



FIREBREAK

Sassafras-Ferny Creek Fire Brigade

No.29, Winter 2006

House fires ... make a plan and live

IN our community there is, quite rightly, a lot of focus on bushfires. But, tragically, more people die in house fires in Victoria *every year* than are killed by bushfire in an average decade.

Every household should have a home fire escape plan, but research shows that most do not.

The "it won't happen to me" attitude can lead to tragedy — a fire in the home can happen to anyone.

Many people over-estimate the time they will have to escape a fire.

A working smoke alarm can give you an early warning of a fire in the house, especially at night when people are asleep.

In a fire, smoke can fill a house in a matter of minutes:

- You may have no idea where the fire is
- Visibility will be almost non-existent
- The smoke will make breathing very difficult
- At night, people will be half-asleep and disoriented

These factors can easily lead to panic, and there can be tragic results.

Families who are well prepared for a house fire are more likely to escape their homes safely.

Making a Home Fire Escape Plan

- Draw a floor plan of your home making sure to mark in at least two ways out (including windows) of every room.
- Decide on the best escape routes. If your home has a second storey, consider how you will escape from upstairs windows. Many hardware stores sell chain

ladders for this purpose.

- If you have window locks fitted, make sure keys are accessible should they be required
- If children's bedrooms are located at the other end of the house, consider how you will be able to reach them if access is blocked by fire. Remember, children may not wake up to the sound of a smoke alarm operating
- If your household includes members who are elderly or disabled or have limited mobility, you will need to make special arrangements in your plan
- Make sure all members of the household know how to crawl low in smoke where the air is cooler and clearer, and that doors need to be tested for heat, with the back of the hand, before opening them
- Include an outside meeting place, such as a letterbox, so that all members of the household know where to meet
- Practise your plan at least twice a year so that everyone knows what to do

If there is a fire in your home ...

- Get out of the house quickly and ***stay out***
- Crawl low in smoke to assist breathing
- If you catch on fire — **STOP, DROP and ROLL** to smother the flames
- Ring 000 from a neighbour's home
- ***Never*** go back into a burning house

Source: CFA Community Safety Directorate, www.cfa.vic.gov.au

A long, hot summer of fire ...

While it was quiet on the local fire front, brigade personnel and vehicles were busy with several of the bushfires that broke out elsewhere in Victoria over summer. In a reflection of their skills and experience, members were involved in a range of duties, from fighting the fires to command and control roles at local, regional and headquarters levels.

Brigade personnel and vehicles were engaged at fires in the Kinglake, Yea and Moondarra (Gippsland) areas in particular. At the same time, there was an obvious need to secure an adequate and effective level of fire cover in own brigade area and this was maintained at all times.

House numbers, please!

During a recent training exercise, brigade members experienced some difficulty in finding a number of street addresses in the local area. In an emergency, being able to find your home quickly could become a "life and death" issue. Make sure your house is readily identifiable to emergency service vehicles, with a clear and obvious number that can be easily seen from the roadside. Obviously, the easier it is to access your property, the less delay there will be during an emergency, so think about whether a truck can get onto your property if necessary. Also, if you have a fire hydrant on the nature strip outside your property, please don't disguise it! They might not be the prettiest of fixtures, but when we need to use one the last thing we need is to fight through a jungle of shrubbery or pile of garden rubbish just to find it!

IN CASE OF FIRE: DIAL 000

Burning off? Consider the neighbours ...

Burning off garden refuse over autumn and winter is a way of dealing with a potential problem during the bushfire period. Piles of flammable fine fuels around your property can, of course, create real problems down the track. But burning refuse is only one way of dealing with garden waste. Shredding, composting, mulching and using the council's green waste services are other alternatives — and arguably better for the environment.

While it may be necessary to burn off some of your problem materials, such as noxious weeds, it may be that some other material can be given a different treatment. Under no circumstances be tempted to dump garden refuse on public land — serious penalties apply and such thoughtless action ruins the environment for everyone.

Remember to consider the neighbours when burning off. Smoke can be a significant public nuisance. In order to avoid billowing plumes, only burn material that has properly dried out. Green waste will always give off a lot of smoke.

Be aware that, even when the fire restrictions are not in force, it is possible for burn offs to get out of control quite easily. Never burn off when it is windy (15kph+).

Burning off outside the CFA declared fire danger period is subject to Shire local laws. Ensure you are familiar with these. If in doubt, contact the Shire on **1300 368 333** or visit their website www.yarraranges.vic.gov.au.

FAMOUS LAST WORDS...

"The smoke alarm kept going off, so we took out the battery ..."

■ **Yes, they can go off when you burn the toast ... but is it a real problem? If you have an ongoing problem like this, think about where the alarms are located.**

Are they too close to the kitchen? Ideally they should be outside sleeping areas. (Or maybe give up toast?)

BRIGADE CONTACTS

Alan Potts 9755 1687

John Schauble 9755 1402

Anna-Marie Shew 9755 1870

Fire Station (answering service): 9755 1078

CFA Area Office, Lilydale: 8739 1300

Victorian Bushfire Information Line: 1800 240 667

E-mail: sfcfb@pacific.net.au

IN CASE OF FIRE, DIAL 000

BRIEFLY

BRIGADE MANAGEMENT TEAM

A scheduled election for the brigade's management team was held in April. All positions within the brigade become vacant every two years. Long-serving officer and member John Schauble was elected captain. There are five brigade lieutenants: Alan Potts, Geoff Horner, Geoff Pfiefer, Edward Geldard and Andrew Potts. Ron Shamir retains to role of communications officer. Win King-Smith was returned as brigade president. Anna-Marie Shew has joined us as secretary and Karen Noonan retains the position of Treasurer. The new team members take up their roles from July. Our thanks to outgoing captain Alan Potts, who served in this very demanding role for four years, to Deb Leticq, who stepped down after eight years as secretary and to John Tomada, who has been a lieutenant since 2000. All remain active and committed members of the brigade.

ANNUAL APPEAL

The local community has again shown its generosity by contributing to the brigade's annual appeal to the tune of over \$15,000. Next year marks the 50th annual appeal, which provides the funds we need to meet running costs and purchase additional equipment not provided by the CFA. One of our major ongoing costs is a brigade-owned vehicle, which is rapidly coming due for replacement.

BUMPER STICKERS ...

What's another way you can show your support for the local brigade, decorate your car with a tasteful design and contribute to replacing one of our fire trucks all at the same time? Get a "We Support Sassafras-Ferny Creek Fire Brigade" bumper sticker! They're available from the Ferny Creek General Store or the fire station for just \$2.

GRANTS GRANTED

The brigade was a successful applicant in the first round of grants under the Federal Government's **National Emergency Volunteer Support Fund**. The brigade received funding of \$4,631 under the program enabling the purchase of training and community education equipment. The brigade was also successful in obtaining a **CFA Environment Grant** of \$672. This has enabled plumbing works to capture rainwater from the fire station roof and divert it into an existing tank, rather than running off down the drain. The saved water will be used for training and gardening purposes.

MORE INFORMATION

There's a wealth of information on home fire safety, as well as how to plan for the next bushfire danger period available on the CFA's website. There's lots of great information that can be used for school projects too!

Direct your browser to: www.cfa.vic.gov.au

DOES YOUR FAMILY HAVE A HOUSE FIRE SAFETY PLAN?