

Wednesday 18 February 2015 - Number 605

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Commissioner's Corner

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Current National Security Alert Level: **High**

GENERAL

Indigenous students take a step closer to becoming firefighters

On Thursday 5 February, I attended a ceremony at Liverpool Catholic Club to congratulate 12 Indigenous students as they graduated with a Certificate III in Fitness, as well as basic firefighting and job application skills. The Indigenous Fire And Rescue Employment Scheme (IFARES) is a pilot program that was developed in conjunction with TAFE South Western Sydney Institute. Although the course doesn't guarantee a position with us, each graduate has gained a unique insight into the job and the process to apply. As an organisation, this is an important step in ensuring that we more closely represent and resemble the makeup of the communities we serve and protect.

The initiative owes much of its success to the efforts of Superintendent Phil Lindsay, and program mentors Inspector Drew Wilson, Station Officer Bill Spek and Firefighters Dean Dobson and Irene Lowe. Thank you to everyone involved. For more details, see the [intranet story](#).

New Death and Disability Award

The President of the Industrial Relations Commission of NSW, Justice Walton, made the new Crown Employees (Fire and Rescue NSW Firefighting Staff Death and Disability) Award 2015 on 16 February. The Award takes effect from Friday, 20 February 2015.

The new Award is the product of many months of discussions between representatives of Fire & Rescue NSW, FBEU and central government agencies including Treasury and Public Sector Industrial Relations. These discussions were focused on ensuring the long term sustainability of the scheme and the very important work it does for firefighters.

In achieving this outcome the new Award has adjusted both the contributions made by firefighters and the benefits payable. These changes were proposed by the FBEU based on actuarial advice commissioned by both parties examining the long term cost of the scheme. FRNSW helped refine these changes in order to ensure the scheme remains viable in the longer term.

Previously, permanent firefighters paid at the rate of 1.5% of their own salary. The new rate is based on 0.8% of a QF's salary, so the decrease in contributions ranges from \$4.85 per week for Recruits to \$31.06 per week for Chief Superintendents.

Retained firefighters' contributions have also been adjusted from \$9.41 down to \$7.22 per week.

These new rates will appear in your pay from 5 March 2015.

I encourage firefighters to read the new Award which will be available on the intranet.

Finally, I would like to thank the FBEU for the positive contributions they have made to achieve this good outcome for firefighters.

News from the Commissioner's Participative Council

Since the Commissioner's Participative Council (CPC) was formed in October last year, the 25 selected members have come together twice under the guidance of CPC Chair, Chief Superintendent Gerry Byrne. At a two-day workshop facilitated by elite sports coach and international leadership consultant Dr Ilan Kogus at City of Sydney Fire Station on 4 and 5 February, the group worked on identifying workplace issues that need improvement. Each issue will be owned by individual members of the CPC who will evaluate ideas and ensure they reach the right people. An intranet page will soon be available to share information about the council's work and update you on the progress being made. I have already approved five out of six improvement suggestions put forward by the CPC, with the sixth still being "fleshed out" prior to being approved for implementation. If you haven't already done so, I encourage you to get to know the council members and don't be afraid to approach them to discuss your ideas. Regardless of where you work and how long you've been with FRNSW, everybody's ideas are important in shaping our future directions.

Shining some light on problems with torches

Many of you would have responded to a short survey about personal torches and no doubt are wondering whether or not this has made a difference. The answer is "YES!" Deputy Chief Executive Rosemary Milkins, after several station visits, told me that she was on a "mission" to expedite replacement of the old torches which clearly were no longer fit for purpose. She was surprised to discover that out of frustration, many officers and firefighters had simply purchased their own. Thanks largely to the efforts of Rosemary and Acting Supt Josh Turner, everybody should start to receive new personal torches by about June. It is anticipated that they will incorporate new, brighter LED technology. The other good news is that savings on overtime due to lower levels of absenteeism (in most areas) enabled us to allocate about \$500,000 for a service-wide replacement program using an accelerated procurement process.

