

Fire & Rescue

December 2012

News

Bankstown unit fire

Firefighters face
fierce high-rise fire

USAR accreditation

Gaining approval from the UN

Fire chief found

Locating a remarkable
former chief



Fire &
Rescue NSW

The Commissioner Writes



Welcome to the summer edition of Fire & Rescue News, ready for you and your family over the festive season.

In the lead-up to the bushfire season, we have been busy with major hazard reductions. We barely completed these when the bushfires began, with FRNSW and the RFS fighting major fires just about every week since late October.

There was plenty of rain early this year for vegetation to flourish, with floods affecting 75% of the state in March. However, much of the prolific growth dried out when the weather shifted away from the wet La Nina patterns. After Sydney experienced the wettest start to a year in two decades, the three months to November were the driest in 10 years. Close co-operation with the RFS, and the good work of our own Community Fire Units, will be crucial as we face what could be a serious bushfire season.

Community Fire Units have their own section in this edition, and there are profiles of Communications Centre Operators and a fire vehicle repairer. This edition has many more stories about recent operations, ranging from difficult cotton bale fires to hazmat incidents. If you attend any noteworthy or unusual incidents, I encourage you to send a write-up for publication on the Intranet and Fire & Rescue News. If you want to comment on articles in this issue or submit stories for next issue, please send your ideas and feedback to: frnews@fire.nsw.gov.au

Research is the key to developing better firefighting techniques and better approaches to prevent fires. This edition features a section on the AFAC/Bushfire CRC conference, where FRNSW officers delivered some very interesting papers. There are also features on reduced fire-risk cigarettes, the Structural Fire Safety Unit, and the research that helped inform the decision to make sprinklers mandatory in aged care facilities. Our IT section has continued to innovate, and a story on the new electronic Occurrence Book is one of the articles that covers their work.

The holiday season is a good time to relax with family. However, it can also be stressful, as everyone rushes around to get things ready before their celebrations. This edition features the Peer Support program and the importance of looking after yourself. The holidays will also bring many more motorists onto unfamiliar roads, and unfortunately there may be more motor vehicle accidents requiring rescues, especially in regional areas. Take extra care when you're driving this holiday season.

Most firefighters will continue working over the holiday season, even if their families have holidays. During this period, my thoughts will be with my fellow firefighters who protect our community. It's been a busy year, not least for those who trained and competed in the State Firefighter Championships in Tamworth in October or the World Firefighter Games in Sydney that followed. After a particularly busy year, administrative staff will be taking a break during the shut-down in the last week of December and first week of January. Whether you're working or on holidays, I hope all of you have a safe, restful break, and enjoy the festive season. 2013 will not be without its challenges, however it will also bring opportunities.

Greg Mullins AFSM
Commissioner

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Send in your stories and photos

FRNSW Media, Ministerial & Communications Unit (MMCU) wants to publicise the incidents your crew attended, and the achievements of your unit.

T: (02) 9265 2907 E: media@fire.nsw.gov.au

Intranet

Email any photos and stories to peter.walker@fire.nsw.gov.au

Fire & Rescue News

Send any high-resolution photos (larger than 1,000KB) to: frnews@fire.nsw.gov.au

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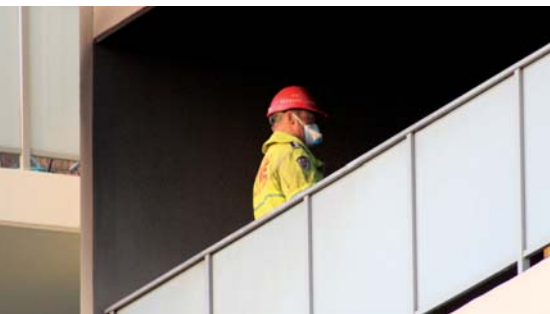
 www.facebook.com/frnsw

Commissioner Mullins with Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Michael Gallacher, briefing the media





6 SEP 14:48



Fire tragedy

Two women trapped in high-rise apartment

Two young women were trapped in a fire in their multi-storey residential building in Bankstown on Thursday 6 September.

To escape the intense heat and flames, they both jumped from a fifth floor window. One of the women lost her life from the fall and the other was critically injured.

Firefighters were initially alerted to the apartment block fire on the corner of West and South Terrace Bankstown at 1448 hours by an automatic fire alarm, followed by numerous 000 emergency calls.

Upon arrival, firefighters observed that a fifth floor apartment was well alight, and there was evidence of people trapped on upper levels. A 4th alarm response was requested bringing about 60 firefighters to the scene, including the Commissioner.

Tragically, the two women jumped from a window ledge at the same time as fire crews arrived. Firefighters in breathing apparatus rescued around 30 people from the upper floors of the building via the fire stairs, and also via an aerial ladder platform.

Firefighters attacked the fire on the fifth floor, and conducted search and rescue on the fifth, sixth and seventh floors. Fire conditions were severe, with a wind-driven fire venting through the door of the unit, which appeared to have been wedged open, into the internal atrium.

Crews with 38mm handlines took some time to reduce the intensity of the flames and gain entry to the four-bedroom unit, which was totally involved in flames.

The fire caused fire and heat damage to the modern reinforced concrete building with a magnitude that has rarely been seen. The fact that the fire was contained to the fifth level is some testament to the stringent structural fire safety standards in Australia, as well as the concerted attack by attending crews

According to the Commissioner, crews performed an outstanding job in a very challenging fire. They successfully contained the fire to the original unit and rescued between 40 and 50 people.

Firefighters helped Ambulance paramedics and doctors to triage and treat people for smoke inhalation, and a number were transported to hospital. One Station Officer was also injured and taken to hospital for treatment.

FRNSW fire investigators and the NSW Police are still assessing the cause of the fire and are pursuing a number of leads.

The incident attracted much media attention. In the aftermath, attention focused on the safety of such apartment blocks and whether changes are needed to improve building safety for occupants. **END**



Hoxton Park



Firefighters prevent burning **LPG** cylinders from exploding at service stations

20 AUG 13:18

Multiple 000 calls reported a building fire at a service station at 1318 hrs on Monday 20 August. Eight crews responded, the first arriving within minutes to discover a number of LPG cylinders well alight and threatening a building adjacent to the service station. Firefighters immediately set up hoses and a ground monitor to contain the fire and keep the cylinders cool. One vehicle parked at the service station was destroyed in the flames. Quick action by crews saved an adjacent building, limiting damage by fire.

Firefighters established a 200m exclusion zone with assistance from the police, and a number of people were evacuated from neighbouring businesses. Quick action by firefighters in a potentially dangerous situation helped prevent any explosion. There were no injuries have been reported. A large media presence in the air and on the ground was managed by the FRNSW media team with regular updates given by Supt Tom Cooper.

END

Newtown



31 AUG 11:52

Crews were called to a service station on King St, Newtown just after midday on Friday 31 August. On arrival they found two large LPG cylinders well alight. A 2nd Alarm was requested given concerns of a boiling liquid expanding vapour explosion (BLEVE) or fire spread to exposure buildings. Firefighters set up water jets to cool adjacent cylinders, and successfully resolved what could have been a very serious incident.



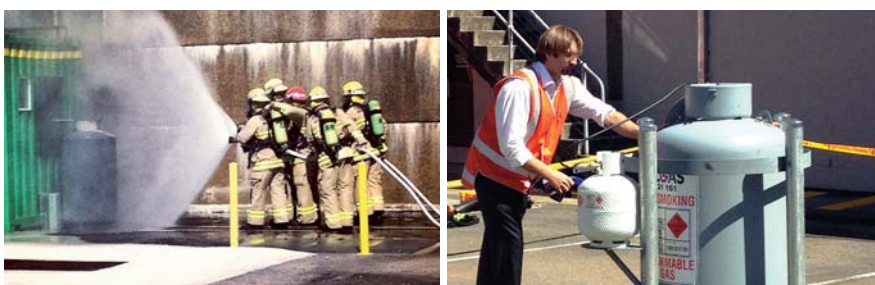
Facebook message

SS:

Walked passed a guy two days ago filling a bottle and said "Gee, where are your gloves?"... He was like "ohh I can't be bothered with them, it's too hard!". I thought to myself, once you get a gas burn you won't be so blasé about, it will you!



Educating the public about gas safety



Two LPG cylinder fires at service stations in late August prompted FRNSW to team-up with WorkCover to educate the public about gas safety.

FRNSW crews showed off their gas firefighting skills in Alexandria in October, gaining widespread media attention and ensuring coverage of our safety message.

Commissioner Greg Mullins said firefighters had responded to 64 barbecue fires and 67 leaking or damaged LPG cylinders and hoses from June to September, the majority of which were BBQ cylinders.

"In the five years to June 2011, there have been 782 claims for incidents involving gas cylinders," Commissioner Mullins said.

He reminded the public not to use cylinders that are damaged or corroded, not to use cylinders with damaged attachments or leaking hoses, and to decant a safe distance from fuel dispensers, flammable materials, tanks containing dangerous goods, public places, and building entries and exits.

General Manager of WorkCover's Work Health and Safety Division, John Watson, said the service station fires at Newtown and Hoxton Park were the result of unsafe practices when decanting LPG into smaller cylinders, such as those used in barbecues.

He reminded the public that LPG cylinders should be "earthed" while being filled, by placing them on the ground to limit the risk of static electricity build from the flow of gas.

Crews from 5 Newtown, 10 Redfern, 28 Marrickville, and 18 Glebe (pumper and aerial) and 13 Alexandria (Hazmat) were commended for an excellent job.

A 200m exclusion zone closed busy King St for a short period, but firefighters were able to send a stop message at 1630 hrs. **END**

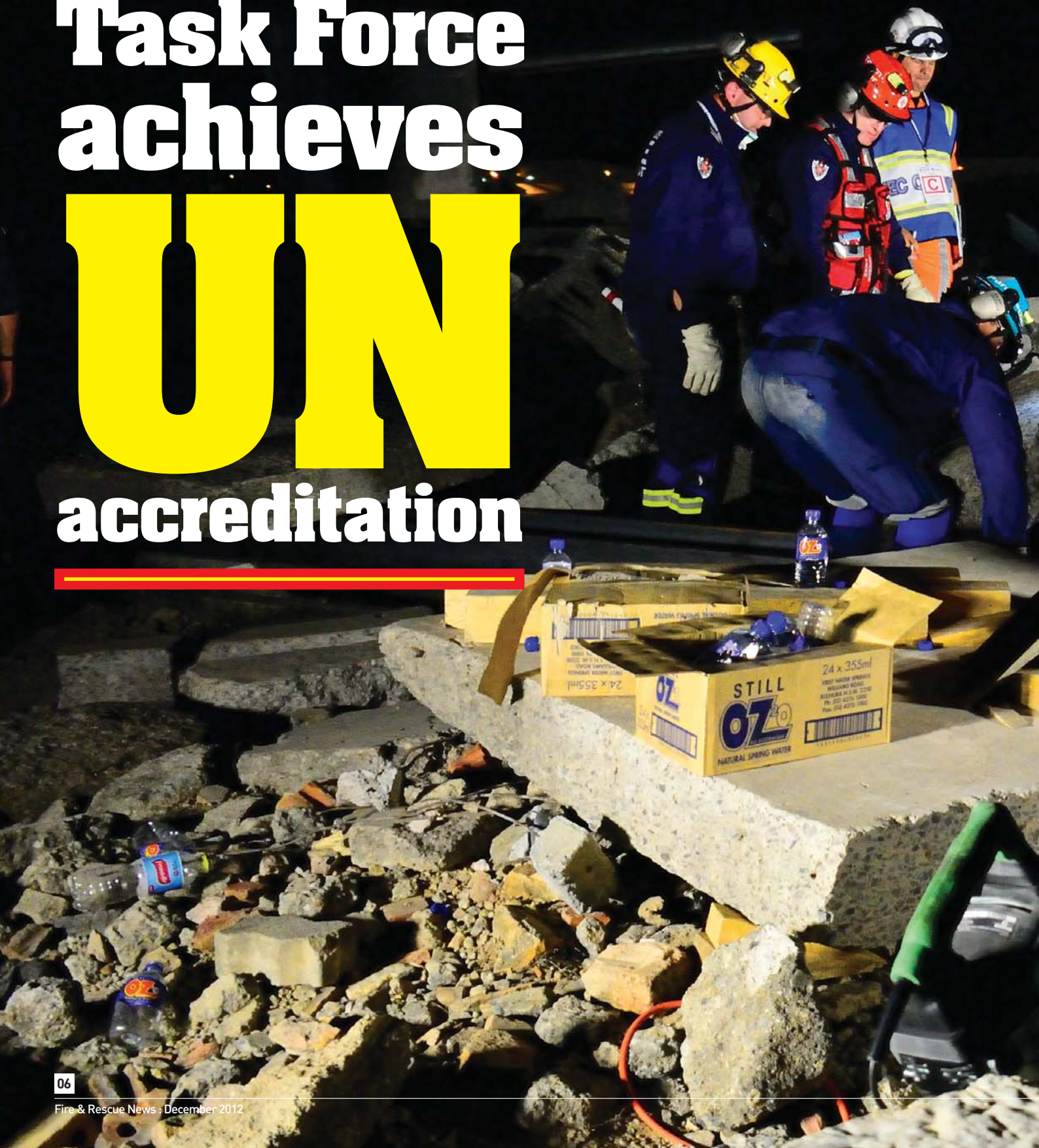
USAR

Task Force

achieves

UN

accreditation





The NSW Heavy Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) Task Force was put through its paces to gain international accreditation.

The skills and expertise of the NSW Task Force, which is led by FRNSW, are well-recognised and respected around the world.

In September, it undertook the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) External Classification (IEC) exercise.

Many members of the NSW Task Force have deployed to humanitarian crises, both in Australia and overseas.

Most recently, the Task Force were deployed twice to New Zealand following the earthquake in Christchurch in February 2011, and then to Japan following the earthquake and tsunami in March of the same year. Prior to that, elements of a Task Force had deployed to Queensland following the devastating floods.

The external classification process is set and administered by the United Nations. An internationally-recognised accreditation, it consists of a voluntary, independent peer-reviewed assessment of international USAR teams.

The planning and preparation

FRNSW's road to the IEC exercise began in 1998 when the first Category 2 USAR course was conducted. Since then, FRNSW has created one of the best structural collapse rescue training programs in the world and has developed a reputation as a world leader in the field.

FRNSW has had a long association with the INSARAG community, with specialists from our rescue section attending exercises as both classifiers and observers. FRNSW maintains three classifiers – all accredited with the

United Nations – who have assessed 12 classification exercises in the last three years.

In the 12 to 18 months leading up to NSW's classification exercise, representatives from FRNSW and other agencies travelled to countries including Spain, Germany, Finland, South Korea, Japan, Oman and the USA to observe these nations as they worked through the IEC checklist. Such international engagement was invaluable to the NSW

Task Force as we prepared for our own classification exercise.

Months of planning and preparation were required for the 2012 IEC exercise.

A multi-agency working group was established in mid-2011, which included representatives from FRNSW, the SES, Ambulance Service of NSW, NSW Police, NSW

Public Works (engineers), AusAID and the Federal Attorney General's Department (Emergency Management Australia).

ExCon

Over a series of 16 meetings, the working group, in particular Exercise Control (ExCon), worked through a range of challenges and issues from developing deployment management plans and a portfolio of evidence, which was submitted to INSARAG, through to identifying and building the prop to be used for the exercise, and management of the cache.

Supt Brian Smart, Manager Rescue, said the members of the Task Force took part in several training courses and exercises in the lead up to the IEC exercise in September 2012. →

International engagement was invaluable to prepare for the classification exercise



"In the 18 months prior to the IEC exercise, we conducted four Category 2 USAR courses," he said.

"The Australian Defence Force plays a key role in USAR deployments with the Task Force and cache generally transported by military aircraft into a disaster zone. We worked with the Australian Defence Force at the Richmond Air Force Base on several occasions undertaking trial deployments, including a full 72-person load exercise in July 2012.

"We also ran multiple 48-hour exercises in the lead up to the IEC exercise and Task Force members undertook a range of specialist training courses.

"All of this ensured that the Task Force was fully prepared and equipped for the IEC exercise."

The site selected for the IEC exercise was the Queensland Combined Emergency Services Academy located on Whyte Island in Brisbane. This state-of-the-art facility includes a purpose-built USAR prop, which can be manipulated to suit a range of complex scenarios.

A team of fire officers, including a number of the FRNSW USAR instructors, spent more than five weeks in Brisbane, working with the Queensland Fire & Rescue Service (QFRS) during a USAR exercise, familiarising themselves with the prop, and then working on the prop to prepare it for the IEC exercise. It was a huge asset to the project team to use the facility in Queensland and to work with USAR specialists from QFRS in preparing and planning for the exercise.

It was a huge asset to use the Queensland facility

Canine capability

For the first time, a canine capability was incorporated in to the Task Force. The NSW SES formed the canine unit in 2011. It provides a critical element when attempting to locate potential survivors or victims in collapsed structures, using specially trained canines and handlers.

