for improved and sustainable education and training in FRNSW for the next decade. When the draft report is prepared it will be circulated for comment.

#### **Gearing up for the State Firefighter Championships**

Firefighters from across NSW, as well as teams from Victoria and the RFS, will head to Kelso for the 2014 State Firefighter Championships which are being held next week from 23 to 25 October. This is the culmination of the regional firefighter championship rounds that have been held over the last two years. Over three days of competition, firefighters will compete in 15 events representing the skills and expertise they need to respond safely and effectively to incidents. The championships will also give local residents the opportunity to see first hand how firefighters respond to emergencies, and to learn how to prevent and prepare for fires and other emergencies. I look forward to meeting many of you at Kelso, and good luck to all of the competing teams.

#### **Fire Chiefs meet with military chiefs**

Last week, together with the Chief Officers and Commissioners of every State and Territory urban and rural fire service and SES, I visited the ADF Headquarters Joint Operations Command (JOC) at Bungendore near Canberra. We were briefed by the Commanding Officer on current international deployments and military capabilities, including the limited capability of the ADF to support emergency services during times of disaster. This was an enlightening 'meeting of the minds' as we discovered that the public and sometimes political perception that the ADF has unlimited capabilities, for example to deploy to bushfires, is not accurate. Like the emergency services, the ADF has its limitations and has to concentrate on 'core business', however wherever possible they will assist when needed in specialist roles.

This meeting was followed by a meeting with Emergency Management Australia at the Crisis Coordination Centre in Canberra where initial work on a statement of national capability was reviewed, as well endorsement of interstate disaster assistance guidelines.

#### **Aerial firefighting forum**

Also last week, FRNSW hosted senior representatives of firefighting and land management agencies at City of Sydney Fire Station for a national seminar on the future of aerial firefighting in Australia. At present the Australian Government contributes about \$12 million per annum, matched by States and Territories, to fund a national fleet of heavy and medium firefighting aircraft. On the morning of the seminar, the Victorian Government announced that this year it will lease two heavy fixed wing air tankers, each with a capacity of

more than 15,000 litres. I believe that this is a major step forward as I have been involved in several firefighting operations in the USA where heavy air tankers were used to great effect. Because of the cost and concerns that their introduction might reduce the number of helicopters available, Australian authorities have been reluctant until now to introduce them. They are another useful tool that like anything, need to be used with care and where they will do the most good.

## Mental Health Month

October is [Mental Health Month](#). Over the past three years FRNSW has made some great advances in the area of mental health and now is the time to talk about it. Check out the relaunched [Mental Health Toolkit](#) on the intranet which provides tools to help you engage with your crew and to support yourself and your family.

FRNSW achievements were recently highlighted by [Heads Up](#), an organisation promoting workplace mental health. The responsibility of creating a mentally healthy workplace lies with each and every one of us. You can help by increasing your awareness and providing positive support for your workmates, and by seeking support if you need it. Look for the intranet stories running this month on the themes of awareness, prevention, response, and support which form the foundation of our [Mental Health Policy](#).

## 10th Alarm factory fire challenges *Firies* in first episode

After months of anticipation since filming finished, it was pleasing to see Network 10's new series *Firies* premiere at 6pm last Saturday. It's too early for any official ratings but if likes, shares and comments on social media are anything to go by, *Firies* got off to a great start. With a 10th Alarm paper mill fire, a thoroughly entertaining SABRE visit, a flood caused by sprinklers in an electronics factory and a break-in to assist paramedics to locate a child after a 000 call, there was plenty to highlight the varied work of FRNSW.

With seven more episodes to come, there's still time to let your local community know that *Firies* is on with a message on your station community noticeboard. For more information and to watch the first episode, see the [intranet story](#).

## Great response to Commissioner's Safety Awards

Entries for the inaugural Commissioner's Safety Awards have closed and I am delighted to advise that 34 nominations were received over the four categories, recognising 65 individuals for their contributions to safety in FRNSW. It is most gratifying to be able to acknowledge the many safety initiatives that have been introduced by groups or individuals within FRNSW to make our workplaces safer. I congratulate all nominees for their contribution to injury prevention and safety promotion within FRNSW.

