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GENERAL

Increasing employee engagement at FRNSW

Over the last few years, I have been very concerned about how we as an organisation and particularly people in management roles talk to, and communicate with, our workforce. I know from my many visits to worksites and at station forums, that many of our people have great ideas and thoughts about the way we do business and how to make things better, but often do not know how to get the message through to people who can do something about it. I am very keen to capture these ideas and to ensure that even more people have the opportunity to hear what is going on, understand what we are trying to do and to get your feedback. While we have done this in a limited way, for example when we made changes to the Inspector Promotional Program Pre-Entry Test and when we held Summits on safety, rescue and women in the fire service, I know that we can and must do much more. For this reason, I have asked the Executive Leadership Team to focus on employee engagement and make it a regular standing item for reporting at all meetings.

Employee engagement is not a new concept. When genuinely embraced and properly organized, it can greatly assist in improving morale and the way organisations operate. Hierarchical organisations' like ours, particularly where there is a chain of command, can struggle with the concept. Over the next few weeks, I intend to circulate various articles on employee engagement in Commissioner's Corner so you may better understand and commence a discussion with your colleagues about what this means for you, for your team and for Fire & Rescue NSW.

There are many articles on employee engagement available on the internet; I ask that you have a look and give us your thoughts on some ways that Fire & Rescue can improve in this area by emailing EmployeeEngagement@fire.nsw.gov.au

Government Sector Employment Act update

In my last Commissioner's Corner, I advised that the Public Service Commissioner Graeme Head was delivering a series of forums to discuss implementation of the *Government Sector Employment Act*. To date these have been very well attended by FRNSW staff including firefighters who have found them informative. The Public Service Commissioner has received requests for additional briefings at a number of other regional locations. As such, the program has been extended to include an additional briefing in the Sydney CBD, at Parramatta and regionally at Broken Hill, Goulburn and Queanbeyan. Register to attend: <http://psc.nsw.gov.au/events/events>. If you have not yet been to a session I strongly encourage you attend; if you cannot make it, a video of the presentation will shortly be posted on the [Public Service Commission website](http://psc.nsw.gov.au). I encourage you to keep checking this site to keep abreast of the latest information which affects all of us. If you have any comments, questions or concerns please email them to GSEAct@fire.nsw.gov.au

IPCC Climate Change report handed down

If you are not concerned, or skeptical about climate change, I strongly suggest that you start to read up on the mainstream science. This week the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released its latest report developed by the world's, including Australia's, leading climate scientists. The report is far more blunt than any previous reports. It states that climate change is no longer a theoretical concept – irreversible changes are already occurring and even if strong action commences to reduce emissions, many adverse changes are virtually "locked in" because of the amount of greenhouse gases already in the atmosphere. Many of the current and projected consequences directly affect the fire and emergency services.

The report predicts increasing bushfire danger (already happening), extreme weather events (already happening), drought (already happening), floods (already happening) and less frequent but more severe cyclones (already happening). It is notable that the October bushfires set 3 concerning records: (1) the largest single property loss fire in NSW history (Winmalee), (2) the first time there has been major property loss due to bushfire in NSW before November, and (3) the first time there has been major property loss when not experiencing an El Nino event. There is increasing evidence that we could be heading into a possibly severe El Nino pattern which usually brings drought and very high temperatures. If this happens, the 2014/15 bushfire season could potentially be worse than 2013. It is not possible to directly attribute the 2013 fires to climate change, as at this stage they are statistically a "one off" event, however in the last decade the fire seasons have tended to start earlier and last longer. The recent storms in Sydney, the Hunter and Blue Mountains also demonstrate a climate change associated phenomena identified by the CSIRO – more violent storms with torrential downpours over a short period, flash flooding, and stronger wind gusts.

As emergency service professionals we need to be aware of the changes happening around us and the effects they are having on community needs – for example the need for more swift water rescue capabilities, enhanced bushfire capabilities, and basic life support capabilities. We will also be increasing our efforts to reduce our own carbon emissions and increase use of renewable "clean" energy. I encourage everybody to think about what they can do in their own homes. I have significantly reduced my home emissions through fitting of solar panels and a gas hot water system. Every little bit helps and it is our generation who will either head off the worst effects for our children, or lock in the worst case scenarios through ignorance and inaction.

