

[Home](#) - [Directorates](#) - [Office of the Commissioner](#) - [Commish's Corner](#) - [CC-588](#)

## Wednesday 28 May 2014 - Number 588

28 May 2014

Current National Security Alert Level: Medium

### GENERAL

#### New Retained Award

On Friday 9 May, we announced finalisation of the Retained Award jointly with the FBEU, as mentioned in last Commish's Corner. Information on the Award is available online [here](#). During the last month Duty and Zone Commanders have been presenting information sessions about the new Retained Award. I am very pleased with the positive feedback that we have received so far.

The new Award starts to operate from this Friday 30 May, marking the end of an era and the start of modernisation of our Retained workforce practices. On 12 June, Retained staff will receive their first payment under the conditions of the new Award. If you have any enquiries, please contact your zone office or email [RetAwardSupport@fire.nsw.gov.au](mailto:RetAwardSupport@fire.nsw.gov.au).

#### FRNSW Leadership Summit

On Monday and Tuesday this week, I brought our Executive and Senior leadership teams together for a Leadership Summit at the Australian Institute of Police Management at Manly. The purpose of the Summit was to discuss how we will progress strategies to improve leadership (at all levels), engagement and innovation throughout FRNSW. Area Commanders gave presentations on leadership initiatives involving Captains, Station Officer and Duty Commanders, as well as a multi-agency leadership program that FRNSW is co-facilitating. You will hear more over coming weeks and months about initiatives that have been identified to help push decision making to the lowest effective level, to empower people, and give all uniformed and non uniformed employees more of a say in our future directions. Stay tuned....

#### 2014 Open Day a huge success

Thank you to everyone who helped to make our 2014 Open Day such a memorable event. With record crowds and over 70 more stations than last year participating, the day was enjoyable and educational for attendees and firefighters alike. I was impressed by the energy and ingenuity displayed by firefighters at many stations, who undertook activities as diverse as kitchen fire safety demonstrations, cutting up cars, sausage sizzles, tug o' war competitions and egg-and-spoon races for the children. To read about some of the activities undertaken by a few stations on the day, please click [here](#).

My additional thanks go to the team at the Community Engagement Unit (CEU) who worked with stations to organise the day throughout NSW, to the media team who did a great job promoting it, to the many Community Fire Unit volunteers who helped out at a number of stations, and to the volunteers from FRNSW's Principal Partner, GIO, who provided invaluable assistance to the firefighters running Open Day at 8 Station Liverpool and 93 Station Narellan.

I also encourage Station Officers and Captains who have received Open Day evaluation surveys to complete and return them to CEU as soon as possible.

#### Winter fire safety campaign launched

On the morning of Open Day, I was at 36 Station Crows Nest with NSW Rural Fire Service Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons and the local member for the North Shore, NSW Health Minister Jillian Skinner, to launch the Winter Fire Safety Campaign.

Winter and the associated shoulder periods of May and September are the busiest periods of the year when it comes to home fires in NSW. On average, FRNSW responds to 102 house fires a week during this period. That's why, each year, we undertake the Winter Fire Safety Campaign to reduce the number of fires, deaths and injuries, to increase traffic to the Home Fire Safety Audit website, and to increase public awareness of key fire risks and the key message – 'Don't leave fire safety to chance.'

You can get behind this year's campaign by communicating the Winter Fire Safety messages on your station's noticeboard. You can also use the [Winter Fire Safety station media release](#) to promote the campaign to local media outlets. If you are required to do a media interview about the campaign, you can use these [Winter Fire Safety talking points](#).

For more information about the Winter Fire Safety Campaign, please click [here](#).

## Promoting our values

A poster highlighting FRNSW's values of Respect, Integrity, Service and Courage has been mailed out to all fire stations and zone offices with the latest issue of Fire & Rescue News. I encourage you to put the poster up somewhere prominent to remind us all of the values that define and motivate us as an organisation. When recruiting, we are looking for people who not only demonstrate their capacity to meet the physical, technical and psychological demands of the job, but who also demonstrate they will actively model and promote these values.