A panel of three judges, consisting of our Assistant Director Health and Safety, a WorkCover NSW representative and I have reviewed all nominations and, after careful deliberation, have chosen [finalists in each category](#). We will announce the winner in each category and the overall winner for the awards at a ceremony on Friday 31 October at 27 stn Parramatta. The Commissioner's Safety Awards has created a unique opportunity within FRNSW for everyone to share their safety ideas, innovations and achievements with a wider audience while being recognised for continuing to ensure that safety is the guiding principle in everything we do.

## Firefighters recognised in Pride of Australia awards

Congratulations to SO Tony Gutteridge, Senior Firefighter Phil Holdsworth, and Qualified Firefighters Andrew Sarson and John Bugelli who were presented with Pride of Australia awards on Wednesday last week. The four were finalists in the category for outstanding bravery. They were recognised for their life-saving role in rescuing 54 residents during the Blue Mountains bushfire emergency in October last year. Well done for this well-deserved community recognition.

## Are your training records up to date?

All formal training delivered by FRNSW is now systematically recorded in Learning Solution Online (LSO) and is available to staff to review through Employee Self Service. This includes data migrated from our previous records database Quad.

Information in LSO provides zones and directorates with a clear picture of what capabilities their staff members have and what training will be needed in the future, so it is very important that all records are up to date. The Education and Training Directorate, along with operational commands, has been reviewing the database to ensure it is capturing accurate information. Please take the time to review your records and use the [Request to correct LSO Qualifications form](#) to amend any discrepancies before 30 November 2014.

## **Welcome to new recruits**

On Thursday 2 October I officiated at the latest graduation ceremony at the State Training College where we welcomed 19 new recruit firefighters into the ranks of FRNSW. The recruits were selected from thousands of men and women who applied for firefighting positions last year. They come from diverse backgrounds and include plumbers and carpenters, engineers, a clinical nurse and an industrial abseiler.

I congratulate this latest batch of recruits on successfully completing the course and wish them all the best in their new careers. I know that they will uphold the high standards of integrity, courage and professionalism expected of a FRNSW firefighter.

## **Partnership puts fire safety on the radar at RSL clubs**

On Friday 10 October, I was pleased to attend the launch of a one year formal community partnership between FRNSW and the RSL and Services Clubs Association of NSW at Penrith RSL Club, along with the Minister for Police and Emergency Services Stuart Ayres. One of our key objectives is to reduce the prevalence and impact of fires and other emergencies, and this partnership will enable us to better engage with some of the State's most at-risk groups and the wider community on fire safety. For more information, see the [intranet story](#).

## **Ensuring seniors safety on Grandparents Day**

Grandparents Day will be celebrated later this month on Sunday 26 October. This day formally recognises the unique contribution that grandparents make to their families and their communities. This is an ideal time to check that your own grandparents have working smoke alarms as well as taking the opportunity to promote fire safety to seniors in your community. Seniors continue to be one of our major community groups at risk in residential fires.

## **Wi-fi access for personal devices**

Secure and convenient Internet access is now available via wi-fi at all FRNSW stations and offices. The wi-fi network is called "FRNSW". Staff and their guests may use it to access the Internet for work and personal use from a phone, tablet or laptop device. Please note that the "FRNSW" wi-fi network is not for FRNSW-issued devices (such as FRNSW iPhones, iPads and laptops), as these have already been configured to connect to a separate corporate wi-fi network automatically. For more information, see the [Intranet toolkit](#).

## **Fire & Rescue News**

The latest issue of Fire & Rescue News has now been posted [online on the Intranet](#). Copies are currently being printed and are being mailed to fire stations and other FRNSW sites over the next few days. Features include a profile on Operational Communications and firefighting in the Solomons. Other articles talk about the future of rescue, the regional firefighter championships, tips on how to take a good photo or video and the 2014 Open Day roundup.

## **Submitting sick leave and personal/carer's leave**

The current system of manually submitting sick leave and personal/carer's leave documentation by post, fax or email has some inherent weaknesses that are causing delays for individual firefighters and Area Commands. FRNSW admin and trades staff already use Employee Self Service (ESS) to submit leave requests and documentation. This online system is secure and ensures complete confidentiality.