Celebrating almost 80 years of combined service

On Saturday 7 February I headed southwest to Young, while Deputy Commissioner Jim Smith travelled north to Byron Bay to attend retirement functions for two long-serving Captains. After 40 years of service, 513 Young Captain Don Smyth was farewelled by his colleagues and family as he recalled the days when SCBA meant holding a hankie over your mouth. Up at Byron, 243 Captain Warren 'Simmo' Simmons AFMS was lauded by his colleagues and the local community after 36 years service with FRNSW.

Both retiring Captains leave an incredible legacy at their respective stations and I sincerely thank them for their dedication, not least to FRNSW, but also to their retained crews and the communities they've served for decades. For more details, see the [intranet story](#).

Next gen technology helps locate 000 callers

Following the launch of new mobile location technology in December 2014, FRNSW's Communication Centre (ComCen) operators now automatically receive the approximate location of callers using a mobile phone to call 000. With around two-thirds of emergency calls in Australia made by mobile phone, this location information is critical – particularly when callers are distressed, confused or lost. In simple terms it means we can get crews on the road as quickly as possible to provide a faster emergency response. See the [intranet story](#) for more details.

NSW State Election requirements

With the election scheduled for 28 March 2015, the official "caretaker" period is nearly upon us. Commencing on 6 March and lasting until the election result is clear, the current Government goes into caretaker mode. This means that while routine business continues, the Government and government agencies are required to avoid significant decisions, appointments and major contracts.

I alerted you in a previous email that there are also other required practices aimed at protecting the neutrality of the public service, including FRNSW.

Members of Parliament often visit fire stations during the election period and this election period has been no different. We can expect this practice to continue as the election draws closer. Members or election candidates may ask firefighters to pose for photographs, or they may wish to discuss equipment needs, or promise more funding. If firefighters participate in any such activities or lobby for funding, that is clearly political activity which Fire & Rescue NSW staff, as public service employees, must never engage in while on duty.

Should you be approached in any such manner, you MUST immediately inform your supervisor. You also need to inform the Manager of Government Relations, Julia Thoener on 9265 3959.

If you are "put on the spot" about anything that relates to the needs of your particular fire station, you must make it clear that funding and equipment decisions are made centrally after careful consideration of the needs of all fire stations across NSW. Additional ad hoc funding Fire & Rescue NSW may receive outside the normal processes is generally allocated to initiatives that enhance community safety and education.

If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact Julia Thoener or your Zone or Area office to discuss.

WA bushfire deployment

Recent major campaign fires at O'Sullivan and Lower Hotham took their toll on local crews, resulting in the Western Australian Government requesting assistance from interstate. The O'Sullivan bushfire had broken its containment lines and had burned 82,131 hectares with a perimeter of approximately 350km. The Lower Hotham fire, covering 52,813 hectares had a perimeter of 140km and posed a significant threat to homes and critical infrastructure if not contained.

An initial deployment from Victoria was relieved by a 163 person multi-agency deployment from NSW. This included IMT logistics officers Inspector Jeff Hogan and Inspector Tom Clarkstone, and Daniel Davies who took on the role of crew leader for resource management. Although only a small contingent, the three FRNSW personnel, who were deployed from 6–13 February, offered valuable assistance to our hard-pressed WA colleagues.

Test your ticker with the new Cardiovascular Risk Checker

Heart attacks can happen to anyone – I know this from personal experience and nearly didn't live to tell the tale. With around 50% of worldwide firefighter deaths on duty cardiovascular related, knowing the health of your heart is not just important, but possibly lifesaving. In line with Heart Research Australia's #REDFEB campaign, the Health & Safety branch has launched a new [Cardiovascular Risk Checker](#) designed to help firefighters work with their GP to assess and manage cardiovascular health. The nature of firefighting work increases heart health risk factors meaning it's vital for us to be serious about our hearts. If you haven't thought about how you can get involved in the #REDFEB challenge, the Cardiovascular Risk Checker is a great place to start. Don't be complacent – for many people their first heart attack is the last thing they ever experience, and I can tell you it's no fun.

