

Wednesday 19 March 2014 - Number 583

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Current National Security Alert Level: Medium

GENERAL

New Class B foam has arrived

FRNSW is changing from Niagara Class B foam concentrate to RF3x6 Class B foam concentrate, which is more environmentally friendly and operationally effective. RF3x6 has been extensively evaluated by FRNSW on a range of fuels and fires. These included both small and large-scale fires involving avgas, ethanol, transformer oil and avtur. It has also been independently certified to European, oil industry and International Civil Aviation Organisation standards.

The change to RF3x6 will be managed by our Fleet section. Metropolitan stations will change over as appliances are serviced. Regional stations and outlying Metropolitan stations (Wollongong, Newcastle and the Central Coast) will begin receiving deliveries of RF3x6 this week. Fleet staff will visit stations and perform the changeover. In general, all Class 2 and Class 3 appliances will now carry the new foam in their main foam tank. Class 2 appliances with two foam tanks will carry both Class A and the new foam. For more information, read the [Intranet story](#).

SOPP pre-entry test update

Since my last message on 22 January regarding changes to the Station Officers' Promotion Program (SOPP), we have received many enquiries from people keen to learn more about the entry requirements test and what it may look like this year. I am very pleased by this response as it highlights the keen interest in the modernization of the IPP with a more merit-based selection process.

Currently we are scoping a proposed pre-entry test that meets the requirements of the award, and consultation with the FBEU is a critical part of this. We hope to have this work finalised in the next few weeks. Once completed, discussions will take place with the FBEU followed by workshops and consultation with Inspectors, Station Officers and Senior Firefighters to validate the proposed format and ensure that it is more reflective of the skills and experience required to carry out the role of a Station Officer.

If you have any queries, please email SOPPenquiries@fire.nsw.gov.au

Radio program update

As part of routine maintenance, all FRNSW radios, both portable and vehicle-mounted, will shortly be reprogrammed. This will involve a transition period when some radios are on the new program while others are still on the old program. However, each station will have all their radios reprogrammed on the same day to avoid confusion.

The new program introduces a number of new features and will also require renaming of radio talk groups. It is important that firefighters familiarise themselves with these changes, so that they are fully aware of the new radio channels on which they will be operating, both to talk to FireComms as well as at an incident.

All metropolitan stations and officers will change over during April to June, while all regional stations and officers will change over during June to September. An intranet story will soon be available.

Update on alcohol and other drug testing

This month marks the completion of the first three months of our Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) testing program, as part of the new policy and procedure which commenced last year. As you are aware, FRNSW engaged the services of external testing provider DASA to carry out testing. DASA has carried out 180 random AOD tests on permanent firefighters, retained firefighters and administrative employees across each of our metropolitan and regional commands and corporate offices. I am pleased to report that, on the whole, testing has been well received by employees.

Since testing commenced, there has been one non-negative result (relating to pharmacy medication) and no positive alcohol tests by firefighters. Most Duty Commanders have now received the hand-held alcohol breath testing devices which will be used for testing at an incident ground only.

Questions have been raised at some stations concerning the authority of testers to enter FRNSW premises. Consequently, all DASA testers have now been issued with FRNSW Access Authority cards which authorise entry for drug and alcohol testing purposes. In addition to displaying their DASA name badge, testers will also present this card upon arrival at the Station.

Generic data for the first three months of testing is now available on the Alcohol and Other Drugs intranet toolkit. Published data will not include any information concerning individual employees. For more information regarding current testing data, the new Access Authority Card and Frequently Asked Questions, visit the [Alcohol and Other Drugs intranet pages](#).

I would like to thank all FRNSW staff for their positive acceptance of the AOD testing and for continuing to support a safe and responsible workplace. I am not at all surprised by the positive results, as this is precisely what we all expected.

Victorian Fire Update

Since the Victorian Government requested our assistance FRNSW has deployed 980 firefighters to Victoria. The safety of firefighters remains our highest priority. We have been involved in reviewing the safety measures developed by the CFA, and have visited various sites to confirm their effectiveness. Firefighters working at the mine itself have been carefully monitored and strict PPE, hygiene and crew rotation protocols have been put in place. If you have any health or welfare concerns, contact your Duty Commander, submit a NIENM form or contact Health & Safety on 9265 2800.

