

From The Chief Officer.....



Number 103

"Our mission is to protect lives and property"

13th January 2014

Maude Fire:

I'd like to commend CFA crews and DEPI firefighters for their great work throughout the fire in Maude on Wednesday 7 January. I also thank the local communities of She Oaks and Steiglitz for their cooperation. Six years ago, almost to the day, a fire went through the same area and claimed one residence. It is a testament to the crews and incident management team that no lives or properties were lost. It was clear the local communities were listening to the warnings and advice messages and took appropriate action. This is reassuring with this week's forecast hot weather. Shortly after the fire, the warning and advice messages issued came under scrutiny. It is important to reassure CFA members that there were no errors in the messages. The information provided was timely, accurate, tailored and issued in accordance with current guidelines. The Emergency Warning was correctly issued for two localities directly in the path of the fire. Advice messages were issued for other settlements that were distant from, but within visibility of the fire. However we have noted feedback that the location of fires on the message template could be made clearer. As a result updates have been made to all templates within One Source One Message (OSOM). These changes see the inclusion of "Issued For" and the alteration of pre-existing "Location" to "Fire Origin". The intent of these changes is to more clearly communicate information that is already being included in the warnings, with greater emphasis on the areas being warned. This makes it easier for the media and the community to quickly identify the communities at risk. Emergency Services continue to test and evaluate our warnings and advice messages as we listen to feedback from the community and we continuously strive to improve.

75th Anniversary of Black Friday:

Today, the 13th of January, we acknowledge and remember the 75th anniversary of Black Friday in 1939. The 1939 bushfires burnt almost 2,000,000 hectares, destroyed 3,700 buildings, including 1,300 homes, and killed 71 people. The following is an extract from Judge Leonard Stretton's 1939 Royal Commission Report:

"These fires were lit by the hand of man. Seventy-one lives were lost. Sixty-nine mills were burned. Millions of acres of fine forest, of almost incalculable value, were destroyed or badly damaged. Townships were obliterated in a few minutes. Mills, houses, bridges, tramways, machinery, were burned to the ground; men, cattle, horses, sheep, were devoured by the fires or asphyxiated by the scorching debilitated air.

Generally, the numerous fires which during December, in many parts of Victoria, had been burning separately, as they do in any summer, either 'under control' as it is falsely and dangerously called, or entirely untended, reached the climax of their intensity and joined forces in a devastating confluence of flame on Friday, the 13th of January.

On that day it appeared that the whole State was alight. At midday, in many places, it was dark as night. Men carrying hurricane lamps, worked to make safe their families and belongings. Travellers on the highways were trapped by fires or blazing fallen trees, and perished."

Victoria is no stranger to extreme temperatures and high risk bushfire conditions, and it seems 75 years on, those weather patterns continue.

Heatwave:

Victoria is bracing for a heatwave this week, with temperatures reaching 38-44°C every day till Saturday. Fire Danger Ratings will vary from Very High to Severe across the State. Friday will be the day of highest fire danger due to strong winds and a wind change expected to move across the state. I urge you all to look out for each other. Keep well hydrated on the fireground. Always remember to have a good breakfast. Come home safe!

"Efforts and courage are not enough, without purpose and direction"

- John F Kennedy