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Current National Security Alert Level: **High**

This issue of Commissioner's Corner comes from Acting Commissioner Jim Smith.

GENERAL

Moving forward at the Emergency Management Leadership Conference

On 17 and 18 June FRNSW held its second Emergency Management Conference at the Novotel in Brighton-Le-Sands. More than 70 senior officers attended from Operational Capability, Metropolitan and Regional Operations, with additional attendees from Community Safety and other corporate directorates. The themes discussed by the conference included operational excellence, leadership, diversity, governance and engagement. On day 1, the whole group heard presentations on these topics and broke into mixed Directorate teams to discuss their implications for FRNSW. On day 2, workshops were held in Directorate groups to plan activities within each of these themes for 2015/16. Each Directorate is now refining these plans.

In addition to the discussions, the Conference also benefited from a presentation by Major-General Jim Molan OA DSC who, among other things, was previously operational commander of Coalition forces in Iraq. His talk on operational excellence and leadership was very instructive, as was a talk by Assistant Commissioner Tom Dawson from Queensland Fire and Emergency Services on their handling of a exploding ammonium nitrate B-double in Queensland. On day 2 there was also a 'truck and trade' show, where attendees could see ADASHI, the new helmets, a CAFS pumper and various other new developments. General consensus was that this was a very useful conference which will form a good basis for project and programs this year.

Your progression – it's in your hands

The first Leading Firefighter Program has begun. This program is FRNSW's first use of a mix of work-based, face-to-face and interactive online learning to deliver a progression program. The change to a blended learning model puts firefighters at the centre of their own learning, allowing them to choose when, where and how quickly they learn. Firefighters will participate in more station-based and work-based learning, supported by their instructors and chain of command, during the 12-month program. Firefighters who participated in the webinars communicated with their instructors and other participants around NSW to learn how the program will work.

The Leading Firefighter and each new progression program will culminate in a rigorous final face-to-face assessment process using realistic scenarios. These new blended learning programs enhance our ability to develop skilled firefighters who can manage their own learning at each rank. Visit the [Leading Firefighter Program page](#) for more information.

Sex Discrimination Commissioner makes the case for change

On Monday 15 June, Sex Discrimination Commissioner Ms Elizabeth Broderick spoke to FRNSW staff at City of Sydney Fire Station. In her current role, Ms Broderick has worked to improve gender equality through her advocacy in preventing violence against women and sexual harassment, improving lifetime economic security for women, promoting women's representation in leadership and strengthening gender equality laws for

agencies. She also led the Commission's Review into the treatment of women in the Australian Defence Force (ADF).

In her talk to FRNSW, Ms Broderick discussed the ADF review, including its key findings and the five principles of success identified for the ADF. She also outlined some lessons that are relevant for organisations like FRNSW. In addition, she stated that change requires strong targeted strategies, and that leaders need to make change personal by moving the issue from the head to the heart. For more information, including slides of Ms Broderick's presentation, see the [intranet story](#).

Fire& Rescue News now includes Operational Journal articles

The latest edition of *Fire & Rescue News* is about to be printed and will shortly be distributed to fire stations and other FRNSW workplaces. The major change you'll notice is that the detailed incident reports which were previously published in a separate publication, the *Fire Operations Journal*, have now been incorporated into the magazine. Thank you to Inspector Kernin Lambert who has put in a lot of effort preparing these articles. This issue also includes articles on the FRNSW-led multi-agency USAR deployment to Vanuatu and FRNSW's wide-reaching response, in conjunction with NSWSES and other emergency services, to the severe weather events which caused widespread devastation across NSW in late April and early May. The magazine can be viewed on both our internet and intranet sites.