Inspirational talk for International Women's Day

On Monday 10 March, around 100 FRNSW personnel celebrated International Women's Day by attending an address at City of Sydney Fire Station by Ms Maha Abdo OAM, Executive Officer of the United Muslim Women Association. Ms Abdo is a recipient of the Medal of the Order of Australia for her service to Western Sydney's Muslim community, particularly in the area of Muslim women's leadership training, social justice and inter-faith dialogue. Last year she was also awarded the inaugural Premier's Multicultural Community Medal which honours champions of NSW's multicultural community.

Ms Abdo had some gentle advice for FRNSW on how we can engage more successfully with diverse cultural and religious groups in the community. Having helped the NSW Police Force to change the way they engage with people, especially women in culturally and linguistically diverse communities, she said that "it would be useful for a service like FRNSW to learn an even more open, inclusive way of engaging with people of different cultures."

She said the best way to promote our service is to have a human touch. We need to build trust, by allowing people to see us as a part of their community at all times, not just when there is an emergency. For more information, read the [Intranet story](#).

Public Service Commissioner announces face-to-face briefings regarding the Government Sector Employment (GSE) Act

As outlined in my email last week, Graeme Head, the Public Service Commissioner has organised face-to-face briefings to explain the Government Sector Employment (GSE) Act. These briefings are scheduled from 17 March – 11 April in metropolitan and regional locations. I encourage all staff to avail yourself of the opportunity to attend an information session and to register soon as sessions are filling up quickly ([click here to register](#)). For those unable to attend, a link to a recorded session will be available on the PSC website at a later date. The GSE Act applies to all staff; Firefighters, Administration and Trade, and Senior Executive Staff. As mentioned last week there are two important areas of reform that will directly influence all of us; 1) Changes to

the executive structure of the Public Service; and 2) Changes to employment arrangements and management practices which will apply more generally to non-executive employees of the Public Sector. Our initial focus has been to look at what we need to do around four main streams of work;

- 1) Capability Framework
- 2) Recruitment Practices
- 3) Performance Management
- 4) Senior Officer and Executive Structure.

As further details are known we will be engaging with you to get your input and feedback and provide information.

I wish to remind you that you can access the GSE Act, Regulation and Rules, along with other supporting information via the new [EmploymentPortal](#) – this is your online guide to NSW Government Sector Employment and the FRNSW [GSE pages](#).

If you have any feedback, questions or concerns I encourage you to email GSEAct@fire.nsw.gov.au

Newtown Fire Station celebrates its centenary

Last weekend I joined firefighters past and present, local politicians and members of the community to celebrate 100 years of Newtown Fire Station. The first Newtown Fire Brigade was established under the leadership of Charles Lane in 1875, comprising around 25 volunteer firefighters. The original station was located in 'Watson's Paddock' next to the railway station and moved three times before the current fire station was built in Australia Street in January 1914. There, it housed eight full-time firefighters, a motorised pumper, a horse and a horse-drawn extension ladder. It was wonderful to be part of the centenary celebration, which was a historic day for FRNSW and the community of Newtown.

Get ready for Earth Hour 2014

At 8.30pm on Saturday 29 March, people throughout Australia and around the world will turn off their lights for one hour, sending a powerful global message: it is possible to take personal action on climate change. FRNSW was an original supporter of Earth Hour and this year I again ask all staff to turn off non-essential lighting and electrical equipment such as computers, monitors, copiers and TVs. Of course, please ensure that any equipment and lighting required for emergency response and safety remain on. You are also encouraged to participate in Earth Hour while at home.

This event creates awareness that electricity consumption is the largest contributor to global carbon emissions and demonstrates that small actions by individuals can make a big difference. It's a time for us to not only to turn off lights, but also to look at all our behaviors – both in the fire station and at home – in terms of recycling, conserving energy and water, and switching to renewable energy. Please visit www.earthhour.org.au for practical suggestions on how you can help address global climate change.