Our Workplace Standards Branch is responsible for monitoring and dealing with breaches of these values. In one recent case, a new Recruit Firefighter used their mobile phone to take inappropriate and offensive photographs of their colleagues and to show inappropriate videos. As a result of this conduct, their employment with FRNSW was terminated. In a second case, a candidate offered employment as a Recruit Firefighter was found to have submitted fraudulent documents in support of their application. The candidate's offer of employment with FRNSW was immediately withdrawn and the matter has been referred to the NSW Police Force which is currently investigating – serious criminal charges could result.

These two cases emphasise the importance that FRNSW places on ensuring that the behaviour of all staff is consistent with our values, including those of respect and integrity. FRNSW will not tolerate bullying, sexual harassment or any other serious misconduct and I am thankful to those employees who demonstrated their integrity and showed the courage to come forward to report these serious matters.

## SANE mental health eLearning program

The SANE Mindful Employer eLearning program, which provides important information on mental illnesses (such as depression, anxiety, bipolar disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder), is now available for all Area and Zone Commanders, Station Commanders, Leading Firefighters, Captains or Deputy Captains. By completing three short online seminars – each of which takes only 20 minutes – learners gain the skills and confidence to identify and support someone who may be experiencing a mental health issue. In the past year this program has been available, through a special grant, to FRNSW officers and managers in regional areas, with extremely positive outcomes.

Twenty per cent of Australians will experience a mental health concern this year, with 45 per cent suffering some form of mental illness in their lifetime. Firefighters are not exempt from these statistics, particularly given some of the traumatic scenes we witness, so we all need to be able to recognise the signs when our colleagues, family members and friends may need our understanding and support. To read the recent Intranet story about the SANE Mindful Employer program, please [click here](#).

## Jim Hamilton presenting at Safe Cities Asia Conference

Acting Deputy Commissioner Jim Hamilton is in Singapore this week where he will be presenting at the Safe Cities Asia Conference which runs from 27 to 29 May. A/DC Hamilton will give a presentation on the challenges facing urban fire and rescue services in Australia. He will also participate in a panel discussing how to achieve smart disaster management and emergency response in megacities. The organisers of the conference paid for all travel and accommodation.

## Recruit graduation

On Thursday 22 May the Parliamentary Secretary for Police and Emergency Services Geoff Provest joined me at the 2<sup>nd</sup> permanent firefighter recruit graduation for 2014. Nineteen new firefighters joined our ranks and I welcome them all. Many of the recruits had a strong family connection to FRNSW, following a father, sister, or spouse into the job. New Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Stuart Ayres, sent his message congratulating the recruits saying, "I wish these men and women well in what is an important, but sometimes dangerous career, and I thank them for choosing a profession dedicated to protecting the lives and property of the people of NSW". I couldn't agree more.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> class for 2014 began yesterday, Tuesday 27 May, at the State Training College and I welcomed them to the service this morning as part of their induction.

## Latest issue of *Fire & Rescue News* published

The latest edition of *Fire & Rescue News* is 'hot off the press' and is currently being distributed to fire stations and other FRNSW workplaces. Major features include details of our recent deployment to Victoria, future directions for our rescue capability, and FRNSW programs for supporting mental health and wellbeing. There are also profiles of Huntingwood Fire Station, the Logistics Support Directorate and the Sports Association. Grab a copy and read up on some of the exciting things happening across our organisation. Download a copy here: [www.fire.nsw.gov.au/frnews/](http://www.fire.nsw.gov.au/frnews/)

## Communicating effectively with the media

The FRNSW *Media Pocket Guide* is a credit-card-sized booklet that provides key tips for Station Officers, Captains, Duty and Zone Commanders on how they can communicate effectively with journalists at incidents. Our FRNSW media team recommends that a copy of the Guide be kept in each appliance and at least one also be readily available at the station. With the Guide at hand, handling media interviews at incidents becomes much easier.