Roll up your sleeves and donate blood to help save lives

As mentioned in the last issue of *Commissioner's Corner*, the 2015 Emergency Services Challenge is running from 1 June to 31 August, with emergency services competing to see which organisation can make the most donations. This year's Australian Red Cross campaign 'Red25' aims to increase blood donations by 25%. Winter is a challenging time for blood stocks as many regular donors are unable to donate due to colds and flu. As Acting Commissioner, I attended the Red Cross yesterday to give blood but unfortunately I could not as I had travelled to Turkey within the last six months. I encourage all FRNSW staff to donate if this is at all possible. For more information, see the intranet toolkit (Toolkits > Organisation Wide > Health, Fitness and Wellbeing > Health & Medical > [Blood Donation](#)).

Emergency services honoured at State of Origin

Around 250 FRNSW firefighters and staff attended the State of Origin Game 1 at Homebush earlier this month. They joined many other emergency services workers as guests of the NSW Government to thank them for their tireless work in the floods and large rain event that occurred in NSW during late April. A lot of the devastation during that time occurred in the Newcastle and Maitland regions. FRNSW crews from Newcastle and surrounding areas, including 282 Dungog, were acknowledged by the 80,000-strong crowd as they took part in a lap of honour with their emergency service counterparts.

Back the NSW Blues with your best winter recipe and help promote kitchen fire safety

After last week's emphatic win over the Queensland Maroons, the NSW Blues have set their sights firmly on winning the 2015 State of Origin. And you too could be celebrating with a signed, framed NSW State of Origin jersey! To be in the running, all you have to do is enter the [Winter Fire Safety firefighter recipe competition](#). Your recipes will help spread the word on Facebook to ensure members of the community 'keep looking when cooking' this winter. Every qualifying recipe will be featured on the new [Home Fire Safety web pages](#), under 'Firefighter recipes' and shared on FRNSW's Facebook page during our 2015 Winter Fire Safety campaign. Entries close 31 August with the winner selected by former 'hatted' chef turned City of Sydney firefighter, FF Kurt Fegebank. For full details and terms and conditions, see the [Winter Fire Safety toolkit](#).

INCIDENTS

Chemical fire at a renewable energy solar power plant at Jemalong

On Saturday 13 June firefighters from Condobolin and Forbes responded to a chemical fire at a renewable energy solar power plant at Jemalong, about 35 kilometres west of Forbes.

En route firefighters were informed of the presence of liquid sodium which reacts very violently with water. Firefighters from Forbes referred to the Emergency Response Guide and were able to notify RFS crews on scene of the danger of using water on the chemical.

On arrival the Forbes crew found a tank containing 120,000 litres of the liquid sodium leaking, with the resulting spill igniting on contact with the air and falling into a bunded area. Initially, about 1.2 tonnes of soda ash from the site was used to try to help extinguish and contain the spill. Further amounts of soda ash were required and this was obtained from other parts of NSW and the ACT.

Firefighters performed very well and worked hard in difficult circumstances to apply the soda ash, contending with a number of issues including restricted access, fire, heat and the continuing spill. The presence of rain added to the complexity of the operation. Fire crews did an excellent job of keeping the spill covered as much as possible and limited the reaction with the rain.

The incident continued for the next five days, until the temperature of the tank could be brought down to help solidify the liquid and stop the leak, before the site was handed back to the site operators. FRNSW was supported on scene by NSW Ambulance, NSW Rural Fire Service, NSW State Emergency Service and EPA. On site staff provided valuable technical information throughout the operation.

Fire and hazmat crews from as far away as Culcairn, Young, Dubbo, Temora, Orange, Cowra, Wentworth, Wagga Wagga, Kelso, and Bathurst attended the incident. These crews did an outstanding job overall, led by the Zone management team and supported by an Incident Management Team, including HART, FIRU, a Scientific Officer and a FRNSW Workcover Liaison Officer.

Operational Capability and the Zone management team will continue to work with FIRU, FRNSW and a Scientific Officer to develop a case study to value add this specific research into renewable energy. The goal will be to ensure such sites are safe. See the [intranet story](#) for incident images.