Four SES canine handlers and their dogs travelled with the Task Force to Brisbane for the exercise, and proved that they will play an integral role in any future responses to disasters both nationally and internationally.

Mentor

A requirement of the IEC is that the Task Force seeking classification must work with a mentor. FRNSW selected Battalion Chief Pat Rohaley from the Los Angeles County Fire Department, who has significant experience in

USAR at the international level. He travelled to NSW on three separate occasions to work with the team and guide its preparations. Pat's experience and knowledge proved invaluable to the NSW Task Force.

The exercise

The exercise was based on the structural collapse of a multi-storey reinforced concrete building, following an earthquake. It simulated and tested every aspect of a full heavy USAR deployment, with the Task Force required to sustain continuous operations over a 36-hour period at two separate locations.

This involved mobilising and deploying the full 72-person multi-agency Task Force, establishing a Base of Operations (BoO), and demonstrating the rotation

of crews whilst managing fatigue. As the 'first arriving team', the Task Force was also required to establish the Onsite Operations and Coordination Centre (OSOCC), which carries out the United Nations function of coordinating the arrival and deployment of other international USAR teams until United Nations representatives arrive in country.

The scenario-based assessments were designed to simulate as closely as possible real life situations. The four rescue teams, lead by SO Tony Waller, SO Chris Sykes, SO Bruce Cameron and SO Clayton Allison, worked through numerous scenarios, all designed to test more than 200 criteria set down by the INSARAG guidelines. The team was rigorously assessed by seven classifiers throughout the exercise to ensure compliance with these guidelines.

The scenarios included a number of complex rescue operations including vertical rescue and confined space operations, as well as breaching and breaking materials in order to recover victims from rubble. In one scenario, this involved removing 20 tonnes of concrete from a car.



The outcome

After a gruelling 36 hours, the Task Force was able to pack up and head home, while key stakeholders, including Commissioner Greg Mullins, met with the classifiers to hear the outcome of the exercise.

Following a thorough evaluation, the IEC team unanimously decided that the NSW Task Force had demonstrated all of the requirements of an INSARAG Heavy Rescue Team and recommended that the INSARAG secretariat register the team as an international Heavy USAR team. Success!

Overall, the classifiers were extremely impressed with the professionalism and skill of the Task Force. The Chinese classifier, Dr Peng Bibo, who specialises in the medical component of the assessment, quipped to Commissioner Mullins that he had "no work to do" because the Task Force was performing so well.

The assessors were also very impressed with the deployment management plan and aspects of the mobilisation process, in particular the mobilisation card which was developed by one of the current USAR instructors, SO Russell Turner, to streamline the reception and processing of Task Force members prior to deployment. A number of the overseas and interstate visitors at the exercise commented on how successful the card was and expressed interest in implementing a similar system for their own mobilization process.

Commissioner Mullins said he was very proud of everyone involved in this project.

"So many people have contributed to the NSW Task Force successfully

achieving accreditation with the United Nations, especially Chief Superintendent John Denny and Superintendent Warwick Kidd, who have provided vision and drive in developing our USAR capabilities for more than a decade," he said.

"This accreditation is a major achievement for both NSW and Australia, confirming that both Queensland, which achieved classification in 2008, and NSW are amongst the most highly trained and best equipped USAR Task Forces in the world."

In practical terms, achieving the United Nations accreditation means that disaster-affected countries accepting assistance from the NSW Task Force can be confident that the Task Force can and will accept and accomplish any tasks assigned to it.

Where to from here?

Despite successfully undertaking the IEC exercise and achieving accreditation with the United Nations, plans are already being put in place for the ongoing development and enhancement of NSW's USAR capabilities.

In five years time (2017) the NSW Task Force will be required to undertake a reclassification exercise. Between now and then, the NSW Task Force will have to ensure areas earmarked for improvement by the IEC classifiers, for example greater integration of the canine and technical search capabilities, have been properly addressed, and the team will continue to look for new and improved practices.

The multi-agency working group will continue to meet to ensure ongoing coordination between the agencies, in the lead-up to reclassification exercise. **END**

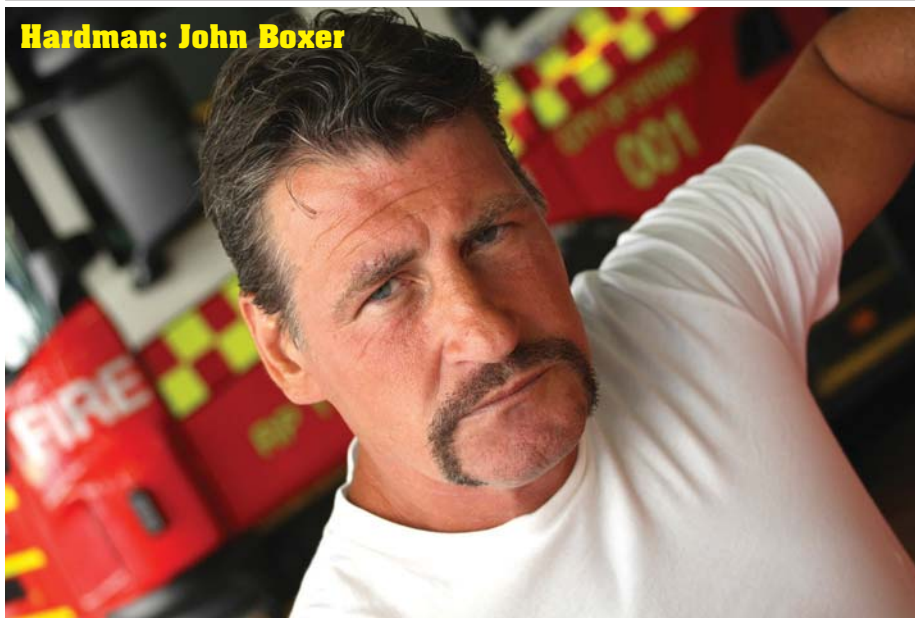
One scenario involved removing 20 tonnes of concrete from a car

Highly skilled team

The 72-person Task Force is a highly skilled team comprised mainly of specially trained firefighters from FRNSW. Their specialist rescue skills are complemented by people from the NSW Police Force, NSW State Emergency Service, Ambulance Service of NSW, NSW Health, Engineers from NSW Public Works and representatives from the Australian Government agencies AusAid and Emergency Management Australia.

The Task Force is supported by sophisticated logistics support infrastructure that enables the team to be self-sustaining for 10 days. The Task Force Team Leader, a highly trained FRNSW senior officer, is responsible for all facets of Task Force operations.

The Task Force is broken into four multi-agency operational teams, supported by specialists such as doctors, paramedics and engineers. This enables the Task Force to sustain 24-hour operations over the course of the deployment.



Hardman: John Boxer



Chaplains Lyndsay and Dawn Smith



SF Mark Dobson, Wellbeing Co-ordinator

Look after yourself

Firefighters are champions when it comes to looking after their fellow crew members and their equipment, but they often neglect to look after themselves.

This is especially true when it comes to mental health, according to Senior Firefighter Mark Dobson, the Wellbeing Co-ordinator.

"Firefighters often think they're bullet-proof," SF Dobson said.

"They can be reluctant to ask for help for mental health problems because they think it might affect their work, or that their peers will think less of them."

"But in all the cases I've seen, their peers have been very supportive. They won't judge you."

Hardman

John Boxer plays Bobo in *Fat Pizza*, and more recently a hardman in the soon to be released *The Great Gatsby*. He came to City of Sydney Fire Station in October to spread a simple message: it doesn't matter if you're the roughest or toughest, we all need help.

Most people will have a mental health problem at some point in their lives. At any one time, 20% of the population is living with a mental health problem. Anxiety and depression are the most common. Substance abuse causes problems and makes it harder to deal with other difficulties.

"It felt like a weight had been lifted"

Firefighters have the same stresses that can affect the general population, including financial worries or family difficulties. But as first responders, firefighters can be exposed to potentially dangerous and stressful scenes.

"It can be hard to make that first phone call or have that first conversation if you're having difficulties," SF Dobson said.

"But the most common thing I hear is, 'why the hell didn't I call earlier'."

"One guy told me it felt like a weight had been lifted."

The Critical Incident Support Program was established in 1990 as a contact for

Common signs of mental health difficulties

Is there a significant difference in the way one of your mates is behaving lately?

- much more agitated than usual
- having more conflicts with other people
- usually quiet, but lately much more rowdy; or
- usually rowdy, but now much more withdrawn

It's time for you to speak to a Peer Support Team member, a chaplain, counsellor or GP if you:

- have a feeling of constantly being overwhelmed
- feel like you're much more short-tempered with everyone
- have difficulty keeping your mind on the job at hand

staff who are affected by a particular incident or an accumulation of incidents. This team of volunteers may also provide support by attending critical incidents such as the Quakers Hill Nursing Home fire and have been sent on USAR deployments.

However over the past two years the focus shifted to be more proactive.

The 50 firefighters who are peer support team members each visit four stations a year to promote the program, so firefighters know they can get help.

"We're hoping to de-stigmatise mental health," SF Dobson said.

"If you had a leg injury, you would do something about it. It's just the same for your mental health." **END**

A firefighter speaks:

'My battle with depression'

A firefighter* won his battle with depression. These are his words.

I never thought that I'd be a candidate for depression and anxiety. Firefighters are strong and resilient and tough. They don't break down.

At least that's what I thought during many years of service.

I got to the point that where I couldn't cope with my job anymore. I hated going to work. I was anxious at work and I would be upset on the way home. I wasn't sleeping and was tired all the time.

I was short tempered and aggressive with my wife and kids, although I didn't realise it at the time. I became withdrawn at home.

At work, I hid behind a façade of humour. One incident was the straw that broke the camel's back. I lost it. I couldn't cope anymore.

I was advised to see the BMO, who referred me to a psychologist.

It was the best thing that could have happened to me.

I went to my GP and was referred to a psychiatrist. My psychiatrist prescribed medication and continued sessions with the psychologist.

At first I had sessions with the psychologist every week. We covered my reactions to the events that had led me down the path of depression. The sessions were difficult – it's hard to admit your feelings and weaknesses.

I felt that I had failed my family, that I was not the person that I thought I was, that I had over-reacted to the events. I questioned everything I believed about myself.

My psychologist helped me look at things from a different angle and look for evidence that challenged my negative thoughts.

I no longer see my psychiatrist or psychologist and am no longer on medication

My wife and kids have noticed a huge improvement in me. I feel better in myself. I still have days when I'm down, but they are far outnumbered by the good days.

I have also learnt a few things along the way to getting better, and that's part of the reason I'm writing this.

There are people within the organisation that care. The staff in Health and Safety Branch are there to support and help.

If you don't connect with your psychologist or psychiatrist after a couple of sessions, ask to be referred to someone else.

You have to trust and be comfortable with the people that are helping you. It was the third psychologist that I ended up being comfortable with and who assisted me to get back on track.

Don't be afraid to ask for help. Depression effects not only you but the people around you.

If you aren't comfortable in dealing with people within FRNSW, seek help outside. There are many good organisations that can help. Your GP can set you up with a mental health plan, the Black Dog Institute has heaps of on-line resources and there are plenty of phone services available.

I never thought FRNSW wanted to get rid of me, I just wasn't comfortable asking for help.

**Name withheld. Interactions with the peer support team remain confidential.*

"My wife and kids have noticed a huge improvement in me."

What's available

All calls and appointments are completely confidential.

- 1 Peer Support Team**
This team offers help to employees who are affected by individual traumatic incidents or a cumulative effect over their career, as well as support for general mental health issues. A list of the peers can be found in the phone directory on the Intranet under phone directory lists.
- 2 Employee Assistance Program**
A service funded by FRNSW, it will connect you to a counsellor. It's confidential and solution-focused. It is available for all FRNSW employees and their immediate family members. Call 1300 360 364.
- 3 Your GP**
Ask for a referral to a psychologist. Medicare will pay for 12 sessions a year, and FRNSW will cover the gap between the counsellor's fee and the Medicare rebate.
- 4 Manager Assist Program**
A service through our EAP provider. Advises managers how to deal with someone with a mental health problem or assists when having to have a difficult conversation with an employee. Don't put off having a conversation with someone who might need help. Call 1300 360 364.
- 5 Chaplains**
Chaplaincy seeks to provide emotional support and care to all employees and their families during times of stress and major life events. Whether the issues relate to work, to home, to relationships or health, the Chaplains offer confidential and non-judgemental care and support. Contact Lyndsay Smith on 0418 869 280, Dawn Smith on 0418 268 754, or chaplain@fire.nsw.gov.au.

The average number of cigarette-related fires has halved since the introduction of reduced fire risk cigarettes. But it may be too early to determine the precise cause of the reduction.

Winning the

WAR

**against
cigarette
fires**

For experienced fire investigators, it's a classic scenario that is always tragic for all involved.

A fire victim, often elderly and living alone, falls asleep while smoking, perhaps in the lounge room in front of the TV, or while lying in bed.

A smouldering cigarette drops onto carpet or furnishings, and slowly ignites a fire that engulfs the room. The victim, impeded by alcohol or medication, or just gradually anaesthetised by the smoke, never wakes up.

The introduction of reduced fire-risk cigarettes, a national initiative of FRNSW, will hopefully make this scenario less likely to occur from now on.

FRNSW strongly advocated for the introduction of cigarettes that are designed to self-extinguish if the smoker does not draw on them. All state and

territory governments, fire services and a number of consumer groups subsequently supported the push.

From March 2010, all cigarettes made or imported into Australia had to be reduced fire-risk, with retailers given six months to clear old stock.

Deputy Commissioner Jim Smith recently asked FRNSW's Strategic

Information Unit to analyse trends related to cigarette fires. The report assessed the impact of the special reduced fire cigarettes.

It found that in FRNSW areas, the average number of cigarette related fires-risk fell from 121 to 57 each

month since the introduction of reduced fire-risk cigarettes.

However, with little more than two years of data, it is still too soon to declare that reduced fire-risk cigarettes have had a long-term impact, statistically significant impact on fire trends.

Cigarette-related fires fell from 121 to 57

Dramatic drop

What is more certain is that over a 25 year period, there has been a dramatic 53% drop in cigarette-related fires, from 1,490 in 1987/88 to 716 last financial year.

There are many possible causes for the remarkable decline in cigarette-related fires. Fewer people smoke, and there are regulations forcing mattresses and upholstered furniture to be more resistant to fires. Mandatory smoke alarms and fire prevention programs have also had a big effect, with the possibility that many small fires go unreported.

In time, we will be able to judge more accurately whether reduced fire-risk cigarettes are contributing to the remarkable decline in cigarette related fires. The early data reinforce the intuitive view that this measure will save many lives. **END**

Homebush



SO Scott Dodson briefing the media



**FIRE
INCIDENT**

Firefighters rescue family from balcony after

GAS explosion

29 AUG 23:00

Numerous 000 calls reported an explosion and fire on the balcony of a three-storey unit block in Henley Rd, Homebush shortly before 2300 hours on Wednesday 29 August

A crew from 30 Lidcombe arrived within minutes, followed closely by 16 Concord and 15 Burwood. They found a second-level unit well alight and sent a "Red" message, saying they were evacuating about 150 residents from the block and required additional crews to assist. Firefighters quickly brought the fire under control.

Firefighters also rescued a family of five, including a two-year-old child and an elderly woman, who were stranded on a balcony due to the smoke-logged stairwell.

Ambulance paramedics assessed the family before they were transported to hospital as a precaution.

The explosion and resulting fire were believed to have been caused by

gas leaking from a deteriorated gas line on a barbecue.

It appeared the gas had leaked out and was ignited by an electrical spark from the split-system airconditioning unit on the balcony, resulting in an explosion and fire.

The barbecue hadn't been used for several months and the cylinder had not been turned off.

Fortunately no-one was injured during this incident, but it emphasised the need to remind householders to check their barbecues, especially during the warmer months.

The incident received wide media coverage with SO Scott Dodson speaking to the media at the scene and raising awareness of LPG safety.

END

Fire vehicle repairer

Evan Holborow



It takes a certain level of devotion to be a FRNSW fire vehicle repairer.

Far from being tucked away in the Greenacre workshop, repairers such as Evan Holborow are on the front line of service provision.

If a fire appliance is ever struck by mechanical difficulties during an incident, urgent repairs can be crucial.

At a factory fire at Marrickville in early 2012, Evan was called to fix an appliance with a broken cooling pump. A quick repair got the appliance up and running so it could be used to help put out the fire.

He was once called to repair an appliance at a fire in Guildford, where a welder's oxy acetylene bottles had caught alight.

The appliance had blown an air hose and had become a sitting duck, while the bottles threatened to explode and possibly throw shrapnel towards the truck. The urgent repairs helped firefighters douse the flames and avoid an explosion.

The repairers undertake maintenance on all the FRNSW Fleet including all fire appliances and other specialist equipment including fire pumps, ladder trucks, and special All Terrain Vehicles used in the snow fields.

