



SASSAFRAS-FERNY CREEK FIRE BRIGADE

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Brigade backs refuge pilot

A decision to pilot a community fire refuge at the Ferny Creek Primary School will see the brigade play a key role in testing the State's new refuges policy.

The pilot site at Ferny Creek is one of three in the Yarra Ranges.

Sassafras-Ferny Creek brigade captain John Schauble said the decision to conduct the pilot at Ferny Creek would present some additional challenges to the brigade but it was committed to working towards a good outcome for the community.

"The pilot is less about buildings and more about testing procedures and the human behavioural factors that will determine whether community shelter is right for a community like ours," he said.

"It hinges on the community understanding that a community fire refuge is a last resort option, when all other plans have failed," he said.

"The presence of a refuge is not an excuse to avoid preparing for bushfire."

"Going to a community fire refuge will only ever be a final option, not part of your main plan," Mr Schauble said.

"By the time you'd resort to going to a refuge during a fire, things have already gone pear shaped. There is an obvious danger in simply getting there when fire is in the local landscape," he added.

Local residents have a range of survival options during bushfires. These include leaving early, staying to defend their homes and installing an accredited private shelter.

"It's a bit of a no-brainer around here really. On his risk days, the safest option is to leave early and the spend the day off the mountain."

One of the issues in relation to community shelter in the hills is capacity. "It will simply never be possible to provide enough public refuges or Neighbourhood Safer Places in appropriate locations a cross the Dandenongs to cater for all residents and visitors," Mr Schauble said.

The provision of community fire refuges is a direct response to recommendations of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission.

During those proceedings, Counsel Assisting the commission Rachel Doyle referred to the need for the “provision of refuges, even for the ill-prepared, the lazy or the stupid ... because there is a need to protect all lives”.

“I’m sure none of our residents fit that that description when it comes to bushfire preparedness,” Mr Schauble said.

“I’m also hoping none ever needs to resort to using a community fire refuge. The fact is that leaving early on days of severe fire danger is a fail-safe way to ensure the safety of your family,” he added.

The refuge will only be activated in the event of a significant fire threatening the community.

Mr Schauble said the brigade would work closely with the State Government, the CFA, Yarra Ranges Council and the school to ensure that appropriate practices procedures and guidelines around the use of the refuge were developed.

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