

## Wednesday 29 October 2014 - Number 599

29 Oct 2014

Current National Security Alert Level: **High**

### GENERAL

#### Dorrigo triumphs at State Firefighter Championships

Following three days of fierce competition at Kelso, the State Firefighter Championship saw a jubilant Dorrigo take the title by almost 400 points last Sunday. The championship brought together hundreds of firefighters from FRNSW, NSWRFs and the CFA and I was continually impressed by the skill and commitment of the teams – and by the state records which continued to tumble across many events.

Huge thanks go to the host brigade Kelso for such a great event and putting in a sterling effort to finish third overall. The set-up at Kelso's Learmonth Park was spectacular and the torchlight procession, in particular, was embraced by the local community who turned out in force to watch. Everyone involved, from all those behind the scenes to the teams competing, can walk away feeling very proud of their efforts. The next Regional Firefighter Championships will be held in March at Gunnedah, and I encourage brigades to consider having a run for the first time – you won't be disappointed.

#### Fire Chiefs meet

Today our Head Office hosted the Chief Officers and Commissioners of every State and Territory fire & emergency service as well as the Director General of Emergency Management Australia. We met to deliberate on interstate and international assistance arrangements in the event of a catastrophic scenario, such as SA, Victoria, NSW, Tasmania and the ACT all experiencing extreme fire weather and multiple fires, with Queensland experiencing a cyclone simultaneously. Tomorrow I will chair a meeting of the Australasian Fire & Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC) being held at City of Sydney Fire Station.

#### Information technology strategy released

We recently released our new IT strategy for the next three years. The strategy focuses on three main programs of work – operations (ESCAD), corporate systems (SAP/TRIM/in-house applications) and technology (infrastructure and radio). Underpinning these are a number of projects that will deliver leading edge capabilities for FRNSW while providing value for money.

The strategy includes case studies from external sources that highlight FRNSW's leading role in delivering new services to firefighters, administrative staff and other sector agencies. The final section introduces the Work Anywhere concept which is based on the latest emerging technologies and practices in IT, and will form a critical component of how IT is delivered to our staff in the coming years. The document can be downloaded [here](#).

#### Targeted home visits improve fire safety in at-risk communities

Prevention is a core function of FRNSW, part of our mandatory obligations under the *Fire Brigades Act*. Our newest prevention activity is aimed directly at reducing fire injuries and fatalities through a targeted home

visitation program. Home Fire Safety Checks deployments involve teams of FRNSW uniformed and admin staff visiting homes in a targeted area to provide fire safety advice and checking that residents have working smoke alarms. Areas are selected based on community risk profiling and residential fire history. Team members leave information to reduce the risk of fire while encouraging householders to undertake an online home fire safety audit.

To date, ten HFSC deployments have been carried out; nine in metropolitan areas and one in a regional area (Young), with another regional one planned in Wellington next week. Members of the Executive Leadership Team have been leading from the front, with Deputy Chief Executive Rosemary Milkins, Director HR Darren Huddell, Director E&T Gail Wykes, A/Assistant Commissioner Gerry Byrne and Assistant Commissioner Mark Whybro participating in some of the deployments to date. I personally had the opportunity of participating in a Home Fire Safety Checks deployment in the Yennora area in early October. Despite the approaching 10-year anniversary of legislation mandating home smoke alarms, the Home Fire Safety Checks deployments are finding around 60% of homes in the targeted at-risk communities do not have working smoke alarms.

My experience with operational firefighters and Community Safety personnel highlighted the opportunities for us to proactively engage with the people we serve and protect, especially those at highest risk of home fires. We need all FRNSW personnel delivering these messages in their communities, targeting their community activities to further reduce the number of preventable home fire fatalities and injuries. If you are interested in this initiative, contact the Community Safety Directorate for more information.

## **Effectiveness of smoke alarms**

Recent media coverage has highlighted the differences between photoelectric and ionisation smoke alarms. FRNSW's position is that we strongly support photoelectric smoke alarms and do not recommend fitting ionisation alarms in any context. Testing shows a clear difference between the two types of alarms, with photoelectric alarms activating more quickly in most scenarios than ionisation alarms.

In 2006, we initiated a change in national fire services' policy to advocate photoelectric alarms. We are conducting joint research with the CSIRO to validate overseas findings. Assuming that the results will be as expected, these will be put forward by AFAC as evidence to support a change to the Building Code of Australia that would mandate that all domestic smoke alarms must be photoelectric.

I have also been asked if completing a SABRE program, should firefighters be installing / replacing batteries of ionisation alarms, even though we do not recommend them. At this stage the answer is yes, because ionisation alarms are still compliant with the current Australian Standard, although we should strongly recommend that they be replaced with photoelectric alarms.

## **Injury management audit**

As part of our Safety Strategy, FRNSW is participating in an audit conducted by Suncorp Risk Services to assess best practice injury management in the workplace. A crucial part of the audit is getting feedback from employees to enable FRNSW to identify strengths and opportunities for improvement in its injury management and return-to-work programs. Suncorp have developed a survey involving 10 multiple choice questions. All employees are encouraged to participate and all responses are anonymous.

