

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

Cold, wet, winter ... don't burn down the house

The recent tragic deaths of a man and his daughter at Sorrento on the Mornington Peninsula are a reminder to us all of the daily danger of house fires. It's easy to forget that year in, year out more Victorians die in residential fires than in bushfires. In 2010, more than 1,200 Victorian homes were damaged by fire. Of those, 42 per cent started in the kitchen. Cooking and heating were the two greatest causes of these fires. So, what do we do to plan for these emergencies? What plan does your family have in place to deal with a disaster on the doorstep?

Get out - and don't go back inside

If a fire breaks out inside your home and it is too big for you to extinguish easily with a fire blanket or extinguisher, then get out. Make sure everyone knows where to meet once you've left the house. It might be at the end of the drive or across the road. Call the fire brigade. Once you're out, don't go back inside ... it takes only minutes for houses to fill with toxic smoke and gases. These will render you unconscious, even kill you.

Always have a working smoke alarm

While a smoke alarm is not the whole answer, there is no question that these devices have saved many, many lives since they came into common use. It is important to ensure that they're going to work when you need them. If it's a battery alarm, ensure the

battery is changed **every** year. Make sure you vacuum the units regularly to clean away dust build up. Test them regularly. You should replace smoke alarms every 10 years. Ensure you have enough alarms to cover the size of your home.

Clothing & kids

Another common cause of winter fires is drying clothing too close to heaters and fireplaces. And please, please don't leave small children alone with an open fire or heater.

Heaters and fireplaces

Solid fuel heating is great, but it means there's a little more fire prevention work to do. Open fireplaces need to clear of obstructions and have a fire screen in front of them to prevent sparks



and embers spitting beyond the hearth. Enclosed heaters need to be cleaned regularly and checked for integrity. Gas and electric heaters also need a simple check each year to make sure they're in good order.

Chimneys

Chimney fires are one of the most common events fire brigades in the hills attend. Preventing them is simple ... make sure you have your chimney cleaned on a regular basis by a skilled sweep. You'll find them in the telephone directories or the local papers.

Celebrating our Junior Fire Brigade - 40 years young

Junior fire brigade offers a unique experience for those aged 11 to 16 to participate in an action-oriented activity where they learn about fire and its place in the built and natural environments.

The first meeting of the Sassafras-Ferny Creek Junior Fire Brigade was held on 9 October 1971, attended by eight aspiring young firefighters and led by Richard Cromb, himself not long into the ranks of the senior brigade.

From the outset, the philosophy behind the Sassafras-Ferny Creek junior brigade has always been a simple one: learn something about the theory and techniques of firefighting but always have a lot of fun doing it!

Over the years, literally hundreds of young people have passed through the ranks of the junior brigade. Many have moved up into senior brigade upon reaching the age of 16. (Our current Captain and many other members began their association with the brigade as junior members.) Others have gone on into CFA brigades across Victoria. Many more have taken away valuable life learnings about fire and fire safety.



A special celebration and reunion marking the junior brigade's 40th year will be held on Sunday, October 16th at the Ferny Creek Recreation Reserve. We hope as many former junior members as possible will join us at this special event.

For more details, please contact John Tomada on 0408 395 256 or by email juniors@sassafrascfa.org.au

A few simple things you can do for us ...

How do we find you?

It's 3.27am and you've just called the fire brigade because your smoke detector's going crazy and there's a strong smell coming from somewhere. It seems forever before the fire brigade arrives ... you can hear the sirens, maybe even see the flashing lights but what the hell are they doing?

Chances are we're trying to find you ... You know your address. We *might* know it, but the chances are we'll be out there in the dark trying to find out exactly where it is you live. The dispatch message will give us a house number, street name and the nearest cross-street.

After that, it's up to us to find you ... and we can't do that unless the **house number** is clearly posted and easily seen.

So here's something you can do for us (and for yourself and your family). Make sure your house number is easily seen from the street. Put yourselves in our boots. We want to get to your aid as quickly as possible. It might be the fire brigade, an ambulance, the police or some other essential service ... don't make it any harder than it needs to be when we need to find you in an emergency.

So we've found you ... how do we get to you?

The next challenge is getting to your house. Many driveways are a challenge for large emergency vehicles at the best of times. Sometimes we're simply not going to get up/down/along them. But other times we could if only some vegetation clearance was maintained and the driveway surface itself kept to a standard that will allow us access. Think about whether a truck can get onto your property and whether there might be anything you could do to make it easier. That goes for gates too ... Nice big electric gates are grand, but will we be able to get through them easily in an emergency?

What about water?

Hydrants off the mains system serve most of the brigade area. That's great, so long as we can get access to the hydrants. We understand they're not the prettiest of things to have on the roadside outside your place, but disguising them with plantings of shrubs or allowing refuse to build up around them makes fire hydrants hard to get at when we really need to use them. The brigade keeps an eye on all our fire hydrants through a regular inspection program, but you can help us by keeping an eye on them too.

Just slow down ...

It's winter and the driving conditions are pretty ordinary. Some days you can hardly see the road for the fog ... and the rain, well, it's been a while since there has been this much water about the place. The brigade attends more motor vehicle accidents than just about any other type of incident. They can be gut-wrenching affairs - especially if it's someone local.

Motor vehicle accidents are mostly entirely avoidable. So, slow down, take it easy on the corners and arrive at your destination safely.

Carols on the Mountain

Preparations are already underway for Carols on the Mountain 2011! As in previous years, we're expecting a bumper turnout for this popular community event staged at the Ferny Creek Recreation Reserve. Carols on the Mountain will be held on Saturday, December 10th. Local businesses are invited to support the event and the local brigade by advertising in the Carols booklet produced every year. It's a unique opportunity to reach out into the local community. For more information, contact the event organisers at carols@sassafrascfa.org.au

Briefly ... briefly ...

FIRE SERVICES COMMISSIONER VISITS

Victoria's new Fire Services Commissioner Craig Lapsley was a guest of the brigade recently. Mr Lapsley commended the work of the brigade and noted the difficulties communities in the Dandenong Ranges face in redefining the messages of leaving early or remaining to defend. In particular he noted the potential for huge property losses in such areas if people abandoned an approach truly based on shared responsibility between individuals, the State and the fire agencies.

CHECK THE WEBSITE ...

The brigade website is an important tool for updates on the latest fire safety information. Regular updates on brigade activities and other local relevant information are posted on the site, especially during the fire danger period. Check it out at www.sassafrascfa.org.au



**PREPARE.
ACT.
SURVIVE.**

Brigade & CFA contacts

John Schauble 9755 1402

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Fire Station (answering service): 9755 1078

E-mail: secretary@sassafrascfa.org.au

Brigade website: www.sassafrascfa.org.au

CFA Eastern Metropolitan Region HQ: 8739 1300

CFA Website: www.cfa.vic.gov.au

Victorian Bushfire Information Line: 1800 240 667