There are 20 repairers in the Fleet maintenance section. This is made up of heavy vehicle mechanics, aerial fitters, body builders and specialist auto electricians.

Body builders

The body builders repair all parts of a vehicle's body from ladder brackets to doors and cabins. The fire trucks have a lot of specialist custom-made brackets which need very careful attention.

Laptops have become an indispensable tool, allowing the repairers to communicate directly with the computer in the engine of each appliance, diagnosing faults and finding solutions.

While not every repair is urgent, the repairers are still conscious that a timely turn-around will put an appliance back in service, taking pressure off the service exchange vehicle fleet.

"It's satisfying to get a truck back on the road and able to provide emergency

services, otherwise the next-closest truck might be ten minutes away," Evan said.

The repairers are rostered round-the-clock for on-call duties to fix appliances that could be struck by mechanical difficulties anywhere in the Greater Sydney Area.

"If a truck has broken down at 1am, we're there," Evan said.

"It doesn't matter if it's rain, hail or shine – if a truck is in a gutter with water gushing down, we have to get in there and fix it.

"We strive to go above and beyond to get it back on the road."

In addition to being on the call out roster there are also three lube service vehicles constantly on the road, maintaining appliances in every corner of the State.

Evan enjoys the change of scenery when he travels, but still misses his family.

Passion for engines

He joined FRNSW six years ago, after qualifying as a diesel mechanic at tech and spending 10 years in the private sector.

"I've always had a passion for anything with an engine in it, and I love using my hands," Evan said.

"I like Fire & Rescue – you get more variety, more responsibility and opportunity than in the private sector, where you're just working on the same site every day." **END**

If a truck is in a gutter with water gushing down, we get in there and fix it.





Passengers rescued from **monorail**

24 SEP 14:00

A power outage in part of the CBD stranded people on the monorail in Sydney's CBD on Monday 24 September.

Shortly after 1400 hours, crews responded to calls of people trapped in two sets of cars on the 3.6 kilometre monorail loop.

One of the sets, with about 50 people on board, was stuck on Darling Drive on the western side of Darling Harbour. The other, with 27 people on board, was stuck at the intersection of Liverpool and Day streets.

Those trapped included children. The power outage also meant air-conditioning wasn't operating,

leading to concerns of rising temperature inside the cars.

FRNSW responded aerial appliances from City of Sydney, Glebe and Darlinghurst, and the Police Rescue Squad also responded.

Firefighters used aerials to reach the stranded monorail cars where they forced the doors open, allowing Ambulance paramedics to enter and check the condition of those inside. Firefighters then progressively evacuated people to safety.

Ambulance paramedics assessed around 30 people for heat-related dehydration. Power was eventually

restored to the surrounding area including the monorail at 4.45pm.

Firefighters had previously carried out regular drills rehearsing procedures required for dealing with such an eventuality. The incident highlighted the value of such exercises, enabling the evacuations to proceed efficiently.

The aerial platforms – some of which were purchased with monorail operations firmly in mind – were key to the effective and co-ordinated rescue. **END**

Major WIN for fire safety



Putting new sprinkler systems into established nursing homes is a very expensive job.

FRNSW has been instrumental in working with the industry and other NSW Government agencies to develop policy and legislation that will save lives.

Retrofitting sprinkler systems was estimated to cost about \$5,570 per bed, based on the bills for past fit-outs. That adds up to about \$172 million for the whole industry.

The NSW Government was understandably cautious about forcing a large extra cost on nursing homes, especially community-based facilities that typically have little cash to spare.

Nursing homes would have to pass on the costs to the elderly and their families, or if that were not possible, they might have to close facilities, which could make it difficult for the elderly to find proper care.

Legwork

In a textbook example of how to achieve a major positive reform, FRNSW contributed to a strong policy proposal that helped convince all stakeholders that the reform would be worthwhile.

First, it had to be established how many nursing homes would need sprinklers.

Current legislation requires Class 9c nursing homes built since 2002 to have sprinklers, but nobody knew how many of the older nursing homes did not have them.

Local firefighters did the legwork

and visited 86% of nursing homes across NSW, checking whether sprinkler systems were present for a

55% did not have sprinklers

NSW Government survey.

Out of the 888 Commonwealth-accredited aged-care facilities, a disturbing 55% did not have sprinklers.

But would sprinklers actually make a difference?

The FRNSW Fire Investigation and Research Unit (FIRU) conducted crucial research the effectiveness of sprinklers (see 'Research yields results for FIRU', p23).

Their test-burns in January 2012 in full-scale replicas of the nursing home rooms showed most, if not all, occupants would have survived if the rooms had had sprinklers.

With no sprinklers, temperatures reached 1167 degrees Celsius.

But with sprinklers, temperatures reached a maximum of 75 degrees at

ceiling level, and less on the ground. The sprinklers activated after 4 minutes and 40 seconds and brought the fire under control within a further 30 seconds.

Backed by the solid scientific research, FRNSW

was able to confidently advise that sprinklers would have activated soon after the smoke alarm. The sprinklers would almost certainly contain the fire, significantly reducing the temperature of the smoke.

Temperatures reached 1167 C

Industry support

However, one crucial factor was still needed: industry support.

Unless there was wide support among the nursing home providers who would have to implement the changes, the policy

In the room with sprinklers, the fire did not spread beyond the bed



Quakers Hill

How the fire developed

proposal could have failed to take off.

The NSW Government held a forum on 7 February 2012 to consult representatives of the commercial and not-for-profit aged care providers. The Commissioner spoke strongly in support of sprinklers, then showed a video of the research burns. "The pictures did the talking," he said.

The industry broadly supported retrofitting sprinklers as a fire safety measure, but wanted to be given time to implement the change.

The NSW Government then proposed a three-year phase-in, to prevent any shortage of contractors who would have to install sprinklers.

Nursing homes could also apply for extensions of a further year in special circumstances.

The government proposes that nursing homes show on signs out the front and on their websites whether they have installed sprinklers.

This may be more effective in encouraging nursing homes to adopt the change as early as possible, rather than simply rely on the threat of large fines.

END

The Quakers Hill Nursing Home fire on 18 November 2011 resulted in multiple deaths and 32 injuries. The cause of most deaths is likely to have been the inhalation of super-heated smoke.

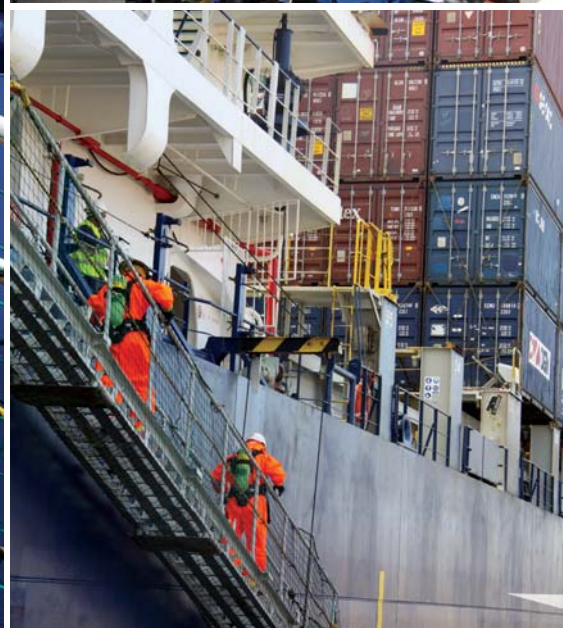
FRNSW was directed to the smaller of two fires and quickly extinguished it, initially unaware of the second fire.

The smoke compartments protected the rest of the building as intended but, over time, confined large amounts of hot toxic smoke from the well-developed second fire, posing an extreme hazard to occupants of that wing.

The conditions made evacuating residents extremely difficult.

Excluding the Quakers Hill fire, there have been at least 27 fatalities in aged care facilities in NSW since 1981 due to nine separate fires. There have been nearly 2000 other fires in aged care facilities over that period, with many non-fatal injuries.

Port Botany



The new heavy hazmat appliance at City of Sydney



Shipping container sent to 'elephant room'

11 SEP 09:00

A major hazmat response was mounted on 11 September when a ship at Port Botany had a container leaking what was believed to be sodium hydroxide. The operation lasted from 0900hrs to 2000hrs and required a total of 21 crews to rotate through the operation. First to arrive on the scene were 56 Matraville and the Heavy Hazmat from 13 Alexandria. Upon arrival of the Duty Commander from Georges River the incident was upgraded to a 3rd Alarm.

The spill area on the ship was neutralised. Initial tests on the liquid, including the PH level, were inconclusive.

The leaking container was placed on a spill truck and moved to the port's so-called "elephant room", which is large enough to accommodate a shipping container and contain any leaks. The container was safely opened and investigated.

END

New vehicles

Station	Zone	Subclass	Class	Configuration	Make	Model	Style	Commissioned
Nelson Bay	MN3	Class 3	Pumper	Pri-Res	Scania	P320	4000LPM-SEM	27/09/12
Neutral Bay	ME2	Class 3	Pumper	Std	Scania	P320	4000LPM-SEM	17/09/12
Bondi	ME1	Class 3	Pumper	Std	Scania	P320	4000LPM-SEM	31/08/12
Kogarah	MS2	Class 3	Pumper	Std	Scania	P320	4000LPM-SEM	21/08/12
Randwick	MS2	Class 3	Pumper	Std	Scania	P320	4000LPM-SEM	31/07/12
Lane Cove	ME2	Class 3	Pumper	Std	Scania	P320	4000LPM-SEM	31/07/12
Batemans Bay	RS1	Class 3	Pumper	Pri-Res	Scania	P320	4000LPM-SEM	25/07/12
Cessnock	MN3	Class 3	Pumper	RAR	Scania	P320	4000LPM-SEM	23/07/12
Maitland	MN3	Class 3	Pumper	Std	Scania	P320	4000LPM-SEM	23/07/12
Counter Terrorism	DS0	Hazmat	Special	Scientific	Mercedes	416 CDI MWB	Scientific	2/08/12
Revesby	ME3	Pumper	Aerial	RAR	Scania	P340	Telesqurt 15M	9/08/12
Penrith	MW1	Pumper	Aerial	Std	Scania	P360	Telesqurt 15M	18/05/12
Huntingwood	MW1	Pumper	Aerial	RAR	Scania	P340	Telesqurt 15M	20/02/12



A CFU volunteer

Diverse country finds common ground

The joint AFAC/Bushfire CRC Conference had a good mix of speakers for both urban and rural firefighters.

Delivered under the theme *Diverse Country. Common Ground*, the conference last August had more than 90 sessions.

One of the keynote speakers, demographer Bernard Salt from accounting firm KPMG, pointed to the large number of baby boomers reaching retirement age.

Many of these boomers will want to volunteer, and Mr Salt discussed some of the best ways to make use of the group.

Key issues addressed at the conference included the drivers shaping emergency management, how diversity and resilience shape community expectations, the risks in different environments, and the importance of leadership and accountability in incident management.

Managing complex incidents

FRNSW Commissioner Greg Mullins chaired a session on the interdisciplinary approach to managing complex incidents.

In a crisis, it can be more effective to work across the usual boundaries of jurisdiction and professional disciplines.

Commissioner Mullins introduced Arlington County Fire Department Fire Chief, James Schwartz, who used a number of case studies – including the 9/11 attacks on the Pentagon – to illustrate how best to prepare for, and manage, a major crisis response.

FRNSW Assistant Commissioner Mark Brown chaired a panel on good practice in urban firefighting.

Increasing risks in the built environment, and the introduction of new technologies, bring with them new challenges to urban firefighting.

Flashover in three minutes

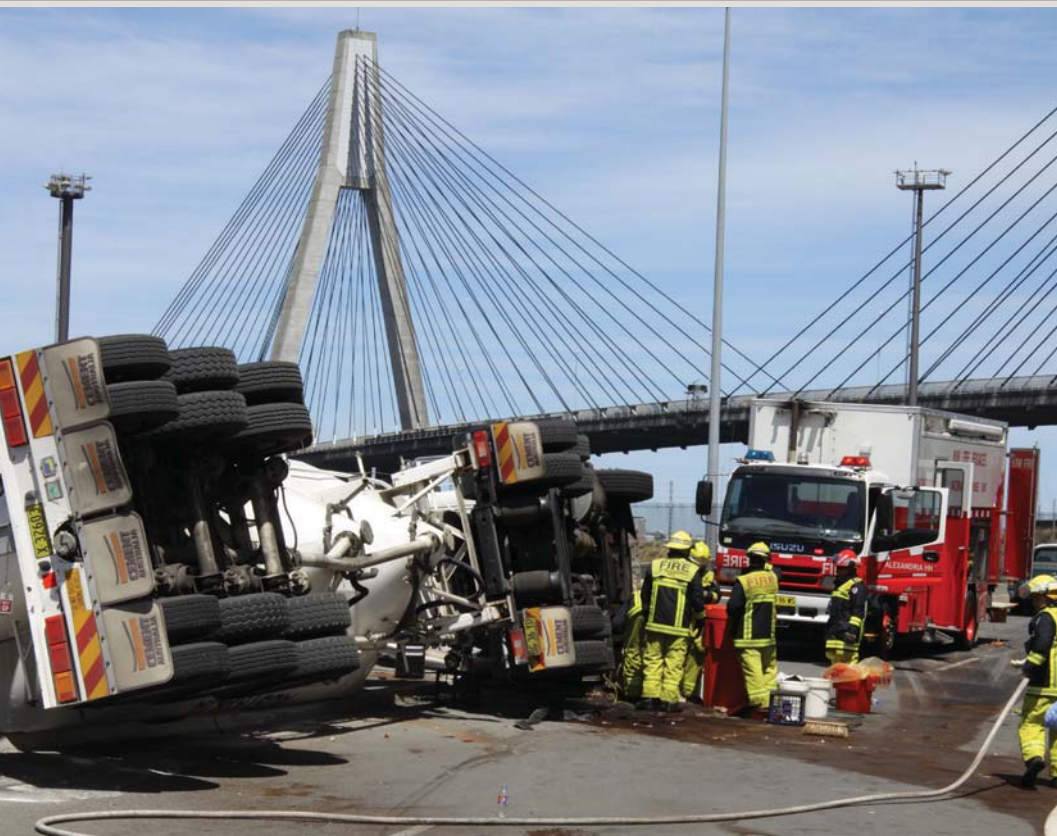
“Fires will develop more rapidly in structures due to modern furnishings and linings that can lead to flashover in residential structures in two to three minutes, rather than the seven to 10 minutes experienced in the 1980s,” Assistant Commissioner Brown said.

The first speaker on the panel was FRNSW Station Officer Morgan Cook from the FIRU, who delivered a paper on the “Build It and Burn It” fire research (see article below).

Also at the conference, Inspector Nick Ferrante spoke on the Blue Card Incident Management Training System, and Assistant Commissioner Brown delivered a paper on implementing our new Operational Capability System (see articles following).

Assistant Commissioner Brown also introduced two speakers from Western Australia’s Fire & Emergency Services Authority (FESA): Stephen Johnston, who spoke about the challenges posed by alternative power sources such as solar power systems and new electrical industry procedures, and Murray Bawden, who spoke about the fire dangers of scrap metal yards after FESA experienced a number of significant deep-seated fires in “enormous” scrap metal piles. **END**

Case studies included the 9/11 attacks on the Pentagon



Training with foam

Assistant Commissioner Mark Brown

Operational Capability meets the challenges of a complex working environment

Assistant Commissioner Mark Brown delivered a paper about the complexities of implementing a new Operational Capability System.

“There are significant challenges in developing and managing new operational capabilities, such as reptile handling or swift water rescues,” said Assistant Commissioner Brown, FRNSW Director of Operational Capability.

“At the same time, our core business of fighting fires is changing, because there are changing risks in the built environment and the introduction of new technologies.”

Swift water rescue

The issue of swift water rescues provides a good illustration of some of the issues faced when developing, implementing and maintaining a new or indeed an existing, operational capability.

Many questions inevitably arise. For example, should FRNSW perform these rescues? What equipment, training, organisational structure, and information flows do we need to deploy crews to safely and effectively rescue people from fast-moving flood waters?

For years, firefighters had performed swift water rescues. However, the Queensland floods of January 2011 allowed FRNSW to gain a much better understanding of some of the risks involved in the task.

Swift water rescues require specialised equipment, and the equipment should be checked regularly.

There should be documented procedures on the best way to perform rescues. A risk assessment would allow the organisation to weigh-up the dangers, and find ways to improve the safety of all concerned.

Inputs

Operational capability is made up of an organisation’s personnel, its structure, training, equipment, facilities, support, information used for decision making, and ‘doctrine’ such as the Standard Operational Guidelines.

All of these inputs need to be managed across their lifecycle.

Once you identify what services must be delivered, you can specify the operational requirements. You can then implement the capabilities, manage, and eventually withdraw and dispose of them if required.

Major shift in the way we will do business

“This approach represents a major shift in the way that we will do business and has application to fire and emergency services throughout

Australasia,” Assistant Commissioner Brown said.