New fire station for Wallerawang

On Thursday 12 February, I joined Bathurst MP Paul Toole and Lithgow Lord Mayor Maree Statham to officially open the new \$1.02 million fire station at Wallerawang. The new fire station was built on the former fire station's Cripps Avenue site after FRNSW purchased the property from Lithgow City Council last June. The old fire station was demolished to make way for the new lightweight station which has a double engine bay, locker rooms, ablutions and training room. The local RFS were very helpful and accommodated the pumper and crew while the new station was being built.

Captain John Gill named Gwydir Shire Citizen of the Year

On Australia Day, 225 Bingara Captain John Gill was named Gwydir Shire Citizen of the Year for his involvement in numerous community and sporting groups and service to the community through the Bingara brigade. Captain Gill, who was nominated by A/Supt Rodney Chetwynd, A/Zone Commander Regional North

Zone 3, has been instrumental in retained recruitment and is highly proactive in prevention programs, including the SABRE program. One of his many SABRE visits saved a resident's life when the man was awoken by a smoke alarm fitted and maintained by Capt Gill and his crew. A member of FRNSW for more than four decades, and Captain since 2002, Capt Gill is a positive role model for the people of Bingara. Congratulations John on your well-deserved award.

Young Leaders Conference 2015 applications

Are you an emerging leader? Do you want to learn practical tools and techniques to lead effectively? The Office of the Commissioner will sponsor 10 aspiring young leaders from FRNSW to attend the Australian School of Applied Management's Young Leaders Conference in Sydney on Thursday 7 May. This opportunity is open to all young managers or leaders regardless of whether you work in administration, trades, or as a firefighter. To apply, email a one page expression of interest outlining how the conference will benefit you and how you can bring the learning into your role to vi.doncevski@fire.nsw.gov.au, Executive Assistant to the Director of Human Resources by 1700 hours, 27 March 2015.

Ambulance trainers a huge success

Last year I asked the Ambulance Service of NSW if they could provide two Paramedics as trainers so that we could catch up with a backlog of BLS training. In September 2014, Paramedics Jennifer Davidson and David McLeod were seconded to FRNSW and have been assisting with the review and implementation of an improved training package for BLS.

Both trainers have been 'out and about' in fire stations within the GSA conducting training to crews, and as part of that training, they have been asking course participants to fill out feedback forms on the training. There has been an overwhelming response with numerous comments from officers and firefighters stating that they get considerable value from having experienced Paramedics answering questions on a variety of scenarios. This in no way devalues the outstanding training from E&T BLS instructors (some of whom are former Paramedics themselves), but the opportunity for firefighters to discuss 'war stories' with the trainers has been invaluable.

Arising from the feedback, I requested an additional two Paramedic trainers from ASNSW and the Commissioner has agreed. A selection process will take place shortly to select the additional trainers.

What is happening with medical response?

At the moment, nothing, other than a few additional Community First Responder units being established in regional areas. All parties appear to be in broad agreement that a medical first response program that leverages the BLS skills and faster response times of firefighters is a good idea and would definitely save lives. However there are still some obstacles to be overcome. The clear feedback from my numerous station visits and forums last year was that whilst many (definitely not all) thought that a first responder program made sense, there were serious reservations about the type and quantity of training. It was very clear that crews wanted more training than that necessary simply to maintain first aid certification, and that ideally, Paramedics would deliver the training (see above). Many firefighters feared that we would be responded without ambulance back-up, or to calls that the ambulance service did not want to attend. This however is a non-issue: the multi-agency steering committee agreed that if and when a program commences in NSW, it will mirror the Melbourne model, i.e. firefighters will only be responded to "1A" cases (life threatening), and only as a co-response (simultaneous dispatch) with the nearest ambulance paramedics. This equates to about 12,000 calls per year statewide, similar to the number of hazmat incidents we attend, and only about 1% of total ASNSW workload. If and when a program is commenced, there will need to be a significant education campaign for ASNSW staff to allay concerns about the role of firefighters and the very limited types and number of calls we would be responded to. Lastly, the matter was raised during Award proceedings in the Industrial Relations Commission and must be resolved industrially.

