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Current National Security Alert Level: **High**

GENERAL

Interstate bushfire deployments

Nine of our urban search and rescue (USAR) specialists were deployed briefly to South Australia a fortnight ago to assist in rapid damage assessment of homes and properties following the recent devastating bushfires. The role of our USAR team was to assess the number of buildings destroyed, check for structural integrity and look for hazards such as asbestos, damaged electrical wiring and chemical spills. They also reported on injured animals (both livestock and native animals) and fire-damaged trees which posed danger to buildings. In addition, they also advised about residents who may need counselling services. In total, the FRNSW team completed more than 200 tasks in one day. Mick Smith, Acting Chief Officer of the South Australian Metropolitan Fire Service wrote to me expressing thanks for FRNSW's support and assistance. Whilst at Adelaide Airport for the return trip to Sydney the FRNSW members saw a person collapse and administered emergency life support. The person happened to be a relative of an employee of SAMFS, who advised me that the medical condition was life threatening and the actions of our firefighters probably saved her life – well done!

In early January, FRNSW also sent two senior officers to Victoria as part of a multi-agency NSW contingent who assisted with incident management during major bushfires in that state.

Martin Place – the aftermath

I have previously praised and thanked all of those staff directly or indirectly involved in the response, stand bys and command efforts involved in supporting Police and Ambulance at the Martin Place siege before Christmas. Stations and crews involved included: City of Sydney, The Rocks, Darlinghurst, Alexandria, Chester Hill, Crows Nest, Woolahra, Drummoyne, Redfern, Leichhardt, Campsie, Concord, Narrabeen, Lane Cove, Eastwood, Bankstown, Burwood, Botany, Newtown, Dee Why, Seven Hills, Berowra, The Rescue Section and Sydney Communications.

A number of debriefs have been or are in the process of being undertaken that focus on agency, inter-agency and State – Federal interactions.

Following recent tragic events in France and Belgium, security agencies have warned of the possibility of further terrorist attacks. All of us need to remain vigilant and whether on or off duty, be prepared to immediately report any suspicious activities that we may witness.

Welcome back Deputy Commissioner Smith

It was a pleasure to welcome Deputy Commissioner Jim Smith back to FRNSW on 12 January after more than 12 months as acting Commissioner of the NSW State Emergency Service. Jim provided stability, leadership and direction during a difficult time for the SES. His selection by the NSW Government to take on this crucial task is testament to his personal competence, ability and integrity, and also to FRNSW's standing as a leading emergency service.

My thanks to Assistant Commissioner Jim Hamilton who acted as Deputy Commissioner during DC Smith's absence, and Chief Superintendent Gerry Byrne who acted in the position of Director Metropolitan Operations. Both officers did an outstanding job.

FRNSW signs MOU with WorkCover

FRNSW has signed a [Memorandum of Understanding](#) (MOU) with WorkCover NSW to facilitate cooperation, coordination and information-sharing between the two agencies. Under the terms of the MOU, FRNSW Incident Controllers should ask FireCOM to notify WorkCover of work-related fatalities, serious work-related injuries, major incidents at major hazard facilities, and incidents likely to become high profile and involve multi-agency response. WorkCover in turn will notify FRNSW of hazmat incidents, and fires or explosions that have not already been reported to us. They will also tell us if their Inspectors identify a workplace that manufactures or stores chemicals, has high risk and/or fire loads, and has the installed fire protection turned off or not fully functional.

The MOU is available on the [intranet](#). An [Information Pack](#) has been sent to Area and Zone Commanders for distribution to Duty and Station Commanders.

More Peer Supporters sought for our Critical Incident Support Program

FRNSW's Critical Incident Support Program uses a network of Peer Supporters to deliver a range of support services to members including provision of information and education about the effects of critical incident stress. Peer Supporters provide their services in a voluntary capacity, in addition to their regular duties within FRNSW. An initial four-day training and assessment program is undertaken to achieve competency, and attendance at team meetings and skills maintenance is required throughout the year.

We are recruiting more Peer Supporters across the State to further enhance the program's capacity and to reduce the load on existing members. All interested employees (firefighting, administrative and trades) are invited to submit an expression of interest for these positions. We are looking for employees with at least five years service in FRNSW, or similar experience, or relevant qualifications. You can get an application package by emailing CISP@fire.nsw.gov.au or, for further information, contact Mark Dobson, Wellbeing Coordinator via email (mark.dobson@fire.nsw.gov.au) or phone on (02) 9265 3910 or 0448 295 725. Closing date is Friday 20 February.

A fire Christmas story

On Saturday 20th December just after 2.30pm, 455 Telarah Fire Station was conducting part of its Annual Santa Lolly Run. The Retained Firefighters, including Santa Claus, were driving along Marlborough Street Rutherford when they noticed smoke issuing from a single level brick and tile home. After sending a white message for assistance, the crew quickly donned SCBA and entered the home with a charged 38mm hose line. They found an unconscious male and a small fire inside – the man was carried from the house and Santa, assisted by the rest of the crew, administered oxygen therapy until Paramedics and additional fire crews (374 Maitland and 373 East Maitland) arrived about ten minutes later. The small fire was quickly extinguished and the man was taken to hospital, where he has since recovered.