[Read the IPCC Summary Report here.](#)

[Watch a really important science announcement here on FireTube.](#)

IFE Conference

On Thursday and Friday last week, the Australia Branch of the Institution of Fire Engineers held an international Conference at Manly in Sydney. The conference consisted of two major streams. The Fire Engineering stream addressed emergency evacuation from a wide range of scenarios, including transport, mining, commercial premises and tunnels. The Operational stream addressed crisis management across a range of scenarios including both natural events and those resulting from human involvement.

The conference featured Australian and internationally known speakers. On Thursday morning I opened the conference and then delivered the keynote address on fire engineering; several other FRNSW staff also gave presentations. The conference attracted both local and overseas delegates, providing many good opportunities to network face-to-face with our colleagues from around the world. Attendees included the Chief Officers of the South Australian Metropolitan Fire Service, Chief Officer of the South Australian Country Fire Service, Chief Officer of the Tasmania Fire Service, Commissioner of Queensland Fire & Emergency Services, retired Fire Chief of the Toronto Fire Department, and an Assistant Commissioner from the London Fire Brigade.

Update on FRNSW Safety Strategy 2013-17

The end of March marks completion of the first five months of implementing our Safety Strategy. These few months have predominantly involved planning and scoping a range of initiatives for 2014.

All actions scheduled for 2013 were successfully completed. We developed a mandatory health and fitness program framework which will be discussed with all stakeholders including the FBEU in the coming months. This is timely, as yesterday the Auditor General released a report on firefighter fitness recommending mandatory testing. The report can be [accessed here](#). We maintained effective relationships through regular meetings with other emergency services and WorkCover to share safety and other information that will benefit all agencies (WHS legislation requires 'horizontal consultation' with relevant external parties). Information and data from our safety incident investigations was correlated and rated for analysis by our Executive at our Work Health and Safety Advisory Committee meetings. We also reviewed how we manage reports of injury, illness, exposures and near misses, with the aim of improving the outcomes of these incidents. See the Intranet story for more details on these achievements.

As 2014 rolls on, FRNSW will further update staff on progress in implementing the Safety Strategy's key initiatives for this year. I encourage you to become familiar with our [Safety Strategy](#) which outlines the strategies and outcomes we are striving for, so you can play your part in achieving these.

Wrapup on Victorian deployment

Our assistance to the CFA and the communities of Victoria has almost finished. To date FRNSW has deployed approximately 1,000 Station Officers and firefighters, backfilling CFA stations, working closely with local crews and providing valuable support to communities, as well as senior officers who managed the deployment. FRNSW crews have responded to many calls for assistance including house and grass fires, MVAs, AFAs and Emergency Medical Response calls. Crews have also contributed through community engagement activities and have supported children in the Morwell area during a day specially for those children.

The work of our Compressed Air Foam System operators, together with CAFS appliances from ACT, Queensland and Tasmania, proved to be very effective in assisting with extinguishing the Hazelwood Mine Fire. I extend my thanks to those crews who worked in this difficult environment.

Commencing last Wednesday, we demobilised the eight Class 3 pumpers from various regional centres in Victoria back to NSW. The Aerial Pumper at Ballarat was demobilised last Friday, however the second Aerial Pumper will continue operations at Corio until the end of April. This will allow the CFA and MFB to withdraw their resources from the mine, then service and repair them prior to returning them to their stations. Our appliances are being serviced and readied for return to their stations as soon as possible.

My sincere thanks to all officers and firefighters deployed to Victoria and to all those who offered to assist but weren't able to be used. My thanks also to all the people who worked behind the scenes in planning and coordinating the largest interstate deployment for FRNSW to date. The Victorian Fire Services Commissioner and Chief Officers from the CFA and MFB all wrote to me thanking FRNSW crews for their support.

New CFU skills maintenance package and station engagement program

The CFU Team has developed a new skills maintenance package for our 7,000 operational CFU volunteers. The package comprises six drills that enable CFU members to manage their own training, and covers the CFU program, safety and equipment. These drills are to be conducted annually, prior to the bushfire danger period. This will allow CFU members to remain operational and be able to activate during bushfire conditions.

