

Thursday 21 August 2014 - Number 594

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Current National Security Alert Level: Medium

GENERAL

Vale: Retained Firefighter Daniel Howard – 256 Cobar

At around 0750 last Sunday, a serious fire broke out in the New Occidental Hotel at Cobar in the state's far west. The crew from 256 responded with 2 crews in the pumper and tanker, and discovered an escalating fire with persons reported trapped in the accommodation section. After evacuating and rescuing a number of people, firefighters withdrew and mounted a defensive attack as the fire intensified and took hold of the entire building. 256 was backed up by local RFS brigades, and later by crews and appliances from Nyngan, Bourke and Dubbo.

About an hour into the operation, there was a major structural collapse, and two firefighters from 256 were briefly trapped by rubble. An RFS crew and two FRNSW firefighters immediately went to their aid. Both firefighters were worked on by fellow crew members and paramedics, and conveyed to hospital. Sadly, one of our colleagues, Retained Firefighter Daniel "Howie" Howard succumbed to his injuries and was pronounced dead at the hospital. The other firefighter is recovering at present.

Immediately following the wall collapse, together with Chaplain Lindsay Smith, peer supporters and other senior officers I headed to Cobar to offer support to Daniel's partner and the crew of 256, who were relieved by other FRNSW and RFS crews. On Monday I travelled to Forbes to meet with Daniel's Mother, Father and two sisters, and to pass on condolences from all members of FRNSW. Investigations are underway into the circumstances surrounding this incident.

A [forum](#) has been set up on the Intranet to allow staff to post condolences online. These messages of sympathy from staff will be combined with those from the public and other emergency services in a condolence book, bound copies of which will be presented to the family and to 256 Station to honour Daniel's memory.

Dealing with tragedies like this can be difficult emotionally. I remind staff of the range of programs we have available to assist them if they need help. These include our Employee Assistance Program, Critical Incident Support Program, chaplaincy services as well as mental health programs to promote wellbeing. For more information, see the Assistance section on our Intranet homepage or this [intranet story](#).

Bushfire operational briefing videos now online

The RFS and FRNSW have developed a series of on-line operational briefings for the 2014/15 bushfire season. These are available to all FRNSW staff and can be accessed through FireTube using the following [link](#). Viewing these briefings is particularly important for officers who will be responsible for command and control at bushfires, or coordinating FRNSW's resources in response to major bushfires. The briefings cover a range of topics including the seasonal outlook, FRNSW planning and preparedness, coordinated firefighting

arrangements and incident coordination with other agencies. I encourage Station Commanders to review the online briefings with their crews.

FRNSW asked to assist at Canadian bushfires

On 11 August FRNSW Inspector Jeff Hogan joined an 81-person Australian contingent deployed to assist in battling bushfires burning out of control in British Columbia, Canada. The NSW component of the Australian contingent consists of 14 bushfire experts from NSWRFES, NPWS and FRNSW representing a range of disciplines in relation to major bushfire operations, including planning, operations, fire behaviour analysis, air base management and logistics. Inspector Hogan was selected given his depth of experience in bushfire fighting and his incident management skills. He will perform the role of Logistics Officer at one of the major fires.

This is not the first time we have provided resources to support major operations overseas. In addition to recent USAR responses to New Zealand, Japan and other southeast Asian countries, FRNSW has previously sent a number of senior officers to assist at major bushfires in the USA.

New and increased fines for bushfire offences

New penalties have been introduced and existing penalties increased for a range of offences, to help protect life and property from bushfires. The new and increased penalties are intended to encourage people to use fire responsibly and help prevent fires. For details of the offences and penalties, see the [Intranet story](#).

Update on FRNSW Safety Strategy 2013-17

We are now well into the second half of 2014, and I am pleased to see that healthy progress is being made with the *Safety Strategy 2013-17*. As we have seen this week, firefighting presents a range of foreseeable and unforeseeable risks, therefore safety must be the guiding principle in everything we do. The worst part of my job as Commissioner is having to deliver bad news to families, and witnessing first-hand the devastation they experience when a loved one is killed or injured – safety therefore has to be a very personal thing; it is everyone's business, not just another box to tick. [Click here](#) for the full Safety Strategy update posted on the Intranet this week.

