

Sassafras-Ferny Creek Fire Brigade ... Volunteers serving the community

What have we learnt from 7 February 2009?

One of the key lessons from the tragic Victorian bushfires earlier this year is that many people are extraordinarily complacent about bushfire. Research led by the Bushfire Co-operative Research Centre in the fire-affected areas clearly shows that most residents had no plan for bushfire and that many appeared to have little understanding about what would happen in the event of a fire. Lawyers, journalists and an assortment of “experts” have since been busy pointing out the failings of government, the fire services and individuals within. But living with fire is a shared responsibility. This means everyone living in fire-prone communities like ours must play a part in preparing for and responding to fire.

What’s changed around here?

Not much in a physical sense. We still live on top of a mountain, surrounded by a finite area of bush. The main difference is that many people in our community who might have not thought much about bushfire in the past have now become quite interested - and that’s great. We already know a lot about how fire behaves here because - unlike Marysville, Boolarra and many other areas affected earlier this year - we have a long and well-documented fire history. We also have good firefighting resources at our disposal. It was no accident that potentially serious fires in February at Upper Ferntree Gully, Tecoma and Upwey were quickly contained with no loss of life and minimal property damage.

Who is at risk?

Everyone who lives here is at risk from bushfire. **Every home** in Sassafras and Ferny Creek is in danger from ember attack to a greater or lesser degree, depending on its specific location. Some homes are in danger of direct flame attack. Every person who remains in the area when there is a fire is at some risk of being killed by it. (Those at greatest risk, of course, are firefighters.)

What must I do?

Firstly, understand and accept the risk. You must understand that this is a very high fire danger area. The act of living here implies that you accept the risk of



bushfire affecting you, your family and your property. If you are not prepared to accept that risk, then you need to ensure at the very least that you are **out of the area early** on high danger days.

So, what should I do now?

A good start is to follow the consistent advice from CFA given over many years. Learn something about how fire behaves in the local area. Learn about which conditions will increase the risk and likelihood of fire. Attend CFA public meetings. Join a Community Fireguard group. Read and understand the information provided by CFA and DSE. Ask questions. Clean up fine fuel around your property before and during the fire danger period. Develop a realistic action plan for your household. Act on the plan on days of high fire danger. Some new CFA initiatives will be rolled out over the coming weeks to help you prepare.

What can’t be done?

There are obviously limits on what can be done before the coming summer. There certainly aren’t any easy fixes. Some of the initiatives proposed by the Royal Commission and by government may not be effective locally. For example, proposals like community neighbourhood safer places and fire refuges will remain problematic here for the same reasons they always have been.

Royal Commission findings: where to from here?

The Royal Commission into the 2009 fires handed down its interim report on 17 August. It made 51 recommendations which the State Government has accepted and is now in the process of implementing before the next fire season.

No core policy has been changed (the “prepare, stay and defend or leave early” policy remains in place). The interim findings of the commission can be found at

<http://www.royalcommission.vic.gov.au/Interim-Report>. The commission has recommenced hearings into a range of other matters, which it will enquire into before handing down a final report next July.

For accurate reports of what is said in the commission and the context in which statements are made, consulting the daily transcript of proceedings is recommended. This is available at <http://www.royalcommission.vic.gov.au>.

Two new trucks complete the fleet!

Sassafras-Ferny Creek Fire Brigade recently found itself in the enviable position of having two new fire trucks commissioned into service on the same day.

Local Monbulk MLA James Merlino presented the keys to the vehicles – a 2000-litre, four-wheel drive medium tanker and a new light pumper – at a brief ceremony at the fire station in front of around 40 brigade members and guests.

The vehicles, collectively worth close to \$500,000, represent the latest in CFA firefighting technology.

A unique set of circumstances means the brigade now has possibly the most modern set of vehicles of any brigade in the state. Our third vehicle, a 3000-litre four-wheel drive heavy tanker is just two years old.

The light pumper is the first of a new design of vehicles being built for CFA to serve small townships. Essentially for dealing with structure fires and other urban incidents, the unit comprises a high capacity pump, quantities of hose, breathing apparatus, lighting and other equipment.

The medium tanker is primarily a bushfire vehicle and



Check this out ... a couple of local lads inspect the new Light Pumper

incorporates the latest crew safety measures, including protection sprays. The vehicle is also equipped with in-line foam and a range of basic firefighting equipment.

Fire trucks are just one part of the equation. The brigade was delighted that representatives from a number of local Community Fireguard groups were able to attend the commissioning ceremony.

Trees ... good or bad?

Most people live in the Dandenongs because of the bush.

Recent changes to vegetation management rules will give simplify the processes for landowners wishing to remove vegetation on their own property. Details of the changes can be found at www.dse.vic.gov.au

Strange as it may seem, simply clearing all vegetation, including trees, may put your property more at risk from bushfire. It is not the only answer to preparing your property against fire. In fact, removing tree canopy cover can expose your property to greater levels of ember attack, which is the main danger to homes in this area. It also has a direct impact on the effects of wind and radiant heat.

Managing the fine fuels – particularly the dead and desiccated leaf, bark and twig litter – on your property is much more relevant to controlling the fire risk than cutting down trees. It's about taking a balanced approach to managing fuels on your property. You might also consider the interests and views of your neighbours before embarking on broad scale vegetation clearance.

For more information on fuel management, go to www.cfa.vic.gov.au and search for "vegetation management".

Bunkers ... good or bad?

CFA does not currently endorse or recommend any bunker products because there has been no testing, research or development of a Standard that will ensure a bunker can withstand bushfire conditions and provide a guarantee of survival. For information on bushfire bunkers, go to www.buildingcommission.com.au

Briefly ... briefly ... briefly

NEW PRESIDENT: Richard Laidler, well known to many in the community through his involvement in the Ferny Creek PS council, has been elected as president of the brigade. Richard takes over from Win King-Smith, who recently stepped down from the position after seven years in the chair and our grateful thanks for her efforts.

COMMUNITY FIREGUARD: Community Fireguard courses will shortly be held at Sassafras, Kallista, Kalorama and Selby. The course at the Sassafras-Ferny Creek fire station will be held on three successive Monday nights from 12 October. Other courses, including a one-day course, will be held in November. Contact CFA Yarra Area for details, ph. 8739 1382.

Brigade & CFA contacts

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