To support the new skills maintenance package, a biennial station engagement program will be launched. This will be conducted by firefighters and coordinated by CFU Officers in conjunction with each Zone Management Team. It will entail a 60 to 90 minute drill. To view the skills maintenance package and station engagement program, please click on the following [link](#). Read the [Intranet story](#) for more details.

The new package is currently being rolled out during Team Coordinator meetings held by CFU Officers across NSW. Please contact the CFU Officer from your Area Command if you wish to discuss further.

'Change your clock, change your smoke alarm battery' campaign

It's now time to spread the word to your local community that all households should check and replace their smoke alarm batteries when daylight saving ends on 6 April. The 'Change your clock, change your smoke alarm battery' campaign aims to increase awareness of the 'Working smoke alarms save lives' message. It's also about increasing awareness of the need to develop and practice a home escape plan, and increasing the number of households approached for inclusion in the Smoke Alarm & Battery REplacement (SABRE) program. I encourage stations to download the [Smoke alarm campaign media release template](#) to send to their local newspaper, radio station or TV station. You can also download a photo from the following [web page](#) to accompany the release. It is also important to advise people who are thinking of replacing their smoke alarms that we only recommend photoelectric smoke alarms, not the older ionization type. Tests suggest that photoelectric alarms respond more quickly in most common house fire scenarios.

Community First Responder Conference

On the weekend of 22-23 March, the Ambulance Service of NSW hosted a multi-agency Community First Responder conference at Coffs Harbour. The first day, Saturday 22 March, was a strategic information day focusing on the community first responder concept. The focus for Sunday was on scenario-based training, with FRNSW crews attending from 262 Coolamon, 322 Henty, 242 Bundanoon, 80 Bundeena, 475 Uralla and 237

Branxton, plus community first responders from the NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS), NSW State Emergency Service (SES) and NSW Ambulance volunteers. Also attending were the local Water Police, a crew from 257 Coffs Harbour Fire Station, local paramedics and paramedic educators. Scenarios included a cardiac arrest, a broken leg, a motor vehicle accident, a simulated helicopter extraction and a water rescue.

'400 in 4' charity bike ride

My congratulations to the 26 riders who completed the 2014 '400 in 4' charity bike ride last Friday 28 March. They left Wagga Wagga on Tuesday 25 March, cycling 400 km over four days, and along the way stopped at Gundagai, Yass, Goulburn and parts of Sydney, where they visited schools and local communities to promote fire safety and awareness. The cyclists eventually arrived at The Children's Hospital at Westmead where they enjoyed a welcome reception that included a performance by country singer FF Dan Murphy, shows for the children and a barbecue. This is the 9th annual '400 in 4' and over the years, the ride has raised over \$300,000 for the hospital's Burns Unit.

FRNSW celebrates Harmony Day

On Harmony Day on Friday 21 March, I joined other FRNSW staff at City of Sydney Fire Station for a presentation by Tony Flick, a Gomeroi man and FRNSW Training Officer, on the traditional culture of the Gomeroi Aboriginal people of Northwest NSW. Tony delighted his audience with an entertaining and very informative talk about the traditions, beliefs and customs of his people, with a particular emphasis on language. FRNSW also participated in Harmony Day events at Queanbeyan, Toongabbie and Eastlakes. Harmony Day promotes cultural respect for everyone who calls Australia home – from the traditional owners of this land to those who have come from many countries around the world. It is a day for celebrating diversity and for us at FRNSW to reflect on the work we still need to do in promoting diversity within our workforce, especially in terms of race and gender.

Penrith Working Truck Show

Firefighters at our Museum and many volunteer supporters will stage the 27th Annual Working Truck Show this Sunday 6 April at the Museum of Fire in Penrith. With 20,000 people attending each year, this is now a major event in Western Sydney. Children are kept busy with a huge selection of 21 free rides, free fairy floss, free face-painting and other activities that are sure to keep parents happy too. There's live entertainment to keep people on their feet, including country rock stars McAlister Kemp, The Wolfe Brothers and many more. Adults tickets are \$30 and three children can enter for free with each adult ticket purchase. All rides, entertainment, activities and exhibits inside the show are free, including entry to the Museum.