Earlier this year I launched the Commissioner's Safety Awards. I know that many of you are working hard to do your part to making FRNSW safer and the Safety Award is my way of both recognising and thanking you. Why not do in a 'safe mate' (or team) by [nominating them](#) for a Commissioner's Safety Award?

CFU Program to celebrate 20 years

2014 marks the 20th year of the Community Fire Unit Program. The CFU program had its genesis in the devastating 1994 bushfires, and since then has thrived due to the dedicated support provided by FRNSW, engagement from local fire crews in training, support and mentoring of Community Fire Unit volunteers, and the willingness of local communities to take some of the responsibility for their own protection. With more than 600 units and just over 7000 volunteers State wide, this humble grass roots initiative continues to build community resilience throughout NSW.

To celebrate, we are hosting a 20th anniversary event for all CFU volunteers and their families at the Penrith Museum of Fire all day on 31 August 2014. I encourage all of you who have been involved with the CFU program to come along and show your support on the day.

New FIRU accelerant detection dog training on track

Opal is a 20-month-old black Labrador and is the latest addition to our canine team. She has been training with the Fire and Investigation Research Unit since May to become our next accelerant detection dog. Her handler, SF Joel Walton, reports that Opal is progressing well through the training program that the K9 team have prepared for her and is on track to become operational later in the year. She has been successfully introduced to the odour of one accelerant and last week she trained in a real scene for the first time.

The next twelve months will be a busy training period for the K9 team as Opal is the first of three dogs in a succession plan that will see our existing accelerant detection dogs Sheba and Winna retired from service.

When these dogs are retired, all staff will be notified and those interested in caring for the dogs will be invited to submit an EOI at that time.

Pride of the Illawarra Award

At a ceremony on 8 August SES member Grant McClory was announced as overall winner of the 2014 Rotary Pride of the Illawarra Award. Retired Captain of 210 Balgownie, Ken Lawrence, was announced as the FRNSW Category Winner. Ken joined the NSWFB as a Retained Firefighter in 1976 and retired in January 2014 after providing distinguished service culminating in his appointment as Captain of Balgownie. Ken was well known within his local community for his promotion of our FireEd and SABRE programs as well as participation in many community activities. Other finalists in this category were Senior Firefighter Cathryn Dorahy AFSM, and Station Officers Andrew Barber and Paul Campbell. My congratulations to the winners and finalists.

Local heroes celebrated in Parramatta

Two FRNSW firefighters were among 23 local service officers and nurses recognised at the Lord Mayor of Parramatta Cr John Chedid's Front Line Services Awards on 14 August. Parramatta Station Officer Robert Callow was recognised in the Beyond the Call of Duty category, while Wentworthville Station Officer Wayne Keever was recognised for Mateship. The awards celebrated the contribution of personnel from local services including FRNSW, the NSW Police Force, the Ambulance Service of NSW, the Royal NSW Lancers and nurses at Westmead Hospital. Congratulations Robert and Wayne.

Multicultural missions in community fire safety

In July and August firefighters from across the State took part in several multicultural events, festivals and campaigns. July events included a firefighters' perspective exercise in Coffs Harbour and NAIDOC Week at the University of Newcastle, both of which helped raise awareness of home fire safety in local Aboriginal communities. FRNSW's Community Engagement Unit also conducted its second Winter Fire Safety campaign in partnership with the Community Migrant Resource Centre in Parramatta. In August, FRNSW attended an Eid Festival to mark the end of Ramadan at Bankstown Paceway in western Sydney. For more information, see the [intranet article](#).

FRNSW participates in Women and Firefighting Conference

On 14-16 August, the Women and Firefighting Australasia Conference was held under the theme of "Women at the Firefront - Innovation, Motivation, Inspiration." FRNSW continues to strongly support the WAFA in line with our aim of increasing the diversity of our firefighting workforce. We were well represented at the conference with many FRNSW staff attending, and Leading Firefighter Bronnie Mackintosh, the President of WAFA, did an outstanding job as coordinator and MC.