Cricket match raises funds for Salvos Bushfire Appeal

On Wednesday last week, players from the FRNSW Cricket Club battled valiantly against the Melbourne Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) Cricket Club in a 40-over match to raise money for the Salvation Army's Bushfire Relief Appeal. The game took place at Birchgrove Oval, with Channel 9's *Today Show* on hand to record the event and pay tribute to the dedicated work of our firefighters, particularly in relation to the October bushfires and the more recent Victorian deployment. Although FRNSW didn't win this time, our profession's reputation was greatly enhanced and interaction between the two fire services was further enhanced.

'400 in 4' charity bike ride to begin

The 2014 '400 in 4' charity bike ride is fast approaching with participating cyclists, most of whom are FRNSW firefighters, heading off from Wagga Wagga on Tuesday 25 March. They will spend the next four days riding all the way to The Children's Hospital at Westmead. Along the way, they will raise money for the hospital's Burns Unit and will visit schools and local communities to promote fire safety and awareness (especially the 'Change your clock, change your smoke alarm battery' and 'Winter fire safety' campaigns). All the riders are selling tickets in a giant raffle, which will be drawn at the hospital on Friday 28 March, so please contact any members of the group for the chance to win some fantastic prizes. A full list of participants are on the website, www.400in4.org. You can also visit the Facebook page, www.facebook.com/fire400in4, and click 'Like' to keep up with the event.

Stephen Richardson Memorial Golf Day

I encourage golfers to register for the annual Stephen Richardson Memorial Golf Day, which will be held at Camden Lakeside Country Club on Thursday 3 July. Registration is \$120 per person and includes 18 holes of golf with a motorized cart, breakfast and four on-course drinks, on-course sandwiches and a buffet seafood lunch. There will also be a raffle and memorabilia will be auctioned to raise money for the Westfield Children's Hospital Burns Unit. The event has been held for a number of years and was established as a tribute to the late Station Officer Stephen Richardson, who died in a road accident while responding to an emergency in 2006. If you are interested in playing, please contact SO Jim Luskan (88D) on 0405 356 823 or SO Bill Spek (8B) on 0404 462 743.

INCIDENTS

7th Alarm fire at Barangaroo halts Sydney CBD traffic

Sydney was brought to a standstill last Wednesday when fire took hold of an underground carpark under construction at the Barangaroo building site in Hickson Rd The Rocks, and threatened to bring down a 60-metre construction crane.

The first of numerous 000 calls came in at 1400hrs with 3 The Rocks arriving just two minutes later and sending the first Red message for assistance. Large volumes of smoke were issuing from two levels below ground level as the fire took hold of timber formwork which was coated in laminates. Site managers informed Police that all workers had been successfully evacuated from the site without injury. Temperature readings from the two level basement area were in excess of 1000 degrees celsius, preventing any chance of an internal offensive attack. Directly above the basement area was a large construction crane which was subject to direct flame impingement around its base. Engineers from Lend Lease declared the crane was at risk of collapse and a 100-metre exclusion zone was immediately established. This resulted in evacuation of over 2,000 people from the adjoining KPMG building and Sussex Hotel, and closing of the Western Distributor to all traffic, causing peak hour chaos.

A 7th Alarm response was required to enable relay pumping from adjoining water mains and also supply sufficient crews to enable crew rotations during the protracted incident. The Shirley Smith firefighting tug also provided water to the relay. A defensive strategy was initiated with three fixed monitors deployed to deluge around the base of the crane in an effort to prevent further flame impingement and subsequent collapse. It wasn't until around 1800hrs that basement temperatures dropped to around 40 degrees, allowing an offensive attack into the basement area in an attempt to contain the blaze.

Crews in SCBA rotated every 15 minutes and worked for several hours to bring the basement fire under control, finally enabling engineers to move into the basement area and assess the integrity of the crane. At around 2300hrs, both the site engineers and the Public Works engineer declared that the firefighting strategies had successfully protected the base of the crane and there was no further risk of collapse. Just prior to midnight, the response was scaled back to a 3rd Alarm as the adjoining Western Distributor motorway was re-opened to traffic. Firefighting operations continued throughout the night and next day to extinguish large amounts of burning timbers and other construction materials.