The survey is available through this [link](#) and will be open for completion until Friday 28 November. If you wish to complete a paper-based survey please contact Debbie Bilton on 02 9265 3927 or [debbie.bilton@fire.nsw.gov.au](mailto:debbie.bilton@fire.nsw.gov.au). Your participation is greatly appreciated.

## **Commemorating the 2013 Blue Mountains bushfires**

On Friday 17 October I joined RFS Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons, Minister for Police and Emergency Services Stuart Ayres, Blue Mountains Mayor Mark Greenhill, community leaders and representatives and firefighters in Springwood to mark the first anniversary of the previous year's catastrophic fires.

The Blue Mountains fires of 17 October 2013 were amongst NSW's fastest and most destructive bushfires ever. In all, FRNSW responded more than 90 appliances and about 400 firefighters to the mountains on that afternoon. FRNSW was the first service on scene at Linksvue Avenue in Springwood and we responded dozens of fire crews who fought to save as many homes as they could. Simultaneously, at Mt Victoria,

FRNSW and RFS firefighters were overrun by a crowning fire, and it was only due to their courage, professionalism and skill that serious injuries were averted and no lives were lost.

The commemoration on Friday 17th was a sobering reminder of the potential destructiveness of major bushfires, and the need for emergency services and the community alike to be ever-vigilant and well prepared.

## Surveying firefighters about barriers to prevention activities

A survey is being conducted to people from inspector down to firefighter, including retained firefighters, to gather information on staff attitudes and practices about community risk reduction activities such as fire prevention and public education. As part of his studies, Inspector Gary Williams is conducting research seeking to identify barriers to firefighters undertaking prevention work.

If you would like to participate, click on the survey [link](#). Individual responses will not be reported and no attempt will be made to identify individuals by their response. This survey is open until Wednesday 5 November. For enquiries or to get more information or a copy of the results once the survey is completed, contact Gary on [gary.williams@fire.nsw.gov.au](mailto:gary.williams@fire.nsw.gov.au), or mobile: 0400 440 118.

## Thanking Ambulance and NSWSES personnel

In November, FRNSW staff have the opportunity to show their appreciation for personnel from other agencies with whom we work closely at many incidents.

Wednesday 5 November is 'Thank a Paramedic' Day. FRNSW and Ambulance personnel respond to many of the same calls and together we work seamlessly to help people in a variety of emergency situations. The care and support provided by paramedics in difficult and stressful situations leaves a lasting impression on members of the community whom they help, and also on those of us who work alongside them at incidents. If you would like to offer thanks or share a story or experience, you can do so either via the Facebook page (#ThankaNSWParamedic) or email [community@ambulance.nsw.gov.au](mailto:community@ambulance.nsw.gov.au)

Wednesday 12 November is Wear Orange Wednesday, when the SES encourages the public to wear something orange to show appreciation and support for SES volunteers nationally. FRNSW works with the SES at storm and flood operations, and the two agencies often cooperate at rescues and other incidents. For more information, see the [website](#).

## White Ribbon Walk

The annual 30-minute White Ribbon Campaign walk, organised by the NSW Police Force and Randwick City Council, will be held on Tuesday 25 November. White Ribbon Day is a national domestic violence prevention campaign which aims to raise awareness amongst Australian men and boys about the roles they can play to prevent violence against women. The campaign calls for men across Australia to speak out and take an oath, swearing never to commit, excuse or remain silent about violence against women.

The walk will commence at 7.30am from High Cross Park, Randwick and finish at South Coogee at around 8am. Following the walk, a breakfast, speeches and oath ceremony will take place, finishing by 9am. If you wish to participate in this event, please email your request to [ebwhiteribbon@police.nsw.gov.au](mailto:ebwhiteribbon@police.nsw.gov.au)

## INCIDENTS

### 10th Alarm factory fire at Revesby

On Friday 17 October 2014 the first of multiple 000 calls were received at around 1112 hours reporting smoke issuing from a large factory complex in Fitzpatrick Street, Revesby. Due to the number of calls being received, FireComms upgraded the response to a 2nd Alarm while appliances were enroute. Upon arrival of 47 Revesby, a Red message was transmitted requesting a 3rd Alarm. Almost simultaneously, 30 Lidcombe arrived in Sector C and requested a 2nd Alarm to that location. The large smoke plume was visible right across the Sydney metropolitan area and it was soon obvious that surrounding factories were under significant threat. The factory contained large quantities of highly flammable liquids including paints, lacquers and thinners used in the manufacture of timber decking.

A defensive strategy was immediately adopted to prevent fire spread to factories in Sectors B, C and D. The fire was through the roof as aerial appliances, 70mm handlines and ground monitors were deployed. Several large explosions occurred and crews did an excellent job in minimising the damage to other exposures. Inspector Mick Wren was the Incident Controller, supported by an Incident Management Team and the ICV. It soon became evident that water supplies were insufficient and that a relay pumping operation from surrounding streets would be required. Upon my arrival the response was raised to a 7th Alarm, and then to a 10th to enable rotation of crews throughout the lengthy operation. The fire did spread into an adjoining factory containing machinery parts however an offensive internal attack within that structure prevented major fire spread.