I delivered a presentation on 'Changing the Mix', highlighting our achievements (or lack thereof) in 30 years of recruiting women. At present we only have 156 women as permanent firefighters, 237 retained firefighters, and only 9 Station Officers. It is very clear just on a statistical basis that there are institutional barriers to women becoming firefighters, and then seeking and gaining promotion. My recent e-mail regarding bullying and harassment did not go into detail, but the attitude of a minority of men in FRNSW is one of the major hurdles women face – something I am determined to deal with and eliminate. Other FRNSW presenters included Deputy Chief Executive Rosemary Milkins who was part of a leadership panel, Inspector John McDonough, and Senior Firefighter Tony Hatch.

Indigenous Employment Strategy launched

FRNSW, in partnership with South West Sydney Institute of TAFE, has developed an employment strategy to prepare and assist Indigenous applicants to apply for employment as firefighters. The program will provide training in Certificate III in Fitness through TAFE, work experience at the State Training College, and a day at 8 stn Liverpool. Indigenous students will be mentored by Aboriginal firefighters based within the Liverpool/Campbelltown area. On 6 August 2014 I spoke at an information session at Macquarie Fields TAFE, and on Thursday 14 August the program commenced with an official launch and tour of the fitness facility.

Farewell to Inspector Wayne Buxton AFSM and Captain Ted Ranse AFSM

During the last fortnight FRNSW has farewelled two of its longest serving officers. On Friday 8 August I attended the retirement function for Inspector Wayne "Bucko" Buxton AFSM from No. 1 City of Sydney. Wayne was our second longest serving permanent firefighter with 47 years of distinguished service. He has been a mentor to many aspiring young officers, and was a calm and competent incident controller and fire safety expert. Following several tragic fires in backpacker premises, he spearheaded a task force which led to the introduction of new and revised fire safety regulations.

On Saturday 16 August I attended the farewell for Captain Ted Ranse AFSM from 343 Katoomba. Ted has not only served with distinction for many years but has also been instrumental in raising around \$350,000 the Westmead Childrens' Burns Unit and other charities. I thank both officers for their enormous contribution to the work of FRNSW and for their many years of dedicated service to the community.

New ventilation modules online now

As part of Education and Training's commitment to providing ongoing learning opportunities, three new online modules for ventilation have been released in the Learning Hub, covering fire behavior; tactical ventilation; PPV and post fire overhaul. These modules are optional and have been made available as non-compulsory professional development/refresher training that can be completed on a voluntary basis. To access the modules, log in to the Learning Hub on the Intranet and locate the modules in the course catalogue. Upon completion, a record will be made to your Training and Qualifications in ESS.

Purple shoot promotes diversity

Firefighters and administrative staff from FRNSW recently joined with members of the NSW Police Force, Ambulance Service of NSW, NSWSES, NSWRFs and the Australian Federal Police for a colourful Wear It Purple promotional photo shoot at Moore Park, Sydney. The shoot, which aims to spread the word of youth-led organisation [Wear It Purple](#) ahead of Wear It Purple Day on 29 August, brought police and emergency services together in a display of joint commitment to diversity. In common with the Wear It Purple organisation, FRNSW is committed to creating a safe, supportive environment free of bullying and harassment where staff can work and thrive; regardless of sexuality or gender identity.

Relief & Welfare Fund 25th anniversary picnic

This year marks the 25th anniversary of the formation of the FRNSW Relief & Welfare Fund. To mark this milestone, the Committee is organising a picnic to thank members for their valued support. The picnic will be held at 1000 hours on 28 September at the Museum of Fire, Penrith. All members of the Relief & Welfare Fund and their families are invited to attend. There will be a steak/sausage sizzle, drinks, coffee/tea and cake; amusement rides and face painting for the children; and free entry to the Museum of Fire and a static display. The FRNSW Band and Precision Marching Team will also perform. Parking is available at the Museum and Penrith train station is close by. For catering purposes, please RSVP to RWFPICNIC@gmail.com by 19 September if you are attending.