From 31 October FRNSW plans to introduce online processing of sick leave and personal/carer's leave through ESS for permanent firefighters. This improvement will make the process more efficient, and will give

permanent firefighters access to their individual up-to-date sick leave and personal/carer's leave entitlements and records through their ESS log-in. Some issues raised by the FBEU can hopefully be speedily resolved.

Permanent firefighters will receive more information about this change from their Duty Commanders or Managers, and will be able to access support material on the intranet. If you have any questions, talk to your Command or Manager, or contact the HR Advisory Helpdesk on 9265 3900.

## INCIDENTS

### Blown away

Almost exactly 12 months ago we were dealing with unseasonably high temperatures and a very dry landscape which resulted in some of the worst bushfires in NSW history. Last night we were hit by what the media called the "Sydney Cyclone" and this morning we shivered our way to work in the wet aftermath. An East Coast Low formed off Wollongong yesterday and moved north during the night. Initially, Illawarra crews were stretched to the limit by dozens of incidents, including a man trapped under a tree at Warrawong, and the flooding of three floors of surgical wards at Wollongong Hospital. Four Pumpers from Sydney were sent to assist when all Illawarra crews became committed.

The storm then moved north resulting in flash flooding and numerous rescues in the southern and south western suburbs of Sydney. At one stage there were 230 simultaneous active incidents. Crews were recalled for seven additional pumpers, three were brought up from the Illawarra, four down from the Central Coast, and 10 RFS tankers were called in to assist. The SES was also fully committed.

The statistics are impressive. Between 1800 and 0800 hours, FRNSW received more than 1,000 triple zero calls and responded to 970 incidents, including:

- 95 fires (including at least two house fires started by lightning strikes at Kellyville and Normanhurst, and a 2nd Alarm at Granville)
- 384 storm-related emergencies, including wires down, trees down and flooding
- 87 rescues including people trapped in MVAs, on a train, in flooded homes and cars
- 15 HAZMAT incidents
- 27 medical assist calls
- 12 bush and grass fires (most likely started by lightning)
- 350 other calls including AFAs and power outages.

### 2nd Alarm school fire at Springwood

At 0530 hours on Sunday 5 October, Blue Mountains fire crews were called to a fire at St Columba's High School in Hawkesbury Road at Springwood. This is the same school that suffered extensive damage about 4 years ago, and which firefighters worked hard to protect during last year's devastating bushfires.

445 Springwood was responded to an unknown fire. On arrival Rescue Pumper 445 reported that there appeared to be numerous buildings alight and requested a 2nd Alarm. The fire had taken hold of a number of separate classrooms under a common roof through which the fire had spread. The area of the school affected housed the school's visual arts, industrial technology and food technology classrooms. Crews from 301 Glenbrook, 359 Lawson, 343 Katoomba, 102 Regentville and 86 Penrith, together with several RFS crews, joined with permanent and retained firefighters from 445 Springwood and worked for three hours to bring the fire under control. The fire still continued to burn in inaccessible areas under collapsed roofing for most of the rest of the day and required numerous other crews from across the area to attend the site during the day and following night. USAR firefighters assisted in securing fallen structures and making the area safe for firefighting operations and the subsequent investigations.

The school community have praised the work of all attending firefighters in limiting the spread of the fire to five classrooms and saving other sections of the school. The fire is being treated as suspicious and the incident attracted extensive media coverage. The Minister for Police and Emergency Services Stuart Ayres, who is also the local member for Penrith, visited the site. He thanked firefighters and assured the community that an extensive investigation into the suspicious circumstances would proceed. The Minister asked me to extend his thanks to all attending firefighters and officers for a job well done.

## 3rd Alarm factory fire at Ingleburn

84 Macquarie Fields was the first crew to arrive at a reported factory fire in Stennett Street at Ingleburn just before 0600 hours on Tuesday 7 October. They immediately called for assistance at what appeared to be a factory 20 x 30 metres almost totally involved in fire. The factory was used for recycling and manufacturing cardboard, and the fire was threatening adjoining factories on either side. Crews immediately commenced a defensive attack; and as soon as power was isolated to the building, pressed an internal offensive attack to quickly bring the fire under control.