The incident attracted enormous media attention both here and overseas given the high profile of the construction site and the resulting city gridlock caused by major road closures leading onto the Sydney Harbour Bridge. I want to congratulate all responding crews and the Incident Management Team who, despite the threat of the crane collapsing, worked in difficult circumstances to successfully prevent what could have been a major disaster to the city's infrastructure. The Coroner's office has called for a full report into the circumstances and cause of the fire, and an extensive investigation by FRNSW together with the NSW Police Force, WorkCover NSW and Lend Lease management is currently underway.

Gas leak at Gunnedah service station

On the same day as the Barangaroo fire, Gunnedah firefighters also worked hard to contain an extensive LP gas leak which occurred around 1000hrs on the morning of Wednesday 12 March. Crews were called to the Woolworths Caltex service station on Tempest Street at Gunnedah when gas started leaking from a pipe in the "turret" area on a 17,000 litre fixed tank within the service station carpark.

Upon arrival 314 Gunnedah immediately declared an exclusion area around the site and deployed a water spray protection line in an attempt to diffuse the vapour cloud. Several major roads in Gunnedah were closed down, with 12 surrounding businesses and a number of homes evacuated for up to five hours during the protracted incident. 452 Tamworth Pumper and Hazmat, together with 399 Narrabri, also attended to assist with the delicate operation. Caltex gas engineers were called to the site and in what can only be described as

a "textbook operation", two firefighters in SCBA, under the protection of fog sprays, moved in to close down a major supply valve to the tank. Nitrogen was then used to purge the remainder of the pipes as another tanker was brought to the site to decant the contents from the leaking system. The area was finally declared safe at 1544hrs. Congratulations to 314 Gunnedah, 452 Tamworth and 399 Narrabri for quickly dealing with a potentially lethal situation.

ASK THE COMMISSIONER

Q. What happened to the proposal for Short Sleeved untucked Duty Wear Shirts? I work with someone who still wears the trial ones and they look professional but more importantly are very functional in the heat.

A. Following the trial it was determined (a) not to go to "untucked" shirts, and (b) to introduce short sleeved duty wear shirts. "Trial" shirts that are not in accordance with current standard issue should not be worn any more. I am informed that the contract for new duty wear shirts has been awarded and both short and long sleeved shirts will be available in ESCAT in the near future.

Q: The decision to only deploy Sydney based firefighters to Victoria is inequitable as it means that they have more earning potential (overtime) than Illawarra and Newcastle based firefighters. Will this unfair decision be reversed?

A: The answer to this may upset some people, however it is my policy to "call a spade a spade" wherever possible. The facts are that the average Illawarra and Newcastle firefighter earns significantly more in overtime, and takes far more sick leave, (perhaps because there is little or no TOLing in the Illawarra and Newcastle?) than the average Sydney based firefighter. There is therefore no equity issue in terms of pay and overtime. I recognise however that a more emotive issue is access to interstate experience, and the main motivator of firefighters; the desire to assist. It does unfortunately come down to money, but also to logistics. The Victorian Government is covering all "reasonable" costs involved in the deployment. Logistically and financially it makes far more sense to use Sydney based firefighters wherever possible because their travel distances are shorter to muster points and points of departure, and this assists with fatigue management. It also costs less in terms of kilometre payments which are required under the Award (and passed on to Victoria). Using Illawarra or Newcastle-based firefighters is significantly more expensive in terms of kilometre payments, and could involve an overnight stay on return to Sydney. Alternatively there could be fatigue issues late at night when driving home from the airport. It is true that some Central Coast firefighters have been used, mostly due to the need for people who are aerial pumper qualified. Regardless of the above, we are examining how we might include some people from further afield.

Commissioner's email: Commissioner@fire.nsw.gov.au

Sandra Garcia, EA to Commissioner: 9265 2930

Ask the Commissioner: OfficeOfTheCommissioner@fire.nsw.gov.au