The fire was eventually contained to an area of about 100 x 150 metres and subdued by the deployment of numerous hand lines, aerials and monitors. 31 Busby's CAFS pumper was used in conjunction with the City of Sydney ladder platform to deliver foam from above. Fortunately all workers were quickly evacuated from the factory and surrounding premises in the early stages, and only two people required assessment for possible smoke inhalation. A fire duty was maintained overnight and throughout the following day with the Stop message finally sent at 1049 hours on Saturday morning. The cause of the fire is not considered suspicious. My congratulations to the many responding brigades from across the Sydney metropolitan area for a job well done.

## **2nd Alarm MVA and rescue at Dee Why**

Northern beaches crews were called to a serious MVA at Pittwater Rd, Dee Why at 0608 hours on Tuesday 21 October 2014. The intersection of Warringah Rd and Pittwater Rd at Dee Why is a notorious accident black spot with many severe accidents occurring at the location over the years. On this occasions, a truck lost control on its descent down Warringah Rd and careered across the intersection of Pittwater Rd colliding with 12 other vehicles. The truck turned on its side and finally came to rest on top of a sedan containing two passengers, which had been stationary at the lights. 69 Dee Why was quickly on scene with 68 Narrabeen Pumper and Heavy Rescue arriving just a few minutes behind.

Crews were confronted with a fully laden truck containing flour and food produce on its side and resting on top of a crushed vehicle with persons trapped inside. The seriousness of the incident was compounded by diesel leaking from the truck fuel tank. Ambulance crews conducted a large scale triage operation of six other victims in several vehicles. Fortunately a doctor was on scene and was in communication with the entrapped victims under the truck. Firefighters established fire protection and stabilised the truck, then quickly released one of the trapped victims. Both were Police Officers on their way to work.

51 Forestville and 24 Manly arrived to assist and the release of the second victim took a lot longer with firefighters having to firstly unload the truck manually. Rescuers worked inside the toppled truck by cutting through the floor to access the roof of the crushed vehicle, finally releasing the trapped victim at around 0750 hours. Northern beaches traffic was brought to a standstill throughout the protracted incident as busy Warringah Road was closed to all traffic. 13 Hazmat Pumper and Heavy Hazmat also responded to assist in the clean-up of a large diesel spill. Congratulations to all responding crews for an excellent rescue operation and successful outcome under difficult circumstances.

## **Too wet for bushfires?**

Don't let the recent rains fool you. Last night after 2000 hours eastern suburbs crews were in property protection mode at La Perouse when a major bushfire broke out at the NSW Golf Course and spread through coastal heath under the influence of very low humidity, temperatures still in the high 20's, and fresh westerly winds. A 4<sup>th</sup> Alarm FRNSW response was required, supported by crews from the National Parks and Wildlife Service. The Stop was sent after backburning operations were completed after 0300 hours. A large pool of hot dry air that transited NSW this week has resulted in rapid drying of vegetation.

## **ASK THE COMMISSIONER**

**Q.** There has been talk about certain stations becoming training stations. If this is true, have these stations already been selected? Are these stations going to receive extra funding and resources?

**A.** It is a concept that has been discussed a great deal over the years, but not progressed to any extent. The recent Training Summit touched on the idea and may be among the final recommendations. No stations have been identified as yet, nor have any resource needs.

-----  
**Q.** I wish to enquire as why the new retained pumpers are not fitted with BA sets in the rear seats similar to the way in which the Scania's are fitted out?

As retained staff we are already "behind the 8 ball" having to respond from home when paged, get to the job and then go through pre op checks and donning etc.

It would certainly be of some benefit to carry out pre-op checks etc on the way to the job. Aviation Fire Rescue and Queensland Fire Rescue have the same Mercedes type pumper with BA sets fitted within the seats.

**A.** The addition of BA seating in the rear of pumpers reduces the number of rear seats from four to three which is not desirable with Retained staffing. The current arrangement provides greatly expanded space in the rear cabin compared to the Isuzus, and BA stowage has been improved in the revised body layout.

The jury is actually still out on BA seating. Whilst convenient and a bit faster, there is some evidence that wearing SCBA while alighting a pumper can lead to sometimes serious lower back injuries. Don't be surprised in the future if there is a general move amongst fire services nationally and internationally to go back to SCBA stowage in lockers. That having been said, there is insufficient information available at present on which to make such a decision.

-----  
**Q.** I am wondering why, in an organisation that keeps talking about 'new ways of working' and the 'paperless office', so many forms still have to be printed out, filled in and scanned and returned via email, instead of being able to complete and submit them online?

**A.** Thanks, this is a great question. I am advised that most of the forms referred to belong to individual sections. We will now endeavour to coordinate this and over time convert as many of the forms as possible to being "online", although this will take some time to achieve given that funding will have to be found.

-----  
**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)