“Whether it’s a rapid response to a structure fire or working alongside the Rural Fire Service for many weeks during a campaign event, our ‘operational capability’ is our ability to deliver services within specified time frames, and then sustain that service delivery for the time required.” **END**

Training the trainers

What's the best way to train fire officers in incident management?

For the past two years, FRNSW has been trialling the Blue Card Incident Management training system, which was developed by the Phoenix Fire Department in the US.

Blue Card incorporates a 50 hour online theory course followed by three full days of practical simulation training to teach Incident Controllers how to effectively manage the huge amount of confusing information at an emergency incident while maintaining a strong focus on safety.

Inspector Nick Ferrante managed the evaluation and delivered a paper on the experience.

Human factors

He explained how the training system focuses on the human factors of incident management. It applies some of the

methods used to train surgical teams and aviation crews — rather than simply stating how to do something, Blue Card aims to capture and correct the inevitable errors that sneak in when a person is at the very edge of their cognitive capacity.

The system incorporates the key principles of the Australian Inter-Service Incident Management System (AIIMS), but the training in a simulated environment is focused on the urban environment, and in particular, on structure fires.

“You can't learn to swim by swinging your arms in a classroom,” Insp Ferrante said.

“With Incident Management, you really need a simulated environment that offers the same challenges and chances for error as the real thing.”

Insp Ferrante's key findings had important lessons for the early stages of an incident.

“Without compulsory staging, the first Incident Controller will become quickly overwhelmed with the complexity of managing incoming resources,” he said.

The Commissioner, who originally introduced ICS based on the Phoenix Fire Department “Fire Command” system back in

1995, has approved extension of the Blue Card trial in 2013. **END**

You can't learn to swim by swinging your arms in a classroom



A typical page from the BlueCard online course



FIRU

research yields results for the community

The FIRU 'build it, burn it' method yielded important results for the community after the Quakers Hill nursing home tragedy.

When the predecessor of the Fire Investigation and Research Unit (FIRU) was born 25 years ago, researchers were mostly concerned with arson investigation and the high number of fires with an "undetermined" cause.

Their work was focused mainly on establishing the cause and origin of fires, and training specialist fire investigators.

SO Morgan Cook, a research officer in the FIRU, delivered a presentation explaining how the unit now gives greater priority to fire research, including "Build It and Burn It" projects.

The best example was a project that tested some of the theories that came out of the tragic Quakers Hill Nursing Home fire in November 2011, in which more than 20 elderly people lost their lives.

The researchers reconstructed and ignited four scale models of the rooms involved in the fire.

"The results were beyond what we had hoped," SO Cook said.

In one comparison, identical rooms with identical fuel loads were set alight with identical methods. Only one of the rooms had sprinklers, showing the stark difference the devices could make in a nursing home setting.

That evidence, along with other research and experience, allowed the

FRNSW Commissioner to strongly advocate to the State Government that sprinklers should be made mandatory in all aged care facilities in NSW.

Major reform

In a major policy reform, the government decided to accept and implement the advice, with the Planning Minister Brad Hazzard specifically referring to the graphic evidence provided by Fire & Rescue NSW.

While sprinklers have been used for the past 130 years, they have been installed mainly in mills, factories, warehouses and department stores.

"Traditionally, sprinklers and compartmentation were aimed more at property protection," SO Cook said.

"To protect life, we rely on smoke detection and early warning, with appropriate egress.

"But what about vulnerable groups like the disabled and elderly in a variety of residential care settings, who simply can't evacuate without assistance?"

"With an ageing population, it is important to look at the role sprinklers can play as part of the 'life-safety' package."

SO Cook was recently awarded a Churchill Fellowship, which will enable him to study and learn from fire research organisations overseas. ■ END





Building codes

SAVE

lives

The Structural Fire Safety Unit (SFSU) works on the front line to ensure major new developments will be safe for firefighters and occupants.

Last September, a fire in a textile factory in Karachi provided a horrific reminder of the importance of building codes.

There were few fire exits, and most of them were locked or barred. As a result, 289 workers perished in the smoke and flames.

Australia's building codes have been shaped by years of experience from some of the worst fires in history.

There were major reforms after the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in New York in 1911, which killed more than 141 people. More recently, the Quakers Hill Nursing Home fire in November 2011 led to legislative reforms that made sprinklers mandatory in all nursing homes (see 'Major win for fire safety', page 16).

FRNSW's Structural Fire Safety Unit (SFSU) works on the frontline to ensure major new developments will be designed with occupant's and firefighter's safety in mind.

This includes ensuring the building is provided with appropriate fire safety systems, such as early fire detection and notification, and measures to minimise the chance of any fires spreading.

Modelling works

Analysing building plans, the fire and structural engineers use sophisticated computer models to predict how a real fire would behave.

This needs to be undertaken by suitably qualified people and involves a number of assumptions or judgements. SFSU is involved as a stakeholder in this process and aims to ensure this is undertaken appropriately.

"Hot smoke" tests can also be performed during the commissioning phase of a building to verify the interfacing and operation of fire safety systems such as smoke detection systems and smoke hazard management systems.

These tests use a pre-determined number of trays containing burning

liquids which provides buoyancy to a theatrical smoke that is entrained in the heat plume.

Superintendent Chris Jurgeit, manager of the SFSU, said their models also take into account the "characteristics" of the building occupants, such as whether any could be elderly or use a wheelchair.

"We spend a lot of time calculating how long it would take before the smoke begins to affect people," Supt Jurgeit said.

"Then we look at how long it would take people to safely evacuate.

"That's the big question – would the occupants have enough time to get out of the building before the fire begins to affect them?"

"We always adopt a conservative approach which recognises that sometimes things don't work as designed."

Using computer modelling, fire engineers can also determine why a particular fire became such an extreme event.



Images Courtesy Barangaroo Development Authority



Artist's impression of the three main towers



This method was valuable when investigating the fire in the Bankstown high-rise apartment building. Two young women had jumped from a fifth-floor window to escape the extreme heat, but tragically only one survived.

Computer modelling was also used after the Childers Backpacker fire in Queensland.

The estimates of evacuation times take into account changes in the average size of Australians over past decades (called Anthropometry), which has affected how quickly a group of say 20 people can pass through an exit doorway to a place of relative safety.

Superintendent Jurgeit said every building is different, and each may require a different solution to the problems of fire safety.

It would be easy to insist that every building adopt the same fire-safety measures. But depending on the design of the building, many of these measures would be completely unnecessary – such as a smoke exhaust fan in an area with an open roof.

Five megawatts of radiant heat is equivalent to standing close to 2000 radiators.

“We can provide an exemption from a fire safety feature if it doesn’t improve the building’s fire safety and would just be an unnecessary expense, both to provide, and to maintain,” Supt Jurgeit said.

“The deletion of sprinklers in a large building used to manufacture concrete products would in most cases be supported, provided other supporting fire safety features (such as suitable perimeter vehicular access) are included in the design.

“Space is always at a premium on the ground floor of commercial and retail buildings, so there’s always a request to move the fire control rooms and booster pump rooms.

“We try to be flexible, but we’d never allow a change that would endanger firefighters or the building occupants.”

Developers often employ their own building consultant. They need to maximise the profitability of a project, although they may not thoroughly understand the needs of fire safety, or the safety of firefighters when responding to an incident in their development.

“It can be a challenge explaining the dangers of a fire that has five megawatts of radiant heat – the equivalent of standing close to 2000 radiators,” Supt Jurgeit said.

Barangaroo development

The SFSU is currently assessing one of Australia’s biggest projects, the \$6 billion Barangaroo development on the western side of Sydney’s CBD.

The first stage of the development will include three skyscrapers above a podium with carparking beneath it. The first stage also has several medium and low-rise commercial buildings.

“One of the questions was whether we should have a separate booster set for each of the buildings, or a single booster set for all of them,” Supt Jurgeit said.

“We decided to allow a single booster for the site, which could be out of the way and reduce convergence and congestion of appliances during an incident.

“Like many issues in structural fire safety, it was a judgement call. There are pros and cons for each side. In the end, the developer’s engineers reverted to a ‘prescriptive’ solution which had individual booster assemblies.” **END**

A SECOND calling

PROFILE



Senior Firefighter Brian Deans

Comms Centre operators lay it on the line!

As a popular film character once philosophised: “Life is like a box of chocolates – you never know what you’re gonna get”.

It is an adage that easily applies to Fire & Rescue NSW’s Communications Centre operators each time they answer a Triple Zero (000) call. Fires and emergencies of every nature; pleas to rescue beloved pets from precarious positions; or prank calls – call-takers never know what is waiting for them on the other end of the line.

You get 100s of calls for every little grass fire because everyone has a mobile

FRNSW’s call centres have a reputation for professionalism and efficiency. Last financial year nearly 97 per cent of fire emergency calls were answered within 10 seconds, well above the national benchmark of 90 per cent.

Technology plays a vital role in the ability to dispatch the appropriate equipment, appliances and personnel to incidents as quickly as possible. The skills of the 100-plus staff members who are attached to the call centres are equally paramount.

As FRNSW settles in to the new Emergency Services Computer-Aided Dispatch (ESCAD) system, *Fire & Rescue News* caught up with two Communications Centre operators –

a veteran of more than 20 years and a newly-appointed operator – to find out just what it takes to be a fire emergency call-taker.

Sydney Comms – Brian Deans

Senior Firefighter Brian Deans has 22 years’ experience in provincial, regional and Sydney communications and has been through four dispatch system upgrades.

“I joined the NSW Fire Brigades in 1979 and, after five years at three stations, I was looking for a different challenge and one that would broaden my career path,” he said.

“I took up a position at Sydney Communications and, after two years, I applied for a transfer to work in provincial communications at Albury as my family was keen to move down there. The comms were run out of the Albury watchroom and covered from the Albury area south to the border.”

After 8 ½ years at Albury, SFF Deans returned to Sydney where he was stationed at City of Sydney, then Marrickville, before moving to Sydney Communications for two years. He transferred to the Wollongong fire district and, in 2002, moved to the Wollongong Communications Centre before relocating back to Sydney in June this year.

“Every communications centre has its own idiosyncrasies and way of doing things,” he said.

“There are protocols and responses particular to certain incidents and infrastructure that you have to learn –

as well, of course, as learning new operating systems from time to time,” SFF Deans said.

There have always been challenges – both with technology and dealing with the public.

“What you have are highly trained operators working in a tense and challenging environment,” SFF Deans said.

“Back in the mid-80s when the system crashed you wheeled out a white board and took it from there. Technology has come a long way since then. Back then the computer running the system had a 5 megabyte capacity and it was the size of a kitchen.”

The explosion in mobile phone ownership over the years has also had an impact on the workload in emergency services’ communication centres.

“Even up until the mid-90s if there was a grass fire most people would have to wait until they found a public phone or until they got home to ring it in, so you would only get a handful of calls. These days, you can get hundreds of calls for every little grass fire because everyone has a mobile phone.”

While being there to assist members of the public on what can often be the worst day of their lives is one of the appealing aspects of the job, it can also be frustrating and emotionally draining.

“The level of hysteria of the caller can make the job really hard for us. You have to try to settle them down – be a bit like a counsellor. Everything is so time-critical. You have to get the correct information out of them in a timely manner.

The phone calls can be confronting

"Also, members of the public can be quite abusive. They sometimes expect a fire truck to be coming around the corner the minute they make a call and will keep calling until one arrives.

"The fatalities affect you the most, of course, because you aren't there to help or do anything about it. We know someone has died before their family members do and you feel for them and the pain they are about to go through."

Newcastle Comms – Geoff Frith

Qualified Firefighter Geoff Frith transferred to the Newcastle Communications Centre in August this year because he, too, had been looking for a new challenge.

"I had worked at a number of stations – Hurstville, Cabramatta, Macquarie Fields, Liverpool and Crows Nest – and had been on the list for a transfer to Newcastle," he said.

"I am still getting used to things but what I have been really surprised about is how raw it can feel taking a Triple-Zero call.

"When you turn out to a job as a firefighter you feel comfortable because you are in your turn-out gear and you are with your crew.

"When you take a call it is almost like turning up to a job by yourself and it is up to you to get it right.

"I expected it to be intense and for there to be a lot of stress but what has surprised me is how the phone calls can be so confronting.

"It is the gravity of the situation – having to get the correct information as quickly as possible from someone who is distressed or injured.

QFF Frith said what he enjoyed the most about working in the Comms Centre was the team work and "watching the machine in action" when there was a big incident.

"Not long after I started, I had just taken the radios off an experienced guy and there was a 3rd Alarm, then a 5th Alarm and a 6th Alarm, then a house fire and a hazmat incident within an hour and a half.

"You do get an adrenaline rush. It is not like the rush you get with physical action on the fire ground, but a real mental rush."

QFF Frith admits being a call-taker can be frustrating at times when it comes to dealing with some members of the public and "remaining cool" with the system.

"I think some members of the general public think there is a call-taker in every town. They ring up and, when you ask them for a location, they might say something like 'it's where Billy Hicock rolled his car last week' and expect you to know where they are talking about."

"But I understand we are talking to people who are very stressed and panicking. At the end of the day, our job is to help them and that is what we will always do." ■■■ END

Blue Mountains



**FIRE
INCIDENT**

Fatal house fires a tragic reminder

10 AUG 21:00

There were three fatal house fires in the Blue Mountains in just three days from Friday 10 August to Sunday 12 August.

Early on 10 August, fire communications received numerous 000 calls to a house alight at Blaxland. Firefighters from 301 Glenbrook and 102 Regentville A Platoon responded.

On arrival, Regentville crews found a split-level brick and tile house totally involved in fire.

There were reports of two persons unaccounted for and the Station Commander called for a 2nd Alarm.

The Glenbrook crew also arrived and firefighters attacked the fire and conducted a search and rescue under difficult fire conditions.

The fire was extinguished but sadly one deceased person was found in the home.

The second person was not home at the time and was later located safe and well. FIRU and NSW Police Force investigated but the house was so badly damaged that the cause of the fire remains undetermined.

Also on Friday 10 August, crews from 359 Lawson, 495 Wentworth Falls and 361 Leura responded to a house fire at 2100 hours.

The house was well alight when firefighters arrived, and neighbours reported two residents were missing.

While firefighters attacked

the blaze, two crews in breathing apparatus entered the house and conducted a search and rescue in marginal conditions locating two unconscious people.

Firefighters carried them outside and administered first aid until Ambulance paramedics arrived and transported the couple to hospital.

There is little doubt that firefighters saved their lives.

Firefighters also discovered a third person inside the dwelling but sadly they were unable to be revived.

On the morning of Sunday 12 August, firefighters from 301 Glenbrook and 102 Regentville B Platoon were called to another house in Blaxland after a resident returned home to find the windows blackened and the house filled with smoke.

Tragically, a deceased person was also found in the dwelling. Firefighters wearing breathing apparatus ventilated the premises and used a thermal imaging camera to check for any hot spots.

After conducting atmospheric monitoring, firefighters stood by until FIRU had finished the investigation. It appeared that the fire, which started in the kitchen, had self-extinguished due to lack of oxygen in the house.

■■■ END



A cast of **thousands**





The Media Ministerial and Communications Unit (MMCU) has been approached by a UK based production company, on behalf of the Discovery Channel, interested in doing a program about FRNSW.

The key to the success of this program will be firefighters willing to participate and prepared to have a television camera follow them while on shift.

The reach for a program like this is well into the millions," said Assistant Director MMCU Andrew Parsons.

"The audience would primarily be the North Americas, Western Europe and Asian (including Oceania) markets."

The initial concept of the program is to focus on FRNSW's capabilities and reach, as well as technology, the diversity of location and types of work being done by firefighters – both permanent and retained.

"Traditionally, programs like this follow the formula of: get aboard a fire truck and follow the crew," Andrew said.

"This particular concept wants to look more widely at FRNSW as a world class fire and rescue service and the work being done all around NSW. Initial talks revealed the production team are keen to follow firefighters at various stations in various disciplines: HAZMAT, rescue, fire investigators, technical specialists, engineers and radio communications specialists."

The key to the success of this program will be firefighters willing to participate and prepared to have a television camera follow them while on shift.

Discovery wants to see how one of the world's biggest fire services does its job, and does it well

"Discovery has a real niche in their programming," said Andrew – a former television professional whose background includes six years working closely with Seven's multi-Logie award winning program, Border Security, while head of communications for the Immigration Department.

"Their formula relies on: a problem, the intelligence and skill that goes into developing a solution and the character, or characters, who deliver that solution for a positive outcome.

"It would be easy to produce a 'COPS' style show where it's job after job, but Discovery wants to see how one of the world's biggest fire services – covering one of the biggest land masses on earth – does its job, and does it well."

To achieve the best on-screen result, Discovery wants to choose a number

of firefighters (new and long serving) on shift, willing to volunteer their 'on camera talent' as a firefighter, and or expertise as a technical specialist.