For more information on interacting with your local media, the May issue of *Fire & Rescue News* contains a detailed article on how to build a mutually beneficial relationship with media outlets on a day-to-day basis. For advice on promoting your station's activities in the media, contact our media staff on (02) 9265 2907, email [media@fire.nsw.gov.au](mailto:media@fire.nsw.gov.au) or ring the on-call Media Officer on 0418 181 000.

### Marrickville Fire Station Centenary

All staff are invited to join the firefighters at Marrickville Fire Station to help celebrate 100 years of service on Saturday 14 June. The official ceremony begins at 10:30am followed by a 'meet and greet' with firefighters past and present, a historical display of heritage vehicles and live entertainment from the FRNSW Band and Precision Marching Team. For all enquiries, contact Olivia Eagle on (02) 9265 2700 or email [metroeastadmin@fire.nsw.gov.au](mailto:metroeastadmin@fire.nsw.gov.au)

### Last chance to participate in the 'People Matter' Survey

This week is your last chance to participate in the People Matter Employee Survey, which enables you to provide your perceptions about how well the public sector values and principles are being applied in Fire & Rescue NSW, and to say what you think about important indicators such as your job satisfaction, well-being at work and commitment to the organisation.

The survey will close on Friday 30 May so please get involved and encourage your colleagues to participate as well. It only takes around 20 minutes to complete. To access the survey, go to <https://www.asr2.com/voiceproject/anon/241.aspx>.

### National Arboretum recognizes Australia's firefighters

Bushfires swept through the ACT in 2001 and again in 2003. The National Arboretum in Canberra, which features forests and gardens of rare, threatened and symbolic trees from Australia and around the world, has risen from the ashes of those fires. The people of Canberra are grateful for the contribution made by the nation's fire and rescue services, not only to the Arboretum and the ACT, but also to the Australian community in general. The ACT Chief Minister accepted a proposal for a Firefighters Forest at the National Arboretum in Canberra to be dedicated to firefighters. The Bunya pine tree, which has fire protection characteristics, was selected by the Arboretum to symbolise the courage and dedication shown by the nation's firefighters. Honour rolls dedicated to firefighters across Australia, including those from FRNSW, can be visited by clicking on [this link](#).

### National Reconciliation Week

Each year from 27 May to 3 June National Reconciliation Week celebrates and builds on the respectful relationships shared by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians. The week-long celebration is an ideal opportunity for all Australians to explore ways to join the national reconciliation effort and to enhance our national wellbeing.

All around Australia, National Reconciliation Week brings people together. It's a time to open our hearts, celebrate our diversity and get to know each other better. Framed by two significant anniversaries—the 1967 referendum and the 1992 Mabo decision—National Reconciliation Week reminds us that great achievements take courage and persistence.

In 2011 FRNSW launched its Reconciliation Plan and Statement of Commitment to Reconciliation. The Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) promotes inclusiveness which will help to strengthen our engagement with Aboriginal communities. We will continue to integrate the RAP into core business and provide support and governance to successful delivery outcomes. Further information can be obtained on our intranet or at <http://www.reconciliation.org.au/>.

## INCIDENTS

### Tuesday 13 May, 60 Avalon experiences "that sinking feeling"!

On Tuesday 13 May, 60 Avalon was called out in the early hours of the morning to assist residents at The Serpentine Road at Bilgola whose houses were being inundated as a result of a burst water main under the road surface.

The Serpentine is a well known landmark so named because it winds its way along a cliff face with many residences located above and below the roadway.

As 60 proceeded slowly along the roadway trying to locate house numbers they felt what was described as "hitting a pot hole" followed by a sudden dipping to one side of the appliance. Fortunately they were moving at a slow pace and were able to stop quickly and alight from the vehicle before it listed dramatically to a 45 degree angle as the road surface suddenly caved in under one side of the pumper. Tonnes of sub soil below the bitumen road surface had been washed away by the rapidly increasing water flow from the ruptured underground water main. The 14 tonne Varley Commander proved too much for the thin road surface to hold, and the vehicle became well and truly wedged in the sunken road surface.

