

CFA community meeting- Kalkallo- Donnybrook Rd fire

Wed 20th Feb 2013

Epping Memorial Hall, 7.30-9.00pm

Panel-

John Deering CFA Incident controller (MC), Tony Higgins (Vic Pol) Bob Dykstra (Vic Pol), Darren Quaid (MFB), Neill Hocking (City of Whittlesea), Steve Di Cicco (VicRoads).

General Fire Information from John Deering, CFA

- Now level 2 fire- trees still burning, 20 new trucks coming in to try to extinguish remaining small fires.
- At present fires will start on even mild days due to grasses being so dry after no/ little rain for so long
- On the day, fire rating index predicted to be 27, by 1pm it was 50 – not classed as high fire risk day or a total fire ban but in retrospect it should have been. CFA realised this at 1pm and started to get plans in place in case of a fire.
- Fire started at 1.22pm Donnybrook.
- Fire moved 9km in total.
- 6 attack aircraft used, 300 personnel on ground from all over Melbourne (MFB) and greater Melbourne (CFA), difficult terrain due to lack of roads, rocks in paddocks etc.
- End of school time made the situation much more chaotic

Warning information (John Deering)

1.44pm FIRE ADVICE issued on website, CFA app, radio

WATCH AND ACT issued website, CFA app, radio

3. 45pm Emergency warning/ seek shelter issued- website, CFA app, radio am 774, Facebook, twitter, SMS

4.10pm second Emergency warning/ seek shelter issued- website, CFA app, radio am 774, Facebook, twitter, SMS

- John urged attendees to keep abreast of CFA website/ twitter/ Facebook/ radio am 774 etc. when it is a high risk day so they know what is going on.
- Emergency SMS is sent according to location/ proximity to fire (using phone towers in area) - Telstra network definitely, Vodafone maybe, other carriers still not occurring.
- Clarification of seek shelter now - this means to stay indoors out of smoke and ashes if it is safe to do so i.e. not at fire front/ in imminent danger.
- If needing to evacuate you will be sent another SMS being told to do so. This didn't occur in Epping North.
- A question was asked about where we should seek shelter to - don't have a fire shelter in Epping - closest is in Whittlesea. Seek shelter in your home if safe or if you wish to leave early go to the shopping centre, movies, friends away from fire area etc.
- A number of people voiced concerns about not receiving 'watch and act' SMS notifications as many of us who work don't use social media during work time, don't listen to radio and don't scour CFA website just in case - especially when it wasn't classed as a high fire risk day and wasn't even a total fire ban. It was said by Cara Horner (ACA secretary) that this policy of only sending seek shelter or evacuate SMS should be reviewed.
- Someone said the CFA is doing enough and we should take more responsibility for ourselves.
- Someone else said they unnecessarily left their home and went into the traffic because they didn't know what to do and should have stayed home.
- A question was asked about the recycled water in the Epping north/ Wollert area regarding whether it will stay on during an emergency - answer was that we shouldn't rely on it (along with mains water and power).
- (Question many of us asked ourselves was that if we are told to stay and we can't rely on power or water and we live in a peri-urban area without (room for) a dam/ fire pump and hose/ back-up generator, then why bother staying? Isn't it better to leave early when safe after getting a SMS?)
- Cara Horner, (ACA secretary) reiterated what someone said earlier about the need to get 'watch and act' SMS notifications as detailed above. It was said by Cara Horner that this policy of only sending seek shelter or evacuate SMS should be reviewed.

Police matters (Bob Dykstra, Tony Higgins, Victoria Police)

- 85 police officers around fire area controlling roads etc.

- Sub-contractor from Geelong using an angle grinder started the blaze accidentally, expected to be charged shortly
- Roads closed until the CFA says it's safe to open them again
E.g. Hume Fwy closed till 3am
- Fire one of the most dynamic they have been involved in
- Encouraged people to go along to community info sessions at start of each fire season

Inability of roads to cope in an emergency

- A question was asked about roads and their capacity to cope not only with normal traffic but that in an emergency (and the 2046 year mentioned by Terry Mulder in a recent letter to community members about the upgrades of roads).
- VicRoads rep (Steve Di Cicco) refused to address the question, instead letting Victoria Police go off on a tangent and speak about their need to close roads, keep the public safe etc. and not answer the question.
- Another question on roads was asked by Toni-Marie Wuelfert, ACA President, this time directly to Steve Di Cicco from VicRoads in regards to the state of the roads in our area, their ability to cope in emergency situations and what they were doing about the roads?
- Steve Di Cicco replied that they are looking into the area's road requirements and that any upgrades would be subject to funding coming from the government. A question was asked by another audience member on the timeline of the upgrades, to which the answer was '10 to 20 years'. People were shocked by the nearly inaudible answer from the VicRoads representative.

Fire feedback- for any agency

If you have any feedback on the fires, a comment to be made for any of the involved government departments or agencies etc. you can email info@whittlesea.vic.gov.au

It was also suggested that people living on the fringe of an urban area should consider setting up a 'Community Fire Guard Group' - see <http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/plan-prepare/community-fireguard/> for more details.

The next CFA fire ready meeting will be held on Tuesday, March 5 at 7.30pm at the CFA, South Morang station at 875 Plenty Road.

Meeting closed 9.10pm

Useful links

CFA website:

<http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au>

CFA warnings and incidents page

<http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/warnings-restrictions/warnings-and-incidents/>

CFA fire ready app:

<http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/plan-prepare/fireready-app/>

'Community Fire Guard Group'

<http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/plan-prepare/community-fireguard/>

CFA Facebook page

<http://www.facebook.com/cfavic>

CFA twitter page:

https://twitter.com/cfa_updates

Other information sources include: ABC local radio (774am), Sky News and other emergency broadcasters, Victorian Bushfire Information Line (1800 240 667)

Minutes taken by ACA Secretary Cara Horner.