"Like in all productions involving our firefighters, FRNSW will have the right to clear the final product before it goes to air and will work closely with the Discovery Channel to ensure firefighters and their capabilities are shown in the most professional and positive way", Andrew said. **END**

What to do next

To assist producers with selecting a suitable on-screen talent, a short 'no frills' video (maximum 3 minutes) can be sent* to MMCU on one of the following formats:

- DVD, mini-DV or on CD-ROM as a .WMV, .MOV or MP4

The aim of this video is not to showcase yourself as the next big thing in Hollywood, it is to give producers an idea of: your experience, specialised skills, your normal station and how you look/sound on camera.

To assist, here are the key questions that the producers would like to know the answers to:

- 1) What is your name?
- 2) How long have you been a firefighter?
- 3) What specialised training do you have as a firefighter?
- 4) Where are you stationed?
- 5) Tell us about where you work (your station), what are the types of jobs you go to, ie. what would be a 'typical day' for you?
- 6) What has been one of the more interesting or challenging jobs you've attended as a firefighter – tell us about it, what did you do?
- 7) Why would you like to be involved in this project?

The final product, including the 'performance' and edit, does not have to win an Oscar. Keep it short, keep it real.

Send your application by Friday 18 January 2013 to:

MMCU – Discovery Project
Level 10, 227 Elizabeth St,
Sydney NSW 2000

Further information:
call (02) 9265 2907
email media@fire.nsw.gov.au

* Submitted media will not be returned, please keep your own copy



Substation fire ignites **50,000** litres of oil

14 OCT 15:00

Albury fire crews could see the smoke while en route to a reported fire at a high-voltage transformer at the Hume Weir on Murray Street, Albury on Sunday 14 October. The pumper and tanker from 206 Albury North and aerial pumper from 203 Albury were first on scene after FRNSW received the call shortly before 1500 hours.

By 1658 hours, power was shut off by Transgrid, who operate the high-voltage power lines, and Eraring Energy who own the hydroelectricity generator. Only then were firefighters able to begin using foam to extinguish the 50,000 litres of burning mineral oil.

Crews were hampered when the bund around the transformer overflowed and threatened

to contaminate the Murray River. Contractors had to pump contaminated liquid from the bund and the RFS then pumped out the clean water.

Firefighters successfully protected nearby exposures, using hand lines to prevent the fire spreading from one transformer, which was well alight, to a nearby transformer which was behind a blast wall.

Two compressed air foam units were despatched from ACT Fire & Rescue in Canberra, but were called off when crews gained control of the fire. 480 Wagga Wagga hazmat van and foam trailer assisted while pumpers from 209 Albury Civic and 268 Corowa provided welcome relief.

Throughout the incident, FRNSW worked closely with the local RFS and the Victorian CFA which sent 4 pumpers

to assist. The CFA Chief Officer, Euan Ferguson, was in Wodonga and attended the fire to speak to crews. He rang Commissioner Mullins to praise the efforts of FRNSW and the incident management team. The excellent working relationship between the services contributed to preventing a major spillage of oil into the Murray River and limited damage to the surrounding ecosystem.

The CFA issued a warning about the thick plume of smoke that crossed the Hume Weir into Victoria. Some roads were closed, 510 people evacuated from a nearby caravan park and a wedding had to be moved from a nearby venue.

The fire was finally extinguished by 0200 hours on Monday, 11 hours after it began. **END**



BFMC plans tested in major Incident Management Exercise

Bushfire Officers orchestrated a major bushfire management exercise on August 23.

Based in Greenacre, the exercise was designed to test the FRNSW Fire Control Centres in Lane Cove, Greenacre and Newcastle.

The exercise simulated the management of bushfires affecting the John Hunter Hospital precinct in Newcastle, while a large fast moving fire was burning along Chowder Bay Road in Mosman, threatening naval fuel oil supplies and tourist infrastructure.

Emergency warnings would have to be issued to communities in the affected areas and 200 children would have to be evacuated by water from their school camp.

The exercise simulated the simultaneous activation of FRNSW Fire Control Centres (FCC) in both Newcastle and Sydney, staffed with a multi-agency Incident Management Team from state and local government representatives.

Relaying vital information

In the exercise, information from the Incident Controllers was relayed into the FRNSW Bushfire Incident Coordination Centre (BICC) at the RFS headquarters.

The information was vital for the State Emergency Management Controllers to develop and maintain a comprehensive overview of state resources.

It also assists in incident management and forward planning on a strategic, holistic scale.

Bushfire Officer Robert Strauch said the two simulated bushfire emergencies comprehensively tested the skills, knowledge, and capability of Manly, Mosman, North Sydney and Newcastle Bushfire Management Committees' Section 52 Operations Plans.

On the same day, FRNSW was involved in the NSW State Operations Exercise, "K12".

The annual exercise tests the functions and coordinated management of bushfire emergencies from the purpose built facility at RFS headquarters.

Led by Assistant Commissioner Rob McNeil, IMT Charlie staffed the FRNSW BICC and participated in the State Operations Centre functions, along with fulfilling internal reporting requirements that would be required in a real event.

As well as being involved in IMX K12, FRNSW's Bushfire Section assisted Operational Command by incorporating

the required annual testing of the FRNSW BFMCs Fire Control Centres located at Lane Cove, Newcastle and Greenacre.

Inspectors Promotion Program

The busy day of incident management exercises and training didn't finish there – an Inspectors Promotional Program (IPP) was also underway completing the bushfire component of the course.

Bushfire Officer Terry Amor, along with staff from Command Leadership Management (CLM) instructed on bushfire theory and hazard reduction operations. In the afternoon, the activation cell provided a bushfire scenario as the IPP participants fulfilled the functional roles in an Incident Management Team to manage a Class 2 Bushfire.

"The day was a great success for all involved," BFO Strauch said.

The agencies included FRNSW, RFS, OEH-NPWS, Sydney Harbour Federation Trust, Defence, Police, Local Councils, Department of Health, John Hunter Hospital staff, Ausgrid and Sydney Water.

■ END

The day strengthened working relations amongst all agencies

Bushfire Season Snapshot

As at 4 December 2012

Bushfire Incidents within FRNSW district greater than 1 ha (code 161 – forest or wood fire)	39
CFU Activations	6
Hazard Reduction Burns	61
CFU Pre-season Briefings	26
Section 44s declared	19
Full activation of Bushfire Incident Coordination Centre	0
Partial Activations of BICC	4
State Operations Exercise – Krulak 2012	1
TOBANs declared	8
Number of fire districts affected by TOBANs	16

Summer Weather Outlook

Wetter summer likely for northeast NSW

The southeast Australian outlook for December 2012 to February 2013 indicates:

- a wetter than normal season is more likely for parts of northern and eastern NSW

Warm summer likely for VIC and TAS

The southeast Australian temperature outlook averaged over December 2012 to February 2013 shows:

- warmer days more likely over Victoria, Tasmania, and the southern parts of SA and NSW
- cooler days more likely in northeast NSW

Facebook

Look for the Community Fire Unit's page on Facebook. Like the page and join the conversation. Facebook.com/communityfireunits



www.facebook.com/frnsw



Twitter.com/firerescuensw



Bushfire Officers help at burns across NSW

Spring brought several days with a Forest Fire Danger Index (FFDI) rating of over 24 (very high).

Hazard reductions cannot be conducted on days with an FFDI greater than 25 – conditions which tend to produce significant bushfires, as demonstrated in the Central Coast and Newcastle areas in October.

FRNSW Bushfire Officers assisted Operational Commands across the state, taking advantage of the weather conditions to complete essential hazard reduction work for the 2012/13 Bushfire Season.

The planning process to get fire on the ground is determined by the Hazard Reduction Sub Committee that is coordinated out of the Bushfire Management Committee (BFMC) of the local area.

There are 67 BFMCs across the state. These committees use the local Bushfire Risk Management Plan to identify the assets and the treatments of that area to endorse any prescribed burning.

Heath Langdon, Bushfire Officer Inner West, said the planning process to get fire on the ground can be a lengthy process.

"Once an area is identified and endorsed by the BFMC, the planning process begins," BFO Langdon said.

"Mapping of the site occurs to determine containment lines, risks and issues associated with this site."

Once this has been identified by the Bushfire Officer, a burn plan is written to identify all the risks associated with this operation and produces an operational plan to

safely conduct the hazard reduction.

"With the Government's directive of increasing hazard reduction works across all agencies by 20 percent, it was full steam ahead for the Bushfire Section to meet this target," BFO Langdon said.

END

Government directed increasing hazard reductions by 20%

Recent operations

Hazard reduction by FRNSW has protected significant infrastructure and regions including:

- Sydney Water Treatment Plant at North Head
- Belrose Electrical Sub-station, a major Sydney power infrastructure
- Holsworthy Army Base
- Ku-ring-gai
- Belrose
- Forestville
- Lane Cove
- Palm Beach
- Engadine / Waterfall / Alfords Point
- North Rocks
- North Parramatta
- Parramatta
- Hunters Hill
- South Katoomba
- Valley Heights
- Lithgow
- Molong
- Warragamba
- Lake Macquarie
- Newcastle
- Central Coast
- Wyong

Milestone for St Ives and Pennant Hills CFUs

Members of two CFU units held a street party in St Ives in November to celebrate their 10-year milestone.

The original unit, FHP-087 was formed by a group of neighbours in 2002. The unit split in 2009 to form another unit, MHP-242.

The units continue to train together. Their training schedule usually starts in September and runs for the duration of the fire danger period, meeting every second Sunday of the month.

They undertake various activities including training scenarios, cleaning out hydrants, maintaining equipment and removing fuel sources in and around their property.

Team Coordinator Lawrie Perrin attributes the success of their unit to regular training and communications as well as the strong mutual respect held

throughout their teams. He sees their biggest accomplishment as being able to maintain community spirit throughout their neighbourhood over the past 10 years.

Pennant Hills based units MHP-029 and MHP-060, have had a similar history to the St Ives CFUs and also celebrated their 10-year anniversary in November. Combined, the units have 28 members, 4 trainees, 2 cadets and 2 associate members.

Team Coordinator Bob Macdonald, a founding member, considers the biggest obstacle the units have overcome is apathy towards bushfire awareness in their local area and believes team spirit and running social events is the key to their units' success.

Congratulations to members of unit's FHP-087, MHP-242, MHP-029 and MHP-060. **END**



CFU member Bernice Miller pulling the pump on a tyre-trolley devised by the CFU.



Surry Hills

Unconscious man rescued from burning unit

27 OCT 11:00



Facebook.com/frnsw

Thank-you messages from his family

**FIRE
INCIDENT**



Facebook message

LH:

This is to all of you involved in my brothers rescue. From a grateful sister with all my heart, thank you! We can't live without you! oxoxox



Facebook message

SB+GB:

Just adding our thanks to the message above from DB, that was our nephew you saved, we know it's "all part of the job" but we also know that that job is often taken for granted. Your actions in rescuing him from that blazing flat have, have kept our family unit intact at this time. Thank you again to all those involved in this terrible incident.



Facebook message

KL-B:

I am adding my thanks and gratitude to all of the people involved in the rescue and saving of our cousins life, as a family we are eternally grateful for those of you who called 000 and then the brave fire fighters who put my cousins life first to find him & resuscitate him, no words can ever really express the depth of thanks and gratefulness to you that we feel. To the police & ambulance officers who attended also thank you. Without everyone who assisted no matter how small you think you think your part was, our family would be in a much sadder place at the moment. I hug you all tightly with my heart.



Facebook message

DB:

To the members of 1 City of Sydney, I would like to THANK YOU all from myself and the members of my family for rescuing and saving the life of our beloved family member. He is my younger cousin. Words cannot describe the gratitude we feel in our hearts for you all for the outstanding job done by all who were involved in this call. If there is anything I personally can do for your crew members or your station please do not hesitate to ask. THANK YOU All again for keeping him with us and THANK YOU for the service you do day in and day out. From a brother firefighter in the NSWRFs.

Shortly before 1100hrs on Friday 27 October, a neighbour in a unit on Poplar St, Surry Hills reported smoke billowing from a third-storey unit.

City of Sydney firefighters arrived and immediately commenced a search and rescue operation in SCBA where they found a 3rd floor unit to be well alight.

An unconscious man was found in the fire-affected apartment. Firefighters treated him with oxygen therapy until ambulance paramedics arrived to take over treatment and transport him to hospital.

Meanwhile crews mounted an offensive attack to rapidly control and extinguish the fire.

A 2nd Alarm assignment brought a total of five appliances from City of Sydney, 4 Darlinghurst and 38 Pyrmont to the scene. As a precaution, 120 residents were evacuated from the eight-storey block. **END**

smoke alarms for the deaf

Colin Allen used to rely on his cats to alert him to the lifesaving sound of his smoke alarm.

That's clearly not a dependable method," Mr Allen, who is deaf, said. Smoke alarms are lifesaving devices – unless you can't hear them.

Specialised smoke alarms that have strobe lights and vibrating under-pillow pads have been available for people who are deaf, deafblind or hard of hearing for a long time, but at considerable cost.

The new Smoke Alarm Subsidy Scheme has been hailed as a saviour for those with a profound hearing impairment.

Sleep more easily

The \$2 million scheme is subsidising 3500 of these specialised smoke alarms so that those who are hard of hearing are not penalised. Instead of paying the nearly \$500 for a specialised smoke

alarm, people who are hard of hearing can get one for the cost of an average smoke alarm (around \$50).

"I sleep much more easily, knowing that if there is a fire I have a chance to escape," Mr Allen said of his subsidised smoke alarm.

NSW Minister for Disability Services, Andrew Constance, launched the scheme in August.

"The average smoke alarm costs around \$50, but those with flashing

lights and vibrating under-pillow pads to supplement the sound of the alarms can rise to as much as \$500," Mr Constance said.

"That is why the subsidy scheme has been introduced."

"Cost will no longer be a reason people cannot access home safety equipment that warns of a house fire."

Commissioner Greg Mullins said this was an important step towards saving lives.

"It is mandatory to have a smoke alarm in every household where people

sleep, but those who are deaf or hard of hearing cannot hear a standard smoke alarm. This lifesaving program will see 3500 high-tech smoke alarms go to people in our community who are deaf, deafblind or hard of hearing,"

Commissioner Mullins said.

"For those eligible, firefighters from your local fire station can come out and help install them."

The scheme is a joint initiative between the Deaf Society of NSW and FRNSW, with funding from Ageing, Disability and Home Care (ADHC).

"If the average person is twice as likely to die in a fire at home where a smoke alarm is not installed, the risk

factor increases for anyone who cannot hear a standard smoke alarm," said Sharon Everson, Chief Executive Officer of the Deaf Society of NSW.

"The subsidy gives deaf, deafblind and hard of hearing people in NSW the right to make the same choices as everyone else about their home fire safety."

Applications for the subsidy can be made to the Deaf Society of NSW, which provides information and services to people who are deaf, deafblind or hard of hearing and their families.

Firefighters commended for supporting the deaf

Ingleburn Fire Station Captain Louis Hese and Senior Firefighter Melanie Rebane, FRNSW's community safety coordinator, were commended for their efforts to ensure those who are hard of hearing receive the specialised smoke alarms.

In 2006, Captain Hese used an NRMA community grant to source and install 10 specialised smoke alarms for those with hearing impairments in his Campbelltown community. He did it again in 2007.