Illawarra sinkhole

Just after 1600 hours on Monday 15 June, NSW Police asked FRNSW to assist and investigate a sinkhole which had appeared at Lambeth Place, Illawong. The crew from 90 Menai along with retained staff on Tanker 90 attended a group of townhouses where a large hole measuring ten by six metres and of unknown depth had appeared in the backyard of one property. The hole had the potential to severely damage an adjacent building which was moving significantly when the crew from 90 arrived.

The Rescue crew from 20 Hurstville was also dispatched to assist. They inserted a camera into a stormwater drain on the property but this proved inconclusive as to the cause of the collapse, so engineers and firefighters decided instead to enter a drainage pit on an adjacent property. A confined space entry plan was established and FRNSW crews entered the pit to make an assessment. The fire crews found that an underground water retention pit had subsided when support piers collapsed. USAR-qualified engineers from the NSW Department of Public Works determined that the houses were not in danger but restricted access to the backyards of the properties fearing further subsidence. The Retained crew from Tanker 90 remained at the scene and provided lighting while engineers and the REMO made further inspections of the houses. The area was declared safe at around 2115 hours.

This incident highlighted the diverse range of incidents that our fire crews attend, and showcased the capability of our permanent and retained staff to respond to emergencies.

Fire at old Mascot RSL Club

Crews from 26 Mascot and 35 Botany were the initial stations called to a building fire at Botany Road Mascot in the early hours of Tuesday 16 June. With numerous 000 calls received at FireCom from around 0048 hours, Communications staff immediately elevated the response level to a 2nd Alarm. Soon after arriving, 26 Mascot sent a message stating that there was a derelict building alight, the building being known as the old Mascot RSL. There were also reports that squatters may be in the building which concerned firefighters as the fire had taken hold on the second level and was threatening a 3-level unit complex in Sector B.

With the building well alight, fire crews set about protecting exposures and evacuating residential unit blocks in the near vicinity. The incident was upgraded to a 4th Alarm structure fire which saw crews from 29 Arncliffe, 56 Matraville, 13 Alexandria, 39 Randwick, 28 Marrickville, 70 Maroubra and Aerial appliances from City of

Sydney, 11 Woollahra and 4 Darlinghurst. Rescue appliances from 20 Hurstville and City of Sydney were also responded.

The Duty Commander from Metro South 2 arrived and took control until a full IMT arrived at the scene. The building was two levels, of brick and iron construction, 40 x 40 metres in area, and was totally involved in fire with exposures on each side under threat. Defensive firefighting tactics were employed using three aerial appliances and a number of 70 mm handlines. All roads surrounding the building were closed to ensure the safety of firefighters at the scene. Crews continued to battle the blaze from all sectors and managed to stop the fire from spreading to adjacent structures which had been evacuated by Police and firefighters. A comprehensive search of the building was unable to be conducted immediately due to the risk of collapse but it was later found that no one was inside.

The Stop message was transmitted at 0517 hours and the incident scaled down to two pumpers so that the morning citybound peak traffic wasn't seriously affected. Crews from FIRU were unable to determine the cause of the fire and residents were allowed back into their homes at around 1230 hours.

ASK THE COMMISSIONER

Q. Are AFAs still a two pump response? Do the RFS need to respond to AFAs when FRNSW has two pumps attending? In my area the RFS is also responded to AFAs leading to appliance congestion. There also appears to be a long delay for a code 2 to reach them. Often we see their vehicle responding well after the event is over and we are heading home.

A. There is currently no change to a standard response for premises with an Automatic Fire Alarm (AFA) installed. The standard response for an AFA is a two pump response. Some premises have a greater predetermined response due to risk. This might include Major Hazard Facilities and buildings where there is a high life risk. This would include nursing homes where the installed fire protection does not currently meet the standard with regards to the sprinkler system.

FRNSW and the NSW RFS have Mutual Aid Agreements (MAA) that underpin the response to premises in adjoining areas. This would include premises with an AFA. Generally this would mean that where possible a minimum of 2 x FRNSW appliances would respond to AFAs to ensure that there is back up for operations where breathing apparatus is being used.

If the call to an AFA previously reported in the prior 24 hour period the response is sometimes reduced to a single appliance.

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