

*Sassafras-Ferny Creek Fire Brigade ... Volunteers serving the community*

## After a long wet winter ... now what happens?

Isn't it interesting how quickly we forget? The hills have been through a long, wet winter and an even wetter spring. But in fact what we have experienced was more often than not the "norm" in years gone by. As it turns out, October alone was the month in which we have experienced rainfall well above the average. For the months of June, August and September the rainfall was around average. July was marked by below average falls. For the moment things are lush and green and growing like mad. More importantly, the forest floor is damp in a way it hasn't been for several years.

### So, I guess that means no fire season this year?

We should be so lucky! What it means is that the chance of severe fire conditions developing over the next few months is much diminished. On a yearly cycle, bushfires are possible in the local area over about a six month period, depending on the conditions. The rain has simply pushed back the date that the risk of serious fire conditions develop. There will be, as there is every year, a risk of bushfire at some point as the weather warms up. But like last summer, the capacity of the fire agencies to control any outbreaks is much improved by factors such as fuel and soil moisture levels.

### Guess we can just sit back and have a break ...

It's time to stop thinking in terms of "good years" and "bad years" and consider every summer as having the risk of fire. We don't stop wearing a seatbelt just because we haven't had a car accident for a while. Build bushfire preparations into your annual cycle of maintenance around your home and property and family activities. It

makes it easier to keep things ready all the time rather than forcing us into sudden flurries of action when the threat is imminent.

### Plan, plan, plan ...

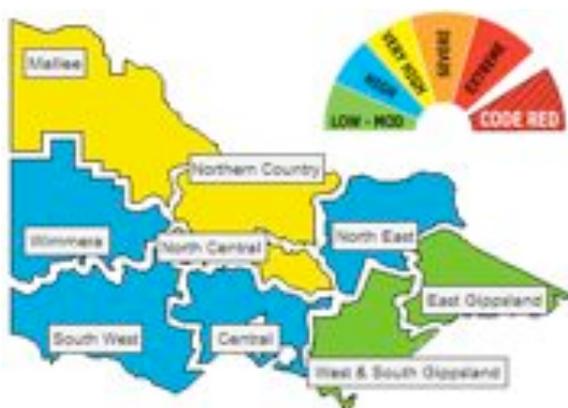
What an excellent opportunity to revisit bushfire plans and make sure they suit your needs and will be effective during an emergency. Review what you plan to do, revise those parts that didn't work last year and develop some new options. There's plenty of information to help you plan. Contact CFA or your local brigade (see over).



### The fundamentals remain unchanged

The fundamentals haven't changed at a local level. Leaving early remains the one guarantee of safety on high fire risk days in the Dandenongs. Staying to defend your property remains a viable option provided you are prepared, are physically and psychologically capable and fully understand the risks involved. The biggest risks are not having a plan, making a last minute dash for safety or relying on someone else to "do something".

## Fire Danger Ratings: refining the approach



There have been some significant changes in the fire danger ratings scale and fire ban districts across Victoria since last summer. Locally, at a practical level, they will make little difference but you should be aware of the changes as you

move through Victoria over the summer months. The first thing to note is that our local area remains in the **Central fire ban district**. Some boundaries have been changed to bring the fire ban districts into line with weather forecast districts. There are now **nine fire ban districts** across the state. The six level fire danger ratings remain, with Code Red being the highest level. Fire Danger Ratings are forecast during a fire season based on weather and other environmental conditions and are provided for the following four days. On Code Red days, the safest option locally is to leave the area early, either the night before or early in the morning. Code Red days will be rare. Homes are not designed or constructed to withstand fires in these conditions. Public schools must have a plan for Code Red days, which may involve closures. Parks and forests in areas with a declared Code Red are closed for public safety. Don't forget, you **must plan** for other high fire danger days, especially Severe and Extreme condition days.

## Reflecting on the Royal Commission

*(The 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission delivered its report