I remain a very strong advocate of a first responder program given my experiences responding to medical emergencies with fire departments in Los Angeles and Oakland in California, and my personal experience as a heart attack victim: I know what it's like from both sides of the oxygen mask. However it is essential not to rush into a program until capability, dispatch, communication, critical incident support, training and industrial issues are appropriately resolved. This is not something that will creep up on people – open, transparent and timely communication will be the order of the day.

Safety note: storage of 9V batteries

Supply have now arranged for safer delivery of 9V batteries, in individual packaging, to alleviate shorting out battery terminals causing overheating. If the terminals of 9V batteries are allowed to come into contact with anything conductive – even the metal shell of another battery – the battery can overheat, possibly causing a fire. If not individually packaged, 9V batteries can be made safer by being isolated in plastic containers or wrapped in electrical tape to insulate battery terminals.

INCIDENTS

Bundeena RSL Club fire

At 0150hrs on Thursday 12 February, 80 Bundeena responded to reports of a fire at the local Bundeena RSL Club in Loftus Street. When they arrived they found the two level local landmark well alight with the office area totally involved. Crews from 33 Engadine, 90 Menai and 45 Miranda, together with several RFS crews were already on the way to provide assistance. Crews in SCBA entered the building and discovered that the kitchen area was also well alight and there were fears that the entire structure would become involved. Crews persevered with the offensive attack as further arriving crews, together with the RFS, commenced an external attack.

A further challenge was a bank of large external LP gas cylinders. Firefighters quickly and successfully deployed cooling sprays to protect the cylinders from flame exposure. At the height of the fire there was a partial ceiling collapse with one firefighter sustaining minor injuries. He was checked by paramedics and allowed to continue working with his crew. A number of nearby residents were evacuated due to the large amounts of smoke generated by the fire. It took close to two hours to bring the fire under control and several more to fully extinguish. Pockets of fire continued to burn in the roof area for several more hours.

Many of the firefighters who responded to the call were members of the RSL club and acutely aware of important historic memorabilia located within the premises. Quick thinking firefighters formed a human chain and salvaged many priceless items. Unfortunately it was later reported that a set of recently restored WW1 medals had been destroyed by the fire, however if not for the great teamwork by firefighters, many other irreplaceable items would also have been lost.

The club had only recently undergone refurbishment after a large community effort to restore the premises. The fire will undoubtedly have a major impact on the small local community, especially as planned ANZAC Centenary commemorations draw near. Despite the tragedy, thanks to the great effort of firefighters, the fire was contained to the top floor and total destruction was avoided. Plans to rebuild have already commenced.

The best way I can congratulate the attending firefighters is by echoing the comment on the home page of the Bundeena RSL Club website which says: "We'd also like to put on record our heartfelt gratitude to our local firefighters for their bravery, skill and dedication in containing and fighting the fire." Well done to everyone concerned.

3rd Alarm at Middle Harbour Yacht Club

At 2244hrs on Sunday 15 February, the first of many 000 calls was received reporting flames issuing from the roof of the Middle Harbour Yacht Club on Spit Road at Mosman. The initial call for 24 Manly was "smoke in the vicinity", but this was upgraded to a 2nd Alarm when numerous calls started to be received by FireComms. Just six minutes after initial dispatch SO 24 sent a Red message confirming that fire was through the roof of a two level building and requesting a 3rd Alarm. The building measured 100m x 20m and contained several restaurants, bars, offices and recreational areas and was attached to a large multi-million dollar boating marina complex. With crews assigned on the 2nd Alarm arriving rapidly, a decision was made to immediately attempt an offensive attack. Crews in SCBA deployed three 38mm attack lines upstairs into a restaurant area while a further three lines of 70mm and 38mm were deployed in an external attack to the roof area. The location of the building, with the harbour and marina on one side and a rock face, trees and overhead power lines on the other made deployment of an aerial attack impossible.