31's Compressed Air Foam pumper was a decisive factor in achieving rapid knockdown, as plant operators used backhoe machinery to break apart pallets of burning cardboard and paper. Given the extreme fire loading of the premises, attending fire crews did an amazing job in not only saving adjoining factories but also rapidly containing the burning factory area. Well done to the following crews who assisted in the initial fire attack: 92 St Andrews, 84 Macquarie Fields, 88 Campbelltown, 8 Liverpool, 7 Horningsea Park, 31 Busby, 93 Narellan and 85 Chester Hill. The cause of the fire is currently under investigation.

## Spectacular stack fire in Wollongong

503 Wollongong and 422 Warrawong were first to be responded to a fire in a fibreglass chimney stack at Bluescope Steel at 1733 hours on Monday 13 October. A plant that processes waste gas appears to have overheated and started a fire in the exhaust chute which was 60 metres tall and constructed of fibreglass, supported in a steel frame. Rescue Pumper 503 was first on scene, and immediately requested a 2nd Alarm while setting up a 100-metre exclusion zone. The fibreglass stack was rapidly consumed by fire which was visible across the Wollongong area. An exposure of ammonia cylinders was protected by a deluge system and the Ladder Platform from 503 extinguished the remainder of the stack in the supporting structure, while crews with hand lines extinguished the collapsed pile of fibreglass under the structure. Heavy machinery was used to break up the debris on the ground while Hazmat deployed the Area Rae to monitor for any hazards. The stop was sent at 2241.

## ASK THE COMMISSIONER

**Q:** Is there any plans in the near future to revamp/upgrade the FRNSW website? Currently it is advertised on all major and minor fleet, and referred to for recruitment and information. Some sections of the site have not been updated in roughly 9 years and do not advertise our current appliances and capabilities. It is far behind the user interface of our intranet and in my opinion should reflect the state of the art organisation that we are.

**A:** Yes. The Fire & Rescue NSW website is "owned" by the Media & Communications Unit (MCU) who have scheduled over the coming year to review and modernise it. This is a large undertaking as numerous sections contribute material: information, fact sheets, data and key contacts. etc. MCU coordinates the website and will work closely with each section throughout the year to ensure content is updated, and kept updated. If you see out of date content or broken links while visiting the website, please report issues to [webmaster@fire.nsw.gov.au](mailto:webmaster@fire.nsw.gov.au)

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**Q:** Is it an accepted practice to do Demo/Championship training in station drill time?

**A:** Absolutely! The Firefighter Championships and the Station Training Program have a significant impact in the development of operational confidence and teamwork and are aligned to the required skills firefighters use on the incident, drill and training ground.

Many championship teams align their Station Training Program to the championship program, thus ensuring they are at peak form for a championship and importantly, any incident to which their station may be responded. I encourage more stations to consider becoming involved in the championships.

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**Q:** During the deployment to Victoria we were able to compare many operational facets of the CFA with that of FRNSW. Some we do better, some they do better and some is the same.

One key element that I believe is delivered better with the CFA was their hard copy of the turnout system. Laser printers being used in place of quite old technology dot matrix printers, incorporating street map printout of call location.

Is FRNSW looking at replacing dot matrix printers with modern type printers and more so is there any plan in the near future to incorporate a printed UBD map with the firecall information.

**A:** The use of dot matrix printers has recently been reviewed and took into consideration what other national and international fire services use. Contrary to expectations, it was found that the use of these printers remains best practice for fire services in Australia, the UK and the USA. Whilst the dot matrix printers that we use might sound and look a little antiquated, their speed to start printing from sleep/standby, and their service reliability, apparently can't be matched by laser printers. These printers can also last far longer on backup batteries during electrical outages than any of the alternatives.

That said, FRNSW is looking to take a step beyond simply replacing the printers. The preferred option is to install computers into appliances, which will surpass the current capabilities of our interstate counterparts. The mobile computers will allow crews to access incident details, detailed maps and other pertinent information such as PIPs and chemical databases.

Lastly, when I enquired with the Chief Officer of the CFA, I discovered that some of the innovations seen by crews when in Victoria were actually not service-wide. For example, maps on printouts are apparently an individual station initiative at some locations, as an organisation-wide solution would have been prohibitively expensive to implement simply due to licensing costs.

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