The Penrith Working Truck Show is a registered charity event, so all funds raised go to educating families in fire safety and to displaying and preserving our fire service history. Staff are encouraged to go out on Sunday to the Museum of Fire, 1 Museum Drive, Penrith, for what is sure to be a fun community event. The Museum is beside Penrith Railway Station and there's plenty of parking. For more information visit www.pwts.com.au.

CEO and Young Professionals Breakfast

The Institute of Public Administration Australia (IPAA) NSW will once again host the highly successful CEO and Young Professionals Breakfast this May. The Breakfast provides an excellent avenue for the development of young people in their organisation. Almost 700 people attended the event last year.

The 2014 Breakfast will be held from 7:00-9:30am on Friday 2 May at The Westin Sydney. The theme for this year's Breakfast is lessons and insights from elite sporting performance, and Gordon Bray, one of Australia's leading sports broadcasters, is the guest speaker.

FRNSW will host a table. There are limited positions available, please forward an expression of interest to your relevant Director asap. Directors will submit successful applications to the Office of the Commissioner by 18 April. To be eligible for this event, you must be aged 34 or under.

Guns and Hoses fundraiser at Anna Bay

The 17th Annual Guns and Hoses charity surfing event will be held at Anna Bay, Port Stephens on 13-14 May. Guns and Hoses raises funds for charities supporting emergency service personnel and also for the local

community of Anna Bay. All are welcome to attend and compete. Major prizes in this year's raffles include a surfboard, a week's accommodation at Boomerang Beach (thanks to a generous firefighter) and much more. Get your entries in ASAP as spots are filling fast. For more details, visit the [Facebook site](#)

INCIDENTS

5th Alarm factory fire at Chester Hill

At 2217hrs on Monday 24 March, crews were called to reports of a factory fire in Orchard Rd Chester Hill. On arrival, 55 Guildford initially called for a 3rd Alarm with 62 Bankstown arriving shortly after. Crews were confronted with a fire in a large multi-unit complex containing at least a dozen separate factory businesses. Fire had taken hold of two units in the centre of the complex, one a food manufacturer and the other, home renovation equipment. There were initial fears that the intense fire would spread in both directions to B and D exposures, and first responding crews and officers were instrumental in establishing some excellent defensive strategies that ultimately saved the adjoining exposures.

There was difficulty in isolating power to the entire complex, and together with several wall collapses and the possibility of a fuel storage area, crews were directed to remain outside the structure with numerous lines for several hours to contain the blaze. Two aerials were also successfully deployed to contain the fire. The 5th Alarm response was required to supply water to the aerials and provide sufficient staff for the various logistic operations of the incident.

The Stop message was finally transmitted at 0238hrs advising that the two units where the fire originated were totally destroyed by the fire, and units on either side damaged by smoke heat and water. No injuries were reported and the cause of the fire is currently under investigation. Well done to all responding crews for preventing fire spread throughout the entire massive complex.

Crews from 55 Guildford, 62 Bankstown, 73 Fairfield, 30 Lidcombe, 72 Merrylands, 47 Revesby, 49 Cabramatta, 85 Chester Hill, 27 Parramatta, 8 Liverpool, 19 Silverwater, 52 Campsie, 97 Huntingwood, 7 Horningsea Park, 21 Kogarah, 17 Drummoyne, 28 Marrickville, 58 Beecroft, ICVA Sydney Communications, DC Inner West, DC Parramatta, DC City and IMT Bravo were initially responded to the incident.

Water buffalo loose, just another day for 5 Newtown

"C" Platoon from 5 Newtown couldn't believe their eyes when returning from an AFA on the morning of Tuesday last week. While waiting at lights to turn into Missenden Rd at Camperdown, they observed two water buffalo, complete with horns, at full trot side by side turning off King Street into Missenden Road. Station Officer Black described how the beasts made a perfect turn, remaining within their turn lane on a green arrow. Despite the perfection of their turn, the Newtown crew quickly realised that something wasn't quite right – you don't often see water buffalo in Newtown - and notified FireComms that they were in hot pursuit.

