

From The Chief Officer.....



Number 107

"Our mission is to protect lives and property"

20th February 2014

Police and Emergency Services Minister – member recognition

Minister Wells has praised the dedication, courage and tireless efforts of CFA's members. The Minister has recently been to the Kilmore Divisional Communications Centre and the Wallan staging area as well as to regular briefings at the State Control Centre, which he indicated have become more cohesive and co-ordinated in the years since Black Saturday. Feedback to the Minister from affected communities continues to be highly complementary and appreciative of members' efforts. The Minister is keen for me to pass on to everyone involved both on the frontline and in support roles, that he is immensely proud of the great job done by all in serving Victorians.

Sunday 9 February 2014

Sunday the 9 February was predicted to be a bad day and proved to be the most significant fire activity day since 2009. Hot and windy conditions over the eastern two thirds of the State caused new fire starts on Melbourne's urban fringes and increased fire spread in Gippsland. Statewide since the 8 February there have been 45 houses confirmed destroyed, a large number damaged and a substantial loss of livestock, fencing and pasture exacerbating the agricultural and farming impact of the fires. All reports and evidence supports that interoperability, processes, systems, warnings and information and command and control arrangements worked well, supporting a marked improvement in the way agencies service communities and that the Victoria Bushfire Royal Commission recommendations have been both actioned and embedded. In the context of history, the 2013–14 season is consistent with Victoria's worst grass fire seasons. Four fires of significance remain not yet under control. Damaging fires in the west and central areas of the state still also remain a possibility. Individuals in at risk areas need to continue to be prepared, vigilant to changing conditions, heed advice and act on warnings.

Latrobe Valley Coal Mine Fires – Hazmat Incident

A large number of grassfires started around Morwell on the 9 February. As a result, fires impacted a range of infrastructure, including the Hazelwood and Yallourn Power Stations. Both are brown-coal-fuelled base-load power stations. Fire remains in the area around Morwell, including inside the Hazelwood Power Station and in proximity to the Yallourn Power Station.

There are complex health and safety issues specific to the environment and the burning coal is emitting elevated levels of carbon monoxide. Exposure to high levels of carbon monoxide carries significant health impacts. A range of strategies have been developed to manage the health, safety and welfare of personnel on site, ensure consistent, tailored and specific messaging to the community and examine containment and suppression options available.

The safety of our people is a fundamental statutory obligation that governs the way we operate, as a result a stringent health monitoring process overseen by health professionals is in place and will be for the duration of the incident. It is mandatory that all emergency services personnel adhere to the health monitoring process, on arrival, during and at shift completion as well as have a developed understanding of the symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning and present for treatment immediately should they develop symptoms. The health of the local community exposed to the lingering smoke is also key with community engagement continuing. I thank everyone that has been involved for their efforts in what continue to be challenging circumstances. Our strategies and processes will continue to be revisited and refined to ensure the best possible outcome. The collaborative approach and support from partner agencies remains invaluable. *[An additional update accompanies this FTCO]*

"There is always safety in valour"

- Ralph Waldo Emerson (Poet)