INCIDENTS

Explosion at Hornsby shopping centre

At 0754 hours on Saturday 9 August, FRNSW crews were called to an AFA at Westfield Shopping Centre in Hornsby. Upon arrival 50 Hornsby, flowed by 37 Gordon, received a reports of an explosion and structural damage in an underground carpark. They found a basement loading dock badly damaged by an explosion with minor damage also to several nearby cars and a truck. Around 30 people were evacuated and parts of the Shopping Centre were temporarily closed as a precaution while the incident was underway.

75 Berowra and 13 Alexandria Hazmat were responded to assist and check for gas leaks, however readings confirmed that the site was safe. Investigation revealed the source of the blast had been leaking coolroom refrigerant. USAR1 was also responded but was called off after engineers assessed the building and confirmed that structural integrity had not been compromised.

There were no injuries although a truck driver in the vicinity at the time of the explosion was checked by paramedics. The incident attracted considerable media attention and the final Stop message was sent at 1138 hours.

Spate of residential fires continues

Despite spring approaching, FRNSW has continued to respond to a large number of residential fires across the State.

Last Wednesday, I issued a strong public appeal to warn NSW residents not to be complacent about home fire safety (see the [media release](#) on our website which was also posted to Facebook). My concern was triggered by a spate of house and building fires that had occurred overnight. This included fires which destroyed a bedroom of a two-storey terrace at Newtown and the kitchens of houses at Blackalls Park and Koonawarra, a house well alight at Balranald with one person taken to hospital with asthma, and a fire at the back of a house in Georgetown where our firefighters rescued two people and three pets. We also assisted the NSWRFSS at several fires, including a fire which destroyed a café, shed and museum at Nimbin; a fire which destroyed a caravan and house in Mooball; and another fire which destroyed a house at Dora Creek.

I encourage all firefighters to continue promoting our key fire safety messages to their communities at every opportunity. Please encourage families and householders to ensure their safety by visiting www.homefiresafetyaudit.com.au

INCIDENTS

ASK THE COMMISSIONER

Q. As a current first aid qualification is a requirement by the SRB for rescue operators, shouldn't rescue operators approaching their BLS expiry be given priority to BLS recertification so that FRNSW can maintain its rescue obligations?

A. Whilst it is ideal that all firefighters hold current training in basic life support, priority is given to primary and secondary rescue operators when it comes to scheduling BLS courses. This is because, as you correctly stated, all rescue operators require current certification in order to maintain rescue accreditation.

Q. We are issued with various small fold out handy reference cards, for activities, such a bushfire, communications, hazmat etc. I've seen the Rural Fire Service have a palm size type booklet, which contains similar reference cards, basically all the cards are in one place, and it can be added to or cards removed if updated.

A. The RFS Field Operations Guide is a useful resource for volunteers. Our old Counter Terrorism Field Operations Guide will be reviewed by Operational Improvement to see whether we should adopt a similar approach.

Q. I attended a Community engagement a few weeks ago and was surprised to see staff that I have seen within Greenacre in administration roles dressed in operational duty wear. I found this quite conflicting as there are admin uniforms available to admin staff. A question was raised by an Inspector at this function as to the reason why they were to be recognised as Firefighters. I overheard the answer being that these staff are a part of the organisation. If this is the case then all brigade staff should be entitled to wear this.

A. In February a decision was made to adopt a proposal to trial what is now known as the Home Fire Safety Checks Program. Included in the approval was to offer opportunities to non-operational staff to team up with firefighters and assist. To avoid confusion, it was decided that they would wear the same clothing as firefighters while participating. The community feedback has been very positive, as has feedback from the non-operational staff. for Admin/Trades staff participating in the HFSC Program to wear dutywear. The accepted PPC standard for firefighters undertaking this activity is dutywear, cap and utility boots, and therefore this is what everyone wears. To ensure that firefighters understand that the Admin/Trades staff they're working

with are not operational, the latter wear 'Community Safety' epaulettes with no rank insignia. At present there is no agreement with the FBEU for station crews to participate in the trial. If non-operational staff had not volunteered to assist, the checks conducted so far could not have occurred.

Commissioner's email: Commissioner@fire.nsw.gov.au

Sandra Garcia, EA to Commissioner: 9265 2930

Ask the Commissioner: OfficeOfTheCommissioner@fire.nsw.gov.au