This incident received national media attention and even TV chat show coverage in the United States, as a member of the public filmed the entire event on their mobile phone, and praised the efforts of the firefighters. Residents said it was a true "Christmas miracle".

Every year Telarah firefighters volunteer their time to conduct a Christmas lolly run. In 2014, local businesses contributed over \$1000 to the purchase of 250kg of lollies, which were distributed to the children of Telarah, Rutherford and Aberglasslyn by Santa and his firefighter helpers over three nights.

Arrangements in the pre-election period

A reminder that the NSW election takes place on Saturday 28 March. A 'caretaker' period runs from 6 March when the Lower House of Parliament is dissolved until after the election. During this period, all government agencies including FRNSW must avoid making significant decisions and appointments, or signing major contracts and agreements. However, routine business should continue as normal.

The Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) has issued [information](#) about caretaker conventions and other pre-election practices. These are designed to ensure the public service stays political neutrally and to prevent public resources being used for party political purposes. All FRNSW staff must ensure that any participation in political activities is in a private capacity and does not conflict with their duty as public employees. Any requests for photographs or other FRNSW involvement by election candidates should be politely refused and escalated through the chain of command if there are any problems. For more information, refer to the DPC guide or contact our Government Relations staff on 9265 3959.

Churchill Fellowship applications closing soon

A Churchill Fellowship provides an overseas travelling allowance of around \$20,000 to fund suitable research projects. The application process, which is open to all sectors of the Australian community, is highly competitive and interested firefighters and administration staff requiring further information should go online at <http://www.churchilltrust.com.au/application-process/how-to-apply>. The closing date for applications is Monday 16 February and anyone interested is encouraged to contact Superintendent Ian Krimmer on 9265 2948 for advice on the application process. Please note that the research proposal should demonstrate a benefit to the broader Australian community, not only FRNSW. As a 1995 Churchill Fellow (which enabled me to research approaches to incident command, rescue, USAR and bushfire fighting in the UK, France, Spain, the USA and Canada) I am a strong supporter of the unique opportunities that a Fellowship can provide.

Singers required for ANZAC Day Remembrance Service

ANZAC Day 2015 will mark the centenary of the landings of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) on Gallipoli in World War I, and ANZAC Day has a deep significance for both Australia and New Zealand.

FRNSW has a long and proud history of commemorating ANZAC Day and has participated in the Sydney ANZAC Day March since the early 1920s. A total of 319 FRNSW personnel fought in WWI, all of whose names are inscribed on our Honour Roll displayed at the City of Sydney Fire Station. Of these, 25 were killed; one was awarded the Military Cross; two were awarded the Distinguished Service Order; and four were awarded the Distinguished Conduct Medal.

The focal point of FRNSW's activities commemorating the ANZAC Centenary will be a special Remembrance Service held at City of Sydney Fire Station, followed by participation in the RSL march – this year it will include a delegation of New Zealand firefighters. Singers are required for this Remembrance Service and FRNSW staff interested in offering their talented talents should contact Superintendent Peter Stathis on mobile 0419 993 065 or email peter.stathis@fire.nsw.gov.au

Love your heart for REDFEB

While there are many worthwhile charities, one close to my own heart (literally) is Heart Research Australia. I can personally vouch for the remarkable skill and commitment of the cardiologists whom they fund, and the importance of looking after your heart. Heart disease is Australia's biggest killer, and February has been deemed Heart Research Month or REDFEB. I encourage everyone to be proactive in the fight against heart disease, particularly given that a large proportion of our staff share one critical risk factor – being male. You can get involved by taking a picture at your station with the REDFEB speech bubble, or getting in on the REDFEB Challenge by giving up something bad for your heart. For more information and ideas about how you can get involved, [see the intranet story](#).

INCIDENTS

Incidents during the Christmas break

The Christmas and New Year period has certainly been no holiday for firefighters this year. Since my last Commissioner's Corner on 10 December, crews have attended numerous hazmat incidents including a 2nd Alarm incident at the Botany Industrial Park and several major boat fires including incidents at Killingworth, Bolong and Corowa. There have been at least ten 2nd Alarm incidents and a 3rd Alarm fire at the Neighbourhood Centre at Woodcroft in Sydney's west.

Crews across NSW have also been kept busy with multiple house fires and factory fires including a 2nd Alarm at Pendle Hill and an 8th Alarm factory fire at Rydalmere on 7 January (see the news article on the Intranet for details). Fortunately due to widespread rainfall, bushfires have not been extensive over the past few weeks, but as reported in this issue of Commish's Corner, FRNSW staff were deployed to South Australia to assist with rapid assessment tasks and to Victoria as members of incident management teams. The largest incident over the past month was no doubt the major St Marys industrial fire last Saturday.