Senior Firefighter Melanie Rebane took the work of Captain Hese and other NSW firefighters and turned it into the Smoke Alarm Subsidy Scheme. Senior Firefighter Rebane spearheaded the new initiative in conjunction with the Deaf Society of NSW, helping to secure the finances and the backing to roll it out across the state. ■■■ END

Risks increase for anyone who cannot hear a standard smoke alarm



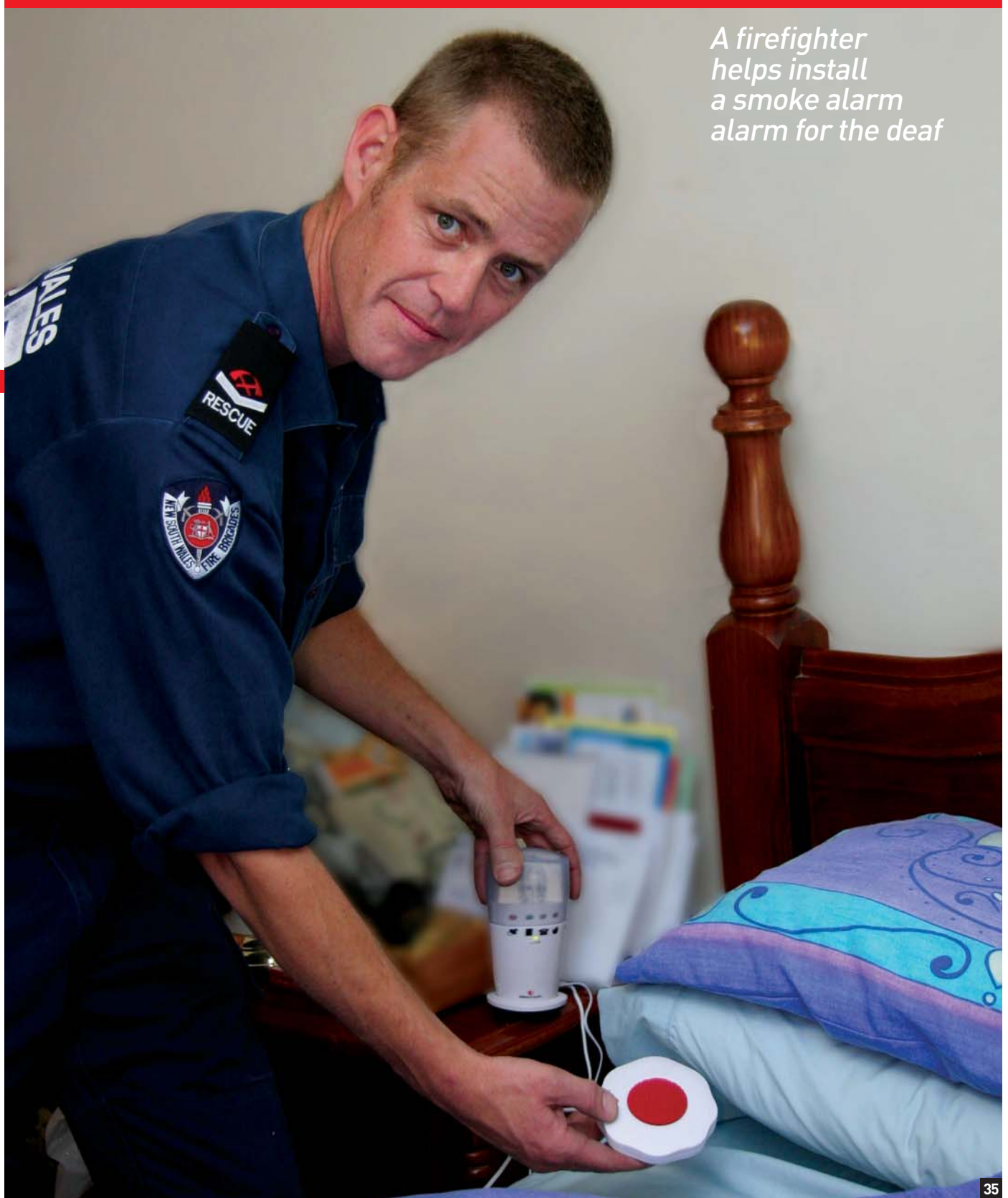
SF Melanie Rebane



A smoke alarm for the deaf



Captain Louis Hesse



A firefighter helps install a smoke alarm for the deaf



Warren

Yennora



All images of Warren incident



Crew battles cotton-bale fire in strong winds

5 SEP 11:49

Firefighters from 491 Warren Fire Station were called to a fire involving cotton bales at a large cotton gin on the Oxley Highway at Warren, just before lunchtime on Wednesday 5 September, a hot, dry and windy day.

They arrived 12 minutes later and were confronted with a large number of cotton bales well alight, with fire spreading rapidly due to strong winds.

Crews from 465 Trangie, 280 Dubbo, 284 Delroy and 300 Gilgandra responded to assist, as well as eight local RFS units.

The Senior Instructor, Duty Commander, Zone and Area

Commanders from Dubbo also responded, and aerial support was also provided by two fixed wing water bombers dispatched by the RFS.

The fire had spread to an adjacent golf course, a rail bridge, and hundreds of cotton bales over an area of 100 hectares.

The Oxley Highway and main western train line were closed during firefighting operations, and an emergency alert was issued to residents of Warren to be prepared for a major smoke hazard before a wind change at 1800 hours.

END

Smouldering cotton bales difficult to quell

9 OCT 22:15

Crews were called to an Automatic Fire Alarm at the Yennora Distribution Park in Fairfield at 2215 hours on Tuesday 9 October.

They immediately called for more resources on arrival as they could smell smoke in the roof area of the large 100m x 30m building. A 5th Alarm was called at 2305 hours, by which time one fifth of the building's contents were involved in fire.



Firefighters deploy a plough to avert disaster

A strong relationship the Warren community, built over many years, paid off when a major fire hit.

With hundreds of cotton bales well alight, a strong wind was threatening to spread the fire to a rail line and nearby fuel depot.

A large housing estate would also be affected if the fire got out of control.

Crews took quick action to extinguish grass fires that had been caused by the burning bales.

However, with the cotton expected to burn for many hours, officers knew it would be a tough battle to keep the fire contained.

Preventing a catastrophe

That's when the relationships they had formed in the Warren community made a significant difference in preventing a catastrophe.

Early in the incident, FRNSW's Incident Management Team (IMT) contacted Queensland Cotton, which owns the property.

The IMT was able to speak directly to the company's senior executives, because they had already formed a good relationship with them.

The IMT asked the executives whether the company could move the unburnt cotton bales.

Workers from the company were able to move many bales, even though they had never had to work close to a fire ground.

Their action prevented the massive fire involving spreading even further.

After years of close collaboration, FRNSW Regional West officers Supt Greg Lewis and Chief Supt Neil Harris had a good relationship with the police, council and other officers on the Local Emergency Management Committee (LEMO), and of course with colleagues from the RFS.

The LEMO was lead by the General Manager of Warren Shire Council, who agreed to firefighters' request to supply one of the council's large water tankers for the fire.

Firebreak

Most importantly, fire officers were able to ask the council to arrange for contractors to plough a field downwind of the fire to form a firebreak.

The firebreak that stopped the fire spreading to more grassland. The vital action meant the IMT could concentrate resources on extinguishing the cotton bales, rather than standing guard to prevent fire spreading to more grassland.

The fire created a large smoke haze, so FRNSW's Media, Ministerial and Communications Unit (MMCU) used Twitter to keep the public informed.

Radio and TV updates were often taken directly from these tweets.

Chief Supt Harris and Insp Gary Barber also gave numerous interviews to radio, TV and the press, providing clear briefings about what was happening.

Fire officers also arranged a letter box drop to tell residents the smoke was not toxic, but that people with respiratory problems should stay indoors.

Information was also provided to local hospitals, nursing homes and schools. NSW Health used a register of known respiratory sufferers to door-knock people, speaking directly to those

As a result of the wide public campaign, there was not a single hospital admission from respiratory problems.

■ END

Radio and TV updates were taken directly from tweets.

Firefighters found the fires inside the cotton bales difficult to quell, with about 400 bales damaged by fire and water. The last smouldering bales were removed at 1830 hours the following day; by 1930 hours they were being pulled apart and hosed down.

It took two and a half days to make sure that the fire had been extinguished, with the incident finally closed after 1400 hours Friday.

■ END



Commissioner Mullins speaks to USAR team at NZ earthquake

IT

What's new in IT

FRNSW is now recognised as a centre of excellence for IT systems and technology.

FRNSW has been given the honour of providing systems for other agencies within the Emergency Services sector.

Information technology is about two things: improving the capability of our organisation, and improving efficiency so more resources can be put back into improving our capability.

Over the last few years, the people in IT have been working to improve our systems, to introduce new technology and automate administrative tasks.

New systems are providing a single consistency of information, from which to make better decisions. Videoconferencing, mobile devices and faster networks are helping to conquer the tyranny of distance.

Projects planned include new hand-held radios, the deployment of iPads in the field, new incident management systems, and more.

Better systems will lead to a safer community.

Videoconferencing

Meet with people on the other side of the city or the State, without leaving your office or fire station.

The benefits are crystal clear. Videoconferencing can allow you to hold a meeting with a number of fire officers or executives hundreds of kilometres away. Unlike a telephone conference, it's easy to recognise who's talking.

You can see all the participants on the screen at the same time, making it easy to judge their body language. This also makes it easier to see if someone's waiting to say something.

Launch

After a two-year development period, FRNSW launched videoconferencing a year ago. A number of sites are already connected, including Greenacre, Alexandria, head office, and zone and area offices. There are plans to connect most fire stations.

The system can also connect with non-FRNSW users, which is useful when collaborating with outside agencies.

When the USAR team was deployed to respond to the Christchurch earthquake and Japanese Tsunami, the team used videoconferencing to brief Commissioner Greg Mullins in his office about the operations.

Videoconferencing has cut the time and expense of travel in some area commands. Regional West Area Commander, Neil Harris, especially likes the Movi system of one-on-one communication that allows you to show someone a document you're working on whilst interacting with the person on screen.

"Videoconferencing is cost effective and helps reduce the time we are required to spend outside our respective Commands, travelling long distances to meetings," Chief Superintendent Harris said.

"I look forward to the continued improvements in the video conferencing equipment over time.

"We'll be using it more and more in regional operations especially, as a means to reduce the time our officers have previously been required to spend away from their Commands, family and friends."

Training

The system is already proving useful for training seminars, connecting instructors with staff in some regional areas.

Training and Co-ordination Manager, Superintendent Bob Alexander, said the system was vital for e-learning.

He has used videoconferencing to connect officers in a fire-training facility in Armidale with students with laptops in Kiama.

This remote training requires accuracy, and videoconferencing provides the only images that are clear enough for training purposes.

While the benefits are clear, the technology behind the system is far from simple.

The system uses FRNSW's private phone and data lines, the Wide Area Network, that currently connects all zone and corporate offices.

It has cut the time and expense of travel in some area commands



USAR team deployed in Christchurch



Corowa

**FIRE
INCIDENT**



Turning Over a New Leaf

All metropolitan stations will be using the eOccurrence Book by the end of 2012, with regional stations scheduled for implementation commencing in early 2013.

The network provides free phone calls between offices on the network. However, the infrastructure had to be fine-tuned to allow videoconferencing, and the bandwidth in some areas had to be increased.

The FRNSW Manager of Network Communications, Sheikh Osman, said unlike sending a document or video file by email, the data has to arrive instantly.

"Videoconferencing has to send a constant stream of data that doesn't drop out, even for a second," Mr Osman said.

"You can't have a time lag, and you can't have 'packet loss' of any of the data.

"If you did, a few crucial words that someone is saying could drop out."

Video data is captured by the cameras mounted next to the videoconferencing televisions. It has a much higher

**Unlike Skype,
it allows several
locations to
participate
simultaneously**

resolution and reliability than Skype, so unlike a webcam, the system can clearly identify a whole group of people in a boardroom.

Unlike Skype, it also allows several locations to participate simultaneously.

FRNSW is now working to allow video-streaming from iPhones. This could be useful at a major fire or hazmat incident, if you wanted to show what conditions were like.

"We can do that now with the Blackberry, but we're developing it for the iPhone," Mr Osman said. **END**

In 2010, FRNSW embarked on a project to replace the paper occurrence books used in every fire station to record information on events and activities taking place at the station with a computer-based application.

The existing books have been in use for more than a century. The upgrade to an online version is part of FRNSW's commitment to being recognised by employees as a high-tech organisation.

A project team was assembled with a mix of IT staff and firefighters working together to understand how stations use the books today and how this could transition from old to new.

The team spent 12 months talking to firefighters at a number of stations with permanent and retained firefighters to ensure that the final product would meet FRNSW's needs, and a number of presentations were given at station forums and Area and Zone meetings.

This allowed the team to identify where improvements in processes could be made – for example, incident details are now automatically populated from the Computer Aided Dispatch system, removing the need for stations to manually record this information.

A pilot was conducted at seven stations to gain valuable feedback and make final improvements prior to the go-live date in mid-2012.

Since the launch, feedback has been extremely positive, aided by the provision of an additional dedicated computer for each station to be used for the eOccurrence Book.

Over the next 12 months there are a number of improvements planned including replacing the register used to hold details of keys to premises and incorporating the Station Register amongst those to be looked at. **END**

Silo fires Narrabri West

17 OCT 14:30

Silo incidents can lead to dangerous explosions or fires that are difficult to extinguish. Firefighters dealt with two separate silo incidents less than four weeks apart.

On Wednesday 17 October in Corowa, two pumpers from 268 Corowa and a pumper from 394 Mulwala were called to the Rivalea Feedmill at 1430 hours.

They found smoke coming from an elevated silo containing 3 to 5 tonnes of wheat. They evacuated seven people and flooded the containers, but it was not until after 0800 the following day that the stop message was sent.

On Wednesday 17 October in Narrabri West, two crews from 399 Narrabri and a crew from 264 Coonabarabran were called to a Graincorp silo.

Smoke had possibly come from friction with the conveyor belt. Crews wearing breathing apparatus searched upper levels with gas detectors and thermal imaging cameras, but found no sign of fire.

As a precaution, students at a nearby school were given an early mark. **END**



Driving down response times

Emergency Services SAP system now one of the biggest in Australia

Our SAP system has evolved to become one of the largest systems (by headcount) in Australian Government.

The new Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL) system will allow ESCAD operators to despatch the closest appliance to any incident.

SAP is the pre-eminent enterprise resource planning system in use across the globe, with the number of customers exceeding 50,000 and millions of end-users accessing the system through portals and mobile devices. The system can be used for financials, HR, learning, inventory and stores management, asset management, business intelligence, customer relationship management – the list is extensive.

The Emergency Services SAP human resources (ESSAP-HR) project commenced in January 2011 and ran for 18 months. It now manages the people, finances and stores for FRNSW, the RFS, the SES and the Ministry of Police & Emergency Services.

The project brought together the four Emergency Services agencies onto the one platform – all hosted and supported by FRNSW.

It deployed a common HR solution for all permanent, retained and volunteer Emergency Services resources across the state that can be accessed 24 hour a day, every day of the year.

The ESSAP-HR project was one of the first major multi-Emergency Services Agency IT projects.

It required complete integration and co-operation on a scale that had never before been undertaken in Australia.

The project team ran from three key locations: FRNSW in Sydney, SES in Wollongong and RFS at Lidcombe.

The system is accessible through internal networks and the Internet, and supports an average of 1800 plus users per day.

The next phase of the Emergency Services program is the implementation of the SAP Enterprise Asset Management

modules that will support the agencies in managing the huge array of firefighting, rescue and vehicle assets.

Once completed, SAP will give emergency response and recovery teams a single comprehensive source for rescue and firefighting people and their skills, equipment and vehicles. This will enable the State to prepare, protect, respond and recover from incidents and events.

Another vital initiative the SAP team has been busy with is the recent launch of ESCAT in SAP. This project has linked procurement directly to the financials system, thereby allowing the organisation to streamline the two business activities.

The NSW Government has recognised FRNSW's work in implementing this SAP system – so much so that the Attorney General's Department will now use the same SAP system. The project is expected to go live in March 2013.

Under the sharing arrangement within NSW Government, agencies are able to implement the system without restriction, thereby enabling a modern supportable system that is highly available and highly scalable.

FRNSW will continue to collaborate with other Emergency Services agencies to leverage this huge store of information to improve front-line intelligence and capability, leading ultimately to a safer New South Wales community. **END**

Imagine you are in a fire truck, returning to your station after an incident. The ESCAD operator receives a frantic Triple Zero (000) call about a fire, with people trapped in a second-floor unit.

Your appliance is driving through the same suburb as this new emergency, and is only a few streets away.

However, since a number of appliances are on the road, unless the ESCAD operator spends valuable time contacting each appliance by radio, they have no way of knowing that your crew is the closest to the fire and may

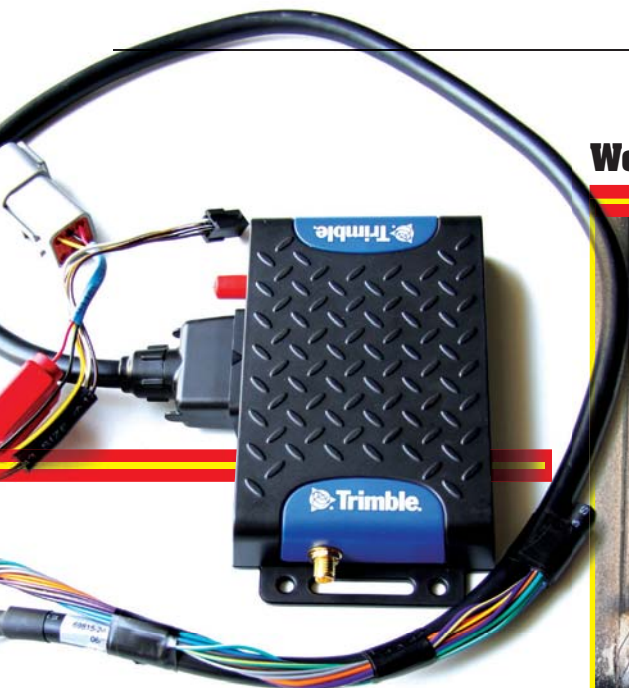
Vehicles on the road can be dispatched based on their actual location

be in the best position to respond and possibly save a life.

The new AVL system will allow the Communications Centre to locate the nearest most appropriate vehicle and respond them to the incident.

AVL is currently being installed on appliances throughout the Metropolitan area with at least 90 vehicles currently having them in place.

Assistant Director of Preparedness and Response, Chief Superintendent Paul McGuiggan, said the system will improve the despatch of vehicles that are already mobile.