The crew was able to escape safely and despite their vehicle listing heavily to one side, to their credit, after securing the vehicle to the best of their ability, immediately set about the important task of assisting numerous residents whose houses had become severely flooded.

Once Sydney Water emergency crews isolated the water main, the difficult task of retrieving the pumper began. There were very real fears that the soaked ground could subside further, causing the pumper to roll completely over and continue rolling onto houses located below the roadway level further down the cliff escarpment.

It was not possible to drag the pumper from the hole as complications included another water main, gas main, communication cabling and electrical mains all of which could have been damaged if great care was not taken.

The vehicle was initially secured with a heavy tow line from the heavy tow vehicle from Logistics Support. USAR and heavy rescue crews attached three Tirfor winches to the base of three large trees adjacent to the roadway and further secured the vehicle to prevent it toppling down the steep embankment. A large heavy duty crane was called to lift the rear of the vehicle clear of the sink hole as the Tirfor winches were operated simultaneously to pull the vehicle sideways onto firmer ground. The delicate operation went like clockwork under the watchful eye of an enormous media pack assembled throughout the entire day long retrieval operation.

The opportunity was taken to invite the many attending media to inspect our Rescue vehicles and equipment as they were given first hand lessons in our Rescue and USAR capabilities for structural collapse and overseas deployments.

I wish to congratulate all involved throughout the incident and in particular, the members of 60 Avalon, who despite narrowly escaping a potentially disastrous situation, put their own concerns aside and immediately set about the important task of providing assistance to many distraught residents whose own homes were heavily impacted by the ruptured water main.

### A busy time for gas leaks across the state

Since my last Commissioner's Corner, Brigades across the state have had a busy time responding to over 85 gas leak incidents. These incidents varied from cars driving into house meters, leaks under footpaths, gas appliances leaking, LP gas cylinder leaks, large scale street closures at East Maitland, evacuation of the Overseas Passenger Terminal at Circular Quay and a 2nd Alarm response to a large gas main fire at Lane Cove threatening surrounding buildings.

Of particular note is that some of these gas leak incidents involved schools, including Ingleburn Public School, Molong Central School, Mt View Early Childhood Centre, St Lawrence's School at Dubbo, Katoomba High School, Boggabilla Central School, the Goodstart Preschool at Thornton, a gas leak affecting two classrooms at Boggabri Public School and the "lock down" of the entire Lane Cove Public School due to the nearby gas main fire.

In each case students and staff needed to be evacuated from rooms and moved to safe areas while fire crews conducted searches and rendered the areas safe. At one school 15 students and staff were assessed by ambulance crews due to concerns of gas exposure, however none were diagnosed as suffering any major or long term affects.

With the onset of cooler weather we anticipate further call outs as the community makes more use of gas heating and cooking appliances. I therefore urge all crews across the state to take any opportunities available to spread safety advice regarding the use of gas appliances and the need to check all joints and connections wherever possible. The recent gas leak incidents involving schools also highlighted the need for schools to have well rehearsed evacuation and/or lock down procedures in place. If you are planning any school visits in the near future, I urge you to discuss evacuation procedures with staff and if possible offer to assist schools in carrying out evacuation exercises in preparation for the winter months ahead.

## ASK THE COMMISSIONER

**Q.** A 'Commissioner's Award' of some form is granted to both an outstanding Recruit from each graduating recruit class and the top ranked graduating Inspector of an IPP. Is there a reason that the Leading Firefighter who achieves the highest result at the completion of the SOPP is not recognised in such a way?

Given that the promotional system, and the opportunity to successfully achieve the rank of Inspector, has now become merit based it would be a notable addition to an individual's portfolio.

**A.** Thanks – good point. In future there will also be an award for the top SOPP graduate in each class.

**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)

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

To submit a story of your own, contact **Internal Comms**

<http://intranet/directorates/office-of-the-commissioner/commishs-corner/cc-588>