Given that lassoing moving beasts was not a skill taught at the Training College, the Newtown crew quickly used their initiative and deployed a ladder and the Stokes Litter as moveable barricades and gingerly herded the buffalo into the front yard of a house in Carillon Avenue. One of the buffalo attempted to charge the crew but the firefighters stood their ground, just like at the OK Corral. The crew kept the animals penned in until the arrival of wranglers from the film shoot location from where the animals had escaped. Apparently the buffalo had wandered some 2.5 km along King Street through Newtown, one of Sydney's busiest streets, before being successfully contained by FRNSW, and rounded up and coaxed by handlers into a waiting trailer. The incident attracted enormous media attention around the world with the Newtown Fire Station message board featuring in a global Tweet frenzy. The sign proudly read *"Give me a home where the buffalo roam!"* When asked on national television whether he knew what the advertisement being filmed was about, Station Officer Black said, "We're not sure. Maybe it was for Red Bull." .

Storm season not over yet

I am sure that all firefighters across the State are well aware of the realities of the storm season. Crews have been kept busy these last two weeks with multiple large storm fronts sweeping across the Metropolitan, Wollongong, Central Coast and Blue Mountains areas on Monday 24 and Sunday 30 March. Apart from the expected upsurge in AFA callouts, crews were called to multiple flooding events, trees down, people trapped in vehicles and small electrical fires. Sadly, one man lost his life after attempting to clear a blocked drain at a waste disposal facility at Lucas Heights after a large deluge on Monday 24 March.

During the evening of Sunday 30 March, storms caused major flooding, particularly across the Blue Mountains area. 361 Leura were called to an AFA at the Katoomba Sports and Aquatic Centre only to discover that the internal ceilings were collapsing throughout the complex. Just one minute later, 343 Katoomba were called to an AFA at the Blue Mountains Hospital in Katoomba and were confronted with multiple roof failures and collapsing ceilings inside a major hospital complex. Ten patients were relocated without injury. Congratulations to all the Katoomba and Leura crews who worked throughout the night with SES crews to successfully render the areas safe. Yesterday the Premier, Barry O'Farrell saw me in the street and came over to thank me for the efforts of crews in the Blue Mountains. Although the storm season officially ended 31 March, I remind everyone that the massive Sydney hailstorm, one of Australia's most costly natural disasters with damages in excess of \$1.5 billion, occurred in the month of April in 1999. Further storm activity is certainly a possibility in the weeks ahead.

ASK THE COMMISSIONER

Q. Is it true, that the NRMA intends to offer a service to members of Emergency Home Assist which will include a response to GAS LEAKS?

If so, what contact has been made from the NRMA to Fire & Rescue N.S.W (FRNSW) in respect to exactly what triggers their phone operators to pass information to FRNSW?

A. Thanks for the heads up in relation to this press release; I will be writing to the NRMA to offer some suggestions to ensure the safety of householders and NRMA workers but also to point out that residents should dial 000 and call the fire service immediately.

Q. With the success of 31 Stations CAFS Pumper at the Victorian Open Cut Coal Mine Fire, are we looking to expand our CAFS capabilities within metro and regional operations, given the proven effectiveness of CAFS over all other extinguishing mediums

A. Yes. FRNSW will soon take delivery of 5 new Class 1 tankers with CAFS. As part of a new foam strategy, we are also looking at strategically locating Class 3 CAFS pumps (yet to be ordered) initially in metropolitan areas. CAFS is now a proven technology.

Q. With the Permanent Award up for renewal what is yours & the minister/governments position in offering a 2.5% wages rise with no adjustments to the conditions contained in the current Award? The NSW Public Sector Wages Policy states this is possible & the PSA Award was recently rolled over in this manner. Is this something that would be acceptable to you & the government?

A. The matter is before the Industrial Relations Commission and as such I am unable to directly answer this query. However I will say that the rumours about reduced entitlements and wholesale changes to the Award are not true. As has been the case with the Retained Award, I believe that the FBEU and FRNSW have shown the ability to work cooperatively on a mutually beneficial outcome that meets Government Wages Policy. I also believe this is possible with the permanent Award.

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