Wetherill Park

**FIRE
INCIDENT**



“The key benefit is that if vehicles are on the road, we will be able to dispatch them based on their actual location, rather than the location of their Fire Station,” Chief Superintendent McGuiggan said.

The AVL unit on each vehicle includes a GPS system to determine the vehicle’s location. A modem transmits this information back to the ESCAD operators via the mobile phone network.

In metropolitan areas, the AVL units will be installed under the seat inside vehicles, with an antenna on the roof.

In rural areas, the whole unit will be mounted on the roof of each vehicle in a weather-proof box, which is more suitable for conditions in those areas.

Installing the units onto about 500 vehicles is a complex job, according to Terry Farley, Assistant Director for IT Systems.

“We had to design the installation for each type of vehicle,” Chief Superintendent Farley said. ■ **END**

Firefighters save main warehouse in

8th alarm fire

27 JUL 03:00

A major fire at a large whitegoods and electrical storage warehouse brought firefighters to Hallstrom Place, Wetherill Park on Friday 27 July. A Triple Zero (000) call was received from a security guard at 0330 hours and firefighters from 41 Smithfield were on scene within minutes.

Firefighters arrived to find a number of wooden pallets, a truck and materials at the front of the building well alight. This hampered efforts to gain access to the building.

Once they gained entry, firefighters found the front section and office area of the 40m x 30m warehouse fully involved in fire and nearby factories under threat.

As the incident escalated, the response was upgraded to an 8th Alarm. More than 75 firefighters from stations across Sydney were responded to the fierce fire which took several hours to bring under control.

Fortunately no-one was in the factory at the time of the blaze. A multi-pump relay was set up to augment the lack of water supply in the area.

Whereas the front of the factory and the office area was destroyed by the fire, the contents of the main warehouse only suffered some heat and smoke damage due to the firefighting efforts on the night in trying conditions. ■ **END**





A young patient



Westmead Children's Hospital nurses



Learn to Stop Burns

Support from firefighters has made a big difference at Westmead Children's Hospital.

If you visit any FRNSW station, you'd expect to see firefighters, big red trucks and rows of boots and helmets. At FRNSW Station No 2, however, you'll encounter doctors, nurses, stethoscopes and brightly coloured murals. FRNSW No 2 Station is actually the Burns Unit of Westmead Children's Hospital, the official FRNSW charity.

George Street West was the original No 2 Station. When it closed in the 1950s, the number was not re-allocated to another NSW Fire Brigades (NSWFB) Station. In 1995 the then NSWFB Commissioner, Ian MacDougall, decreed that the Burns Unit at Westmead Children's Hospital would become an official NSWFB Station and bestowed it with the title of Station No 2.

Although members of Station No 2 don't wear firefighting gear, they do wear FRNSW T-shirts.

FRNSW employees have been donating to the Burns Unit since 1985 when it was situated in the Royal Alexandra Hospital for Children at Camperdown. In fact, the Burns Unit Fund is still known as the *NSW Fire Brigades Royal Alexandra Hospital For Children Burns Unit Fund*. Through payroll deductions, community fundraising activities, and donations, FRNSW staff have donated more than \$1.83 million to the Burns Unit.

Donations allow us to employ doctors and nurses specialising in pain relief

"It's only a very small amount we donate each pay," said a City of Sydney firefighter who, along with colleagues, contributes to the Burns Unit via regular payroll deductions, "but every bit counts and it all adds up. It's good to know that we are able to help."

200 children per year

And help it does. The Burns Unit treats all major paediatric burns in NSW and admits over 200 children each year.

The majority of those children are aged between one and four years and have received scalds from tea/coffee, kettles or bath water. Thanks to FRNSW donations, the Burns Unit is able to buy vital equipment and employ a burns anaesthetist to reduce the pain and trauma of the children's dressing changes.

Dr John Harvey, Head of the Burns Unit affirms that the generous donations from FRNSW provide very positive benefits for his patients and their families. "We are delighted to have the ongoing support of FRNSW," he said. "Our staff has a special relationship with FRNSW, and firefighters visit us from all over NSW to see how their donations affect the care of our burns patients."

"Donations allow us to employ doctors and nurses specialising in pain relief. Their role is to alleviate the pain and stress involved with burns by

providing state of the art analgesia and anaesthesia. This helps make repeated procedures more tolerable to children and less stressful for families.

"This money has also contributed towards establishing a research program looking at burns scars and developing techniques to prevent them. It has also helped to fund our recent research which established the scientific basis for the use of cold water for first aid in burns."

Close bond

Superintendent Peter Stathis, one of the original trustees of the Fund, believes that there is a close bond between FRNSW and the Burns Unit. "Firefighters give support as well as funds," he said. "Individual firefighters, Platoons, Stations and Zones raise money for this very worthwhile charity, and a Christmas visit by firefighters (and Santa) is almost mandatory."

Nursing Unit Manager, Carrie Hopwood, agrees. "There has always been a mutual understanding and respect between firefighters and the Burns Unit team. I think this is due to the difficult job we all do."

"It's fantastic to have the support and funding of FRNSW which helps improve our patients' lives both directly and indirectly. Our young patients and their families appreciate visits from the firefighters and enjoy the interaction with them. It's great to acknowledge the wonderful work that firefighters do, and in particular, their long-standing commitment to the Burns Unit."

Donations to John Hunter Hospital, Newcastle

In August 2011, the annual Newcastle Firefighters Ball raised \$25,250 to enable John Hunter Children's Hospital to buy equipment for treating burns patients. \$5,000 was also donated to Hunter Kidsafe to educate children about accident prevention, and \$5,000 was given to the KIDS Foundation to assist local families attending the annual Burns Survivors camp.



GIO Executive Manager of Marketing Peter Williams, and GIO Digital Marketing Adviser Adam McKay

Sponsorships have allowed FRNSW to increase community engagement activities by more than a third.

In March 2011, firefighters cycled from Sydney to Wagga Wagga, a distance of more than 400 kilometres, in only four days. This *400 in 4* charity bike ride raised over \$41,000 for the Burns Unit and cyclists promoted fire safety messages in country towns they visited along the way.

Young patients and their families appreciate visits from firefighters

And, when it comes to fire safety, it goes without saying that prevention is better than cure. In order to achieve this, The Children's Hospital Burns Research Institute, the Child Safety Centre, Kidsafe and FRNSW continue working together to promote burns education and prevention.

The message is simple, important, and ongoing. *Learn To Stop Burns.*

END

Fire & Rescue NSW (FRNSW) established a partnership program in 2008 to encourage private sector funding to help deliver community engagement programs. As a result of the partnership program, FRNSW has been able to develop and improve a number of previously unfunded public safety initiatives.

Assistant Commissioner Mark Whybro, Director Community Safety, is proud of the results.

"From the inception of the partnership program in 2008 to 2011, there has been a 36% increase in community engagement activities delivered by FRNSW," Assistant Commissioner Whybro said.

"Over the same period, we've seen a decrease of 6.47% in residential home fires, and a 6.07% decrease in residential home fires against the five-year average."

FRNSW has developed two Major Community Partnerships since the introduction of the partnership program, with McDonalds and GIO. While the relationship with McDonalds ended in 2011, GIO has recently signed on for a further three years and has increased its level of support, becoming FRNSW's first ever Principal Partner.

Fire Safety Audit

During the course of the relationship, GIO has been instrumental in assisting FRNSW to develop the online Home Fire Safety Audit tool and the FRNSW Recovery Kit. GIO has also contributed significantly to a range of other community engagement initiatives over

and above their contractual arrangements, including the Winter Fire Safety campaign.

Over the next three years, GIO will be increasing their commitment to help FRNSW develop and deliver a number of community engagement programs, campaigns, and initiatives. The additional funds will help FRNSW undertake important updates to improve the usability of the online Home Fire Safety Audit, to deliver a bigger and better Winter Fire Safety campaign, and a more integrated Fire Prevention Week and Open Day.

As Principal Partner, GIO will now receive acknowledgement across all FRNSW community engagement brochures and material that appears in the public domain. In coming months, you will see updated branding rolled out across the Kitchen Fire Simulators, pull-up banners, fact sheets, brochures, and our website.

Assistant Commissioner Whybro is very positive about the future.

"The funds and resources committed by a valuable partner like GIO allows FRNSW to deliver community engagement and education that we otherwise would not have had the funds or resources to provide," he said.

"Brigade Kids, Recovery Kits, and the Home Fire Safety Audit are a testament to this.

"With increased sponsorship funding, the Community Safety team can continue to support the great work firefighters are doing to deliver local community safety initiatives and campaigns, helping to deliver further reductions in preventable home fires, related injuries, and fatalities."

END



Final resting place of remarkable fire chief

On top of the cliffs at Bronte, amongst a 16 hectare sea of some 50,000 examples of Stonemasonry and funerary art dating back from the 19th century is an unremarkable grass patch.

Ironically, the area occupying a tiny section of Waverley Cemetery is the final resting place of a remarkable man and his beloved wife.

Finding this small patch of earth was no easy task, but for Station Officer David Tai, it was one of the final pieces of a large jigsaw he'd been methodically putting together for many months.

SO Tai had found the unmarked grave of Mr William Douglas Bear – the first 'Chief' of Fire & Rescue NSW, which at the time (1884) was called The Metropolitan Fire Brigade.

"Mr Bear's actual rank was Superintendent," said SO Tai as he begins to list off some of the information from his research into Mr Bear.

"Superintendent was the highest rank in the Metropolitan Fire Brigade from 1884-1909. The rank of Chief Officer did not come into existence until 1 January 1910 after the Fire Brigades Act 1909 was enacted."

"At 35 years of age, Mr Bear remains the youngest person to hold the highest rank in the (then) brigade."

For SO Tai, a technical writer in the Lessons Learned Centre, what had been a passing remark in the corridor one day between him and the Commissioner has culminated in a compilation of a comprehensive history of our Chief Officers.

"I originally wrote a piece on a former Chief, Mr C J Griffiths," explained SO Tai. "Commissioner Mullins had read it and later – in a passing conversation – I said we should have some more material on

our former chiefs. The Commissioner agreed and said it was a 'good idea'... it went from there."

SO Tai has researched and written about all of the chiefs throughout the history of the organisation, a journey that has seen him commit hundreds of personal hours to the project.

The journey hasn't been a solo one. A very understanding wife and family has supported and encouraged SO Tai while on his 'mission'. SO Tai acknowledges the fantastic research support from Ms Anne Pickles, retired Station Officer Sam Walker, Supt Peter Stathis, Cathy Rostron, Lachlan Calvey, Julie Wyner, the Lessons Learned Centre staff -including A/Supt Chris Sedgwick and Lynette Twigg, Mark White and his staff from the Museum of Fire, and Commissioner Mullins.

Originally destined to follow a path as a graphic designer and illustrator, SO Tai joined the fire service in 1986 and has worked at a number of stations attaining the rank of SO in 1997. Asked if he considered himself a 'writer' or 'historian', SO Tai is more comfortable with title of 'researcher'.

"I love researching something," said SO Tai.

"This has been a great way of combining a genuine interest in the history of the brigades and my research skills – two things that have enabled me to find out some interesting things that not many people knew. It also enabled me to find a few missing links, too – including where Mr Bear is buried."

Another former Chief, Mr Alfred Webb, is also buried at Waverley Cemetery. A little further down from Mr Webb's grave – adorned with an impressive memorial comprising a large cross with a firefighter's belt and axe draped over it – lays Mr Bear and his wife, Annie. The Bears' grave is unmarked and would have been completely overlooked if not for SO Tai's eye for detail.

"While researching Mr Bear's final resting place, I was wandering around Waverley Cemetery looking for a headstone for Mr Bear or his wife, Annie," said SO Tai.

"Considering Mr Webb's grave, I thought it would be easy to find Mr Bear. But the more I looked, I couldn't find it."

On the day SO Tai was searching for the former chief's grave, an off-duty firefighter was walking along the adjacent track to the cemetery and saw SO Tai, who was in uniform. Asking if SO Tai was okay, the firefighter was interested to hear what the purpose of the visit was all about.

Both firefighters then teamed up and began a search along the area where SO Tai was certain Mr Bear and his wife's graves were – their only clue: faint numbers stamped into the gravestones.

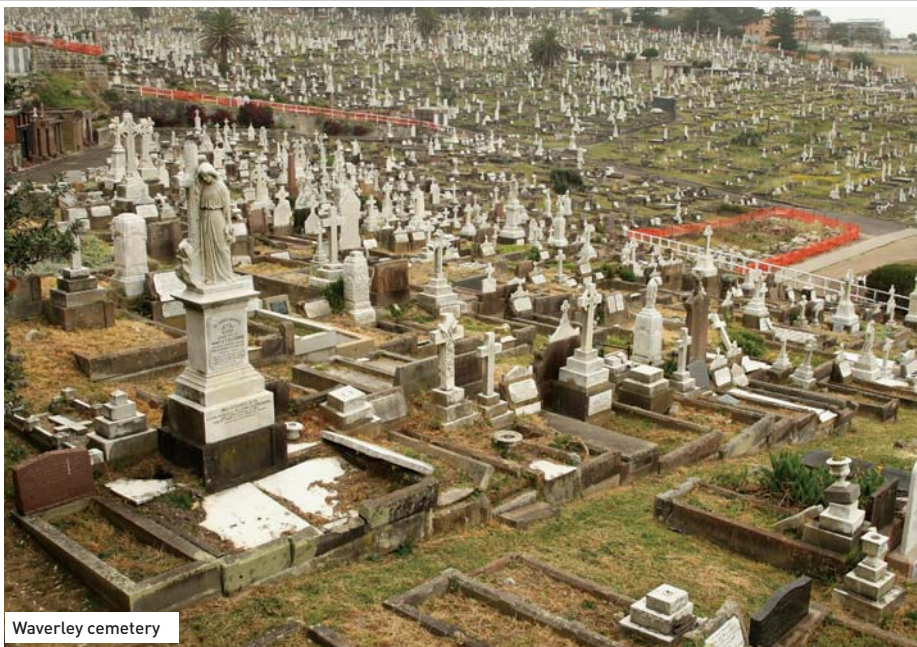
Armed with a map of the graves obtained from the visitors centre, it became a process of location and elimination.

"We found a grave with the number that correlated to being adjacent to where Mr Bear was supposed to be," said SO Tai.

"While we found a numbered grave, we couldn't see Mr Bear's headstone or any signs of where he may be.



David Tai inspecting the grave site



Waverley cemetery

“Then it dawned on us – the grave was completely unmarked and the grass patch was what we were looking for.”

Both firefighters had found the first chief. Mr Bear and his wife were resting in a completely unmarked plot, a few rows back from the edge of the cliff above Bronte, overlooking the ocean.

SO Tai’s research has found ancestral links to Annie and William Douglas Bear’s children, the last known child passed away in the late 1950s. Finding a living immediate family member of the Bears is becoming increasingly difficult.

SO Tai is beginning to sense the family link may be lost.

“It would be great to do something to mark this grave as a significant site,” said SO Tai.

“The founding Chief of the modern fire service for NSW lay, with his wife, in an unmarked grave – no link or mention to the great organisation he came from.”

SO David Tai hopes, as do a number of other people in the fire service, that one day in the near future something can be done to mark the final resting place of our first chief.

When former chief, Mr Rex Threlfo, passed away on 20 August 2012, SO Tai’s research was invaluable in assisting the FRNSW Media Team to write an obituary that was published in *The Sydney Morning Herald*.

The FRNSW Media Team is working with SO Tai to publish some limited copies of the completed profiles. In the meantime, *Fire & Rescue News* is please to be able to share with readers Mr Threlfo’s profile as an example of the work SO Tai has meticulously put together. **END**



David Tai inspecting the grave site



Waverley cemetery



Supt Alfred Webb





Charles Rex Threlfo felt he was the “Lucky Chief”.

As Chief Officer from 1980 to 1984, Rex Threlfo was the first Chief Officer to sit in on board meetings. He was the 16th leader of the NSW Fire Brigades.

A World War II veteran, Mr Threlfo did tours of the Middle East, Papua New Guinea and Borneo.

He was the second President of the FBEU (after Charles Milledge) to reach the rank of Chief Officer. Like his predecessor, Chief Officer Fred Davies, Mr Threlfo would be in charge of the NSW Fire Brigades as it faced incidents with multiple fatalities.

Early years

Born on 25 February 1924 in Mullumbimby, as a young man Mr Threlfo wanted to do law. He started working in a solicitor's office but World War II interrupted. At age 17, he enlisted with the Australian Imperial Forces on 12 August 1941.

Mr Threlfo joined the 2/13th Australian Infantry Battalion, also known as the “Devil's Own”.

Military Service

By July 1942, the German and Italian forces had reached El Alamein in North Africa, an area defended by the British Eighth Army. The 9th Division rushed to Alamein, and the 2/13th battalion fought for two weeks from late October 1942.

After the Japanese attack on Darwin, the 9th Division was recalled to Australia. After leave and jungle training they were sent to Milne Bay in Papua New Guinea, then landed north-west of the town of Lae in September 1943 without casualties.