12th Alarm factory fire at St Marys

At 1250 hours on Saturday 17 January FRNSW received the first of multiple 000 calls reporting a factory alight in Severn St at St Marys. 98 Cranebrook sent a Red message en route advising that large volumes of smoke were visible and requesting a 2nd Alarm. Shortly after arrival, together with 77 St Marys the decision was made to increase the response to a 4th Alarm. First arriving crews were confronted with a 30 x 40 metre tin structure used as an oil recycling plant well alight. Firefighters reported that they were initially confronted with a running fuel fire as burning cooking oil flowed from the building towards several exposures. An internal attack was out of the question and a defensive strategy was adopted.

Dozens of 000 calls continued to flood in as a huge plume of black smoke could be seen climbing up to a kilometre above the intense fire. Exploding oil and methanol drums continued to threaten surrounding properties with debris being located on roofs of other buildings over 100 metres away. The structure was also surrounded by gum trees which ignited resulting in a severe ember attack on properties and grassed areas around the fireground. Duty Commander West increased the response to an 8th Alarm, shortly after to a 10th Alarm and finally a 12th Alarm when it became apparent that several of the surrounding factory exposures contained sulphuric acid, methanol and asbestos style construction, and water supplies were being over-run.

Numerous aerial appliances and ground monitors were deployed around the site and crews entered exposed buildings with 70 and 38mm handlines to prevent further extension and to extinguish the many spot fires that continued to break out. Hazmat crews were deployed to monitor both the surrounding atmosphere and dam the contaminated run-off into local waterways. Fortunately the incident was within an industrial complex and the smoke plume fuelled by strong convection from the intense fire went high into the atmosphere where it dissipated without causing any major impacts on populated areas. All workers in the area were evacuated and fortunately everyone was quickly accounted for.

I attended at the height of the blaze and was impressed that only three structures were impacted due to the successful defensive attack. The weather on the day was extremely hot, making firefighting operations all the more difficult and I congratulate every firefighter and officer who attended the incident. About 30 retained and permanent fire crews attended and all worked tirelessly to bring this intense fire under control.

A 3rd Alarm was maintained overnight and EPA waste trucks were deployed to pump out large amounts of contaminated waste water from the site. On Sunday morning a digger was brought in to open up the building to allow 31 Busby CAFS crew to extinguish further hot spots around the site. The final Stop message was transmitted at 1551 hours on Sunday. FIRU staff continue their investigations into the cause of the fire.

Once again I wish to place on record my thanks to the more than 200 firefighters from across Sydney and the lower Blue Mountains who attended the fire and prevented what could have been a far more serious incident.

ASK THE COMMISSIONER

Q1. We are continually being asked to reduce spending in the operational side of FRNSW. Then why are we still required to purchase items through ESCAT when it can be purchased locally? Procuring simple items such as tools, and basic items such as dust masks etc is more expensive through ESCAT than when purchased through local suppliers. It is also faster when items are ordered to just drive to the local hardware store.

Were you aware of the costs associated with some of the items on Escat?

Q2. Recently we ordered some brown paper bags for our opening day and a new SIMS board for our new engine bay. Upon ordering we noticed the brown paper bags were at a cost of \$1.00 each and the SIMS board: without seals/documentation is at a cost of \$1000.00.

After looking at a lot of the items on ESCAT and then comparing these products to other comparable products at local retailers, we found a lot of items to be grossly overpriced.

In regards to reaching our budget targets and other cost saving measures that have been put in place throughout FRNSW is ESCAT pricing something that could be evaluated to become a more cost efficient resource?

A. Our Strategic Procurement Unit is reviewing the ESCAT catalogue to identify opportunities to better support local businesses and to comply with the Government's new small to medium enterprises policy. As part of this review it is likely that many lower value items will be able to be purchased locally in future.

Many specific items of equipment and services that are not readily available will always need to be purchased using established contracts which contain special terms and conditions that have been negotiated to include emergency and after hours supply provisions, free delivery and warranties.

SIMS boards have been specifically tailored to FRNSW requirements and after first being issued in bulk some years ago to all fire stations, are now only purchased in very limited quantities to cover replacement or for additional appliances. The commercial reality unfortunately is that the purchase cost is a consequence of the small production run.

Q. Why do we separate internally between Retained and Permanent firefighters with different colour epaulettes, helmet colour for captains, SO's and helmet insignia colour?

There would even be a small cost benefit in retiring the red retained insignia and orange captain helmets.

A. The Fire Brigades Act distinguishes between Retained and Permanent Firefighters on the fireground in relation to command and control, and many years ago it was determined that different coloured epaulettes was an easy way of making the distinction. The new contract for structural firefighting helmets should soon be announced, and this provides an opportunity to review helmet colours and rank / position identification. The red / orange colour for "crew leaders" has proved to be confusing to other agencies – it is likely that SOs and Captains will both share the same coloured helmet in future, however helmet markings will make it clear to FRNSW staff whether an officer is permanent or retained.