The fire had taken hold of a store room, kitchen and large section of roof area and was spreading laterally. The adjoining marina area contained several hundred boats and launches with multiple fuel storage risks. Duty Commander North, Insp Tom Morrison (IC) and Duty Commander CoS, Insp Graham Jarrett (Ops Officer) took charge of firefighting operations and given all the associated issues surrounding this fire, crews did an amazing job in rapidly limiting the lateral spread and protecting multiple high risk exposures, including a large attached building complex with multiple occupancies. Gaining access to the roof area proved extremely

difficult due to insulation materials, electrical cabling and large air conditioning ducts. Hazmat 13 monitored the water run-off and at this stage there appears to have been no significant pollution issues in the harbour.

Congratulations to all responding crews, particularly the initial crews from 24 Manly, 25 Mosman, 53 Neutral Bay, 36 Crows Nest, 69 Dee Why, 61 Lane Cove, 40 Willoughby, 1 City of Sydney and 13 Alexandria.

2nd Alarm city high rise fire

An electrical fire prompted a large scale evacuation in one of Sydney's largest high rise buildings. Crews were called to the Australia Square building in George Street, Sydney just after 1300 hrs on Wednesday 18 February. An electrical fire broke out in an air conditioning system on level 36 of the 48 level building and quickly filled the entire floor with acrid smoke. The fire floor was connected to level 37 by an open internal staircase and the smoke rapidly spread to the floor above. The EWIS system activated and by the time fire crews arrived a large scale evacuation was already underway from levels 35 through to Level 40. Over 500 people evacuated safely from the building without any reports of injury.

City of Sydney crews were on scene within four minutes with 3 The Rocks crew just a few seconds behind and immediately deployed the Standard Operational Guideline for High Rise fires. A BA crew with a High-rise Access Pack immediately proceeded to the fire floor whilst a Forward Control Point was established on the floor below. BA Control was established on the ground floor and firefighters took over control of all lifts and also deployed to the Fire Control Room. The fire was rapidly extinguished however smoke spread was quite significant throughout two levels. Air handling systems were effective in confining any further smoke spread.

A 2nd Alarm response was required to provide suitable back up and crew rotations as firefighters checked the ceiling voids carefully to ensure there was no lateral spread. A building electrician was placed on a SCBA extension line and together with three firefighters to ensure his safety, was taken to the fire floor and was rapidly able to identify and isolate power supplies to affected areas. Hazmat crews conducted extensive air monitoring and after two hours workers were allowed back into all levels with the exception of levels 36 and 37 which remained locked down for the remainder of the day.

The fire clearly demonstrated the importance of crews being familiar with the High Rise firefighting guidelines ([SOG4.5](#)) and building owners and managers having well rehearsed evacuation procedures. A working EWIS system combined with well trained fire wardens ensured that office workers within the affected areas were moved safely away from the building and firefighters could concentrate on a rapid containment and extinguishing of the fire. Well done to Inspector Gary Meagher and crews from 1 City of Sydney, 3 The Rocks, 4 Darlinghurst and 11 Woollahra.

ASK THE COMMISSIONER

Q: I was astounded to be made aware that FRNSW has been paying a ludicrous \$32.78 each, for the tiny Calico key bags. It is a product which can be purchased from other locations for less than \$1 each.

This is an incredible waste of public money, especially in a budgetary climate where rank file staff have been made aware of their role in reducing cost and providing value for money.

A: I agree. Unfortunately the cost of canvas goods has substantially increased as a result of the expiration of a government contract. To address this situation Strategic Procurement has released an "open" Request for Quotation (RFQ) for the supply of canvas goods, including Key Bags. The open status of the quote allows any supplier of canvas products to make a competitive bid to FRNSW. This process should result in a reduction in the cost of ALL canvas goods listed in ESCAT, and this should be in place by the end of March 2015. At that time Procurement will update ESCAT with a revised supplier and pricing schedules.

In the meantime, you don't have to purchase via ESCAT. Because canvas goods are not under contract at the moment, should a station find an alternative supplier at a reasonable cost they simply need to complete a "Request for Purchase Order" in ESCAT to their respective Zone Office to obtain the required goods locally.

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

Sandra Garcia, EA to Commissioner: 9265 2930