

From The Chief Officer.....



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Planned Pager Replacement:

As you may be aware, an upgrade of the paging network was agreed to by the State Government following a review of pager messaging during the 2009 fires.

This, in addition to the fact that the Infostream X3 pager is no longer being manufactured, meant that CFA needed to find a new pager that could take full advantage of the network upgrade. Only three pagers met the technical criteria of increased sensitivity; longer battery life; easily readable screen; auto time setting; dynamic incident capcodes; over the air programmable; robust screen and message storage.

The Unication Alpha Legend, Infostream X5 and Unication E5 pager were tested over three months in late 2012 for sensitivity, shock resistance, vibration, free fall dropping and bumping, screen integrity and holster ruggedness.

Following this trial, the Unication Alpha Legend pager was selected as the only pager that met all requirements. About 2000 of these pagers were then distributed across 19 CFA districts seeking further feedback about functionality.

A set of instructions for use was provided for the trial but our intention is to include comprehensive training for the final rollout. The lack of user training before the trial meant that some features already on the pager were overlooked. Back lighting rather than side lighting, for example, improves readability. The pager does have a silent-all function.

Some key issues identified by members during testing have resulted in modifications that will delay the rollout now due to start in April and finish by July.

Modifications include the removal of manual time setting; a single press button acknowledgement to stop the beeping, and the ability to select the next message without scrolling through the previous message.

However, some things cannot be modified. We often spend significant amounts of money repairing the broken screens of our current pagers. The Unication Alpha Legend screen size makes it the toughest pager screen on the market but it does mean members will have to scroll through the messages. The small and large font sizes are the same as those on our current X3 pagers, but there is no medium font available.

The visual alert feature is being investigated with concerns that pager integrity will be compromised if the current case is altered.

Finally, some areas that currently have marginal or no coverage reported slight improvements, but no pager can provide total statewide coverage.

The Unication Alpha Legend pager is the one and only pager being rolled out. These pagers are used by emergency services both within Australia and around the world. Each district has been consulted about the most appropriate time to begin local rollout with the program flexible enough to fit around any late fire season activity.

"In preparing for a crisis have a sense for the "lay of the land" because you don't have time to get it when the crisis arrives."

- Paul 't Hart