They faced fierce jungle fighting before successfully capturing Lae 12 days later. The 2/13th battalion also landed on Scarlet Beach, helping to defend against a Japanese counter-attack.

The 2/13th battalion returned to Australia in March 1944. They landed at Brunei on 10 June, before making another landing in the Miri-Lutong area ten days later. They captured the Lutong airfield and oil tanks and moved inland to the Pujut oilfields.

During World War II, 9th division casualties included 256 dead and 556 wounded. Mr Threlfo was discharged on 4 April 1946. In an interview with Dr Colin Adrian at Headquarters fire station on 21 October 1983, Mr Threlfo said somberly “I fought a number of battles”. With the war over, Mr Threlfo decided that he no longer wanted to do Law. Believing there was a future in being a Quantity Surveyor, he applied to do a course through the army.

Mr Threlfo recalled in the interview, “I was in a Hotel in Petersham, when who should come in, but some fellows I had been in the army with – John O'Coote, Danny Lewis and Mr Turner”.

After they made a persuasive argument for him to join the NSW Fire Brigades, he decided he would “give it a trial for six months”.

Career

Mr Threlfo was accepted into the NSW Fire Brigades at age 22 on 6 May 1946.

Mr Threlfo told Dr Adrian “I became very interested in the Fire Service and

in the first four years I did a lot of study. I could have passed the DO's (District Officers) exam, which I later did – so I progressed through the ranks like everyone else”.

After getting married, Mr Threlfo built his own home like many other veterans.

Mr Threlfo said: “I consider the couple of years I spent at Stanmore were probably some of my best years in the Fire Service.

“A good group of people, we all got on well and it was a busy station”.

FBEU executive

While at Stanmore, Mr Threlfo met Maurice (“Maurie”) Stolmack, the FBEU Secretary. Mr Threlfo then met the FBEU President, Harry Evans, at Bankstown fire station.

The two men would have an important influence on Mr Threlfo, who joined the union executive after the successful campaign for a 42-hour week in 1955. Mr Evans retired as President of the FBEU in 1957 due to illness. He suggested to Mr Threlfo that he should run for the position.

“We ran a good campaign and I got an absolute majority,” Mr Threlfo said.

Mr Threlfo became FBEU President in 1957 and remained in the position for nine years.

The union's achievements during his term included:

1960 The FBEU applied to the Industrial Commission for an award for Volunteer Firemen. It came into effect in 1963.

1963 The union stepped up its campaign for compressed air breathing apparatus

1964 Poly-carbonate helmets replaced brass helmets after a long union campaign

He decided to give it a six month-trial

District Officer

Mr Threlfo was promoted to Station Officer D grade in June 1962, progressing to C grade in June 1964. He passed exams and was made a District Officer B grade in March 1966.

Mr Threlfo stood down as president of the FBEU, mainly because he had become a District Officer. You could not be a Senior Officer and remain as president of the union.

Stations that he was attached to during his career included 1 Headquarters, 12 Balmain, 7 Stanmore and 22 Leichhardt.

Unheard of

Upon joining the Senior Officers Association, Mr Threlfo informed them that he was remaining a member of the FBEU. This was previously unheard of. The Senior Officers Association were initially reluctant to endorse his application, but subsequently relented. A year later, Mr Threlfo was asked to become secretary of the Senior Officers Association.

In December 1968, Mr Threlfo was appointed Building Inspector under Superintendent Vic Crum and later acted as the technical advisor to Deputy Chief Officer Jack Meeve on the Height of Buildings Advisory Committee.

In May 1973, Mr Threlfo was made Inspector and placed in charge of Zone 1 – Blue Mountains. He was transferred to the Fire Prevention Department (FPD) in 1977.

Mr Threlfo was promoted to Superintendent in September 1977 and placed in charge of Personnel, before becoming the officer-in-charge of the Fire Prevention Department.

The Staff Training and Development Division was formed in 1978 and Mr Threlfo was transferred to this new post. He rebuilt the resources section of the College and brought in a number of future leaders to work underneath him, including Bill Reay and Stan Hearn. Both would go on to become Chief Officer.

In September 1979, Mr Threlfo ascended to the rank of Deputy Chief Officer (Services). Less than a year later, he was made Deputy Chief Officer (Executive) after Deputy Chief Officer C. Rose retired. From 26 September 1980, he was chosen to be the Acting Chief Officer.

Chief officer

When Chief Officer Fred Davies retired, Mr Threlfo was appointed Chief Officer on 17 October 1980.

Major changes

During Mr Threlfo's term as Chief Officer, he assisted the Board in implementing many significant changes. Other major occurrences have also been included.

1981

- Commenced conversion of 70 mm hose to Storz Instantaneous Couplings
- NSWFB policy decision to consolidate role in non-fire rescue. New equipment included 34 sets of rescue shears, three sets of Holmatro advanced hydraulic jaws, and 22 new appliances
- First Chaplain, Salvation Army Major Don Woodland, was appointed
- Task force began preparing a new instruction manual, the Blue Reader
- Task force began preparing a Volume of Standing Orders

1982

- Board installed its first computer – a major development in 1982
- The ban on out duties was lifted, allowing firefighters to perform four in a 12 month period
- Board planned Fire Investigation Team to assist the Police Arson Squad. The unit was created with one District Officer, but team did not commence until 1987
- A School Lecture Programme developed with the Department of Education, speaking on fire safety and prevention in State schools
- Inspector Bernie Cinders was developed by SF Ian Krimmer for children's fire safety programme

1983

- Full-time EEO Co-ordinator was appointed
- Half-day session on interaction with the media included in District Officers' training
- Mr Cinders Programme launched by SF Krimmer, telling 30,628 children about fire safety in six months and appearing on TV shows including Romper Room and Simon Townsend's Wonder World
- The term "Fireman" changed to "firefighter", signalling a major change in brigade culture, paving the way for recruitment of women (In Orders 27 April)
- Major planning and preparations for 1984 Centenary Year of the Fire Brigades
- FBEU included a claim for a shorter 38-hour working week. This was achieved and implemented two years later
- Fire Command Vehicle was commissioned for major incidents

1984

- Approval of move of administrative staff from HQ to Aetna Tower on the corner of Bathurst and Castlereagh Streets

The Board of Fire Commissioners had operated since the inception of the Metropolitan Brigade in 1884. It made all the monetary and policy decisions regarding the Brigade.

Before Mr Threlfo, Chief Officers were not able to attend board meetings. If not called on for "technical advice" (after which they had to leave), the Chief Officer would wait until the meeting was over to be told what the board had decided.

Mr Threlfo was the first Chief Officer to be regularly invited to attend board meetings. The significance

of Chief Officer Threlfo's achievement was that it allowed him to have a direct input in decisions.

With the precedent now set, the Chief Officers who followed Mr Threlfo continued to attend board meetings, until the Board of Fire Commissioners was officially dissolved on 31 December 1989.

Mr Threlfo retired on 20 July 1984, providing the NSW Fire Brigades with over 38 years of dedicated service. In June 1986, Mr Threlfo was awarded the Member of the Order of Australia for services to the NSW Fire Brigades.

Rex Charles Threlfo passed away on 19 August 2012, at 88 years of age. He was cremated at Rookwood Crematorium.

In his last report as Chief Officer to Fire News on 20 July 1984, Mr Threlfo said: "I am a little disgruntled at leaving the Fire Service before the first female Firefighter is employed. →

The years I spent at Stanmore were probably some of my best years in the Fire Service

"A number of Chief Officers are apprehensive about the introduction of women into the fire services. However, I don't share their trepidation. We have taken steps through the FRAB testing to ensure a recognised standard of performance will be maintained by the women. I am a strong supporter of equal employment opportunities".

Commissioner Mullins lauded high praise on retired Chief Officer Threlfo, saying: "He was integral to natural justice being introduced into the NSWFB disciplinary processes, was a visionary leader, and took a personal interest in me when I was a young officer."

Whether in his role as the President of the FBEU or the senior positions he held in the Fire Brigade, Mr Threlfo endeavoured to help his fellow firefighters by working tirelessly to improve their safety and working conditions.

SO David Tai is drafting a history of former fire chiefs. This is an edited version of his article on Rex Threlfo.

END

Major incidents during his term as Chief Officer

Pacific Heights Nursing Home fire

A fire broke out at the home on Princess Hwy, Sylvania Heights at 2304hrs on 29 April 1981.

The front section of the building was involved in fire with heavy smoke logging. Brigade personnel equipped with breathing apparatus entered to carry out search and rescue operations and attack the fire. Of the 70 aged residents, 16 lost their lives. Six Brigade personnel received Citations for Bravery.

Rembrandt Residential Apartments fire

Firefighters were called to the fire on Bayswater Rd, Kings Cross at 0158hrs on 25 August 1981. Darlinghurst pumper arrived to find the five storey building well alight, with the entrance lobby and wooden stairs surrounding

the lift well completely involved.

Of the estimated 70 people in the building, nine lost their lives. A Station Officer received the Conspicuous Bravery Medal. Many precarious rescues were performed from upper levels.

Pantheon Restaurant fire

Firefighters were called to a fire in a restaurant above ground-floor shops in Marrickville at 0133hrs on 29 April 1982. Crews arrived to find the entire first floor heavily involved.

Firefighters rescued a number of unconscious and semi-conscious people. There were no fatalities, although 28 people were taken to hospital. Three Brigade personnel, including District Officer Phil Robinson, received Citations for Bravery.

Letters

Motorbike accident

My bike didn't fair so well after hitting another car, although fortunately I only sustained a bruised hip.

A firefighter, Marianne Hopcroft, stopped to render assistance. She assisted in retrieving my bike from the roadway, and after assessing my medical condition, she then tended to the driver of the other vehicle.

After assisting all with their exchange of details, FF Hopcroft remained with me until my wife arrived some 25 minutes later and proved invaluable in helping me lift my bike into our trailer. She even secured the bike in the trailer for me.

FF Hopcroft was driving a marked FRNSW vehicle and was in uniform when she stopped to help and her professionalism was evident to all in attendance.

It took a while to identify who the Good Samaritan was. Please pass on my sincere thanks to FF Hopcroft.

Thanks again. (name supplied) Bangor.

Condolences appreciated

My husband, Walter Alexander Phillips, only ever known as "Jacko", passed away on 14 May. I am just up to writing my thanks to all for their condolences.

Jacko was a retained firefighter for 45 years here at 400 Narrandera and had a retirement dinner in August 2004. I was so fortunate at his passing that our son Wayne Alexander Phillips was here to relieve the Zone 3 Duty Commander for a month.

At times like this, one realises the comradery of the firefighters. All the messages and floral tributes were wonderful, but the proudest moment was the Guard of Honour and

the two motors outside the church. Jacko's chest would have really extended when they carried the casket through the Guard of Honour on full salute.

Jacko was so passionate about the Fire Brigade so I knew the Commissioner would like to be informed what a wonderful crew he has here. Please convey my thanks to the Commissioner and all down the line.

Mary Phillips, Narrandera

Japanese Parliament (Diet)

(unofficial translation)

Japanese people were deeply impressed by the relief activities, quick and warm, raised by FRNSW at the time of the Great East Japan Earthquake. We were very pleased to have the chance to directly express our appreciation to the relief brigades and have face-to-face talks with them.

On behalf of the delegation, I would like to express my sincere gratitude for the warm welcome you gave us on the occasion of our recent official visit to your country at the invitation of the Parliament of Australia.

I believe that to further strengthen the friendly relations of our two countries, it is of great importance to further promote exchanges in various fields and deepen the mutual understanding of the people of both countries. We sincerely hope the mutual understanding and friendly relations of our two countries will show further progress.

Reiterating my appreciation for your kindness, I wish you good health and continued success.

Otsuji Hidehisa

Vice President, House of Councillors National Diet of Japan.



Facebook.com/frnsw

Firefighter rescues two people from Sutherland fire after receiving minor burns



Facebook message

SS:

What a Hero! Simply forgetting his injuries and continuing on to save others... Amazing!

Firefighter Championships, Tamworth



Facebook message

DC:

Took my son to watch & we had a great time. My son enjoyed the firetruck I bought him. You guys do a great service to your towns.



Facebook message

PA:

Great going. Was the best time I had in the brigade was these competitions. Stay safe.

With **gratitude** for service to the people of NSW

Deaths of retired and current members April to October 2012

Station Officer Thomas LISTON	July 2012
Station Officer Ian DEMPSEY	July 2012
Station Officer Geoff HODDER	July 2012
Debbie BANERJEE (Admin)	July 2012
Retained FF Harley ROOTS	July 2012
Station Officer John PIRONA	July 2012
Station Officer Edwin DOWNIE	July 2012
Captain Colin HUTSON	August 2012
Captain Kevin MULDOON AFSM	October 2012
D/Captain Robert McMASTER	September 2012
Station Officer William BOYLE	August 2012
Chief Officer Rex THRELFORD AFSM	August 2012
Retained FF Reginald ALFORD	August 2012

Farewell and enjoy **'you'** time

Retirements April to October 2012

Name	Station	Date Retired	Name	Station	Date Retired
Michael Maclaurin	Comm - Katoomba	4/05/2012	Peter Jezzard	Shellharbour Hazmat	23/07/2012
Stuart Schmidt	Darlinghurst	20/04/2012	John Roach	Ashfield	26/07/2012
Gary Panton	Horningsea Park	3/05/2012	Wayne Ansell	Gosford	26/07/2012
John Considine	Macquarie Fields	3/05/2012	Mark Williams	Maitland	27/07/2012
Kevin Carey	Hamlyn Terrace	18/05/2012	Brian Johnson	Metro Sth2 Zone Offc	27/07/2012
Walter McGlynn	Berkeley Vale	18/05/2012	Alan Walker AFSM	Coffs Harbour	27/07/2012
Richard Tanner	Becroft	18/05/2012	Steve Hogan	Dubbo	28/07/2012
Martin Clough	Bulli	18/05/2012	Michael Guymmer AFSM	Emergency Plan&Coor	10/08/2012
Greg McDonald	Lane Cove	19/05/2012	Greg Todd	Berkeley Vale	10/08/2012
Stephen Ridgeway	Mayfield West	26/05/2012	Peter Fitzpatrick	Warrawong	10/08/2012
Anthony Hopwood	Comm - Newcastle	1/06/2012	Kurt Bals	Tamworth	17/08/2012
John Benson AFSM	Dep.Comm.Emerg.Mangt	2/07/2012	Michael Maitland	Dee Why	24/08/2012
Arthur Richards	Kellyville	2/07/2012	Robert Stewart	Queanbeyan	24/08/2012
Anthony Grant	Metro Wst3 Zone Offc	6/07/2012	John Hamling	City Of Sydney	26/08/2012
James Barnes	Cranebrook	9/07/2012	Jeff Walker	Berkeley Vale	30/08/2012
Mark Preston	Comsafe Training Ser	12/07/2012	Kenneth Brown	Hamlyn Terrace	7/09/2012
Ray Cranley	Wollongong	13/07/2012	Ronald Love	Metro Sth3 Zone Offc	7/09/2012
Daniel Good	Horningsea Park	13/07/2012	George Brown	Macquarie Fields	7/09/2012
Ian Ockerby	Dee Why	13/07/2012	Bryan Parkes	Wollongong	7/09/2012
Neale Fraser	Newcastle	13/07/2012	Jennifer Corr	Toronto	7/09/2012
Garry Eagles	Rosemeadow	13/07/2012	Stephen Sims	Newcastle	7/09/2012
Gerard Donovan	Leichhardt	13/07/2012	Fred Hampton	Berkeley Vale	21/09/2012
George Johnston	Riverwood	13/07/2012	Glenn Lander	Menai	21/09/2012
Chris Kirsten	Charlestown	13/07/2012	Todd Lucock	Kogarah	21/09/2012
Brent Edwards	Nowra	13/07/2012	Vincent Bell	Manager TRC	21/09/2012
Robert Derwin	Forestville	13/07/2012	Alan Johnston	Metro Est2 Zone Offc	5/10/2012
Warren Goodwin	Mayfield West	13/07/2012	Graham Webb	Metro Sth2 Zone Offc	19/10/2012
Ian Wilcox	Comm - Wollongong	13/07/2012	Jeffrey Fell	Dunheved	19/10/2012
Adrain Bognar	Comm - Newcastle	15/07/2012	Garry Hills	Metro Sth2 Zone Offc	19/10/2012
Dennis Latta	Toronto	20/07/2012	John Karimanovic	Concord	26/10/2012



1942 American LaFrance-Foamite 600

The "American LaFrance" company was named after its founder, Truckson LaFrance. NSW received 50 ALF pumper chassis in 1943, with massive 12.3 litre V-12 petrol engines and a top speed of 130km/h. With a "twin six" configuration you could run the engine at half power on one bank only, usually to prime the fire pump. A transfer box on the main driveshaft powered a CentraFlow fire pump. Two generators were fitted to most engines.

Photo courtesy Museum of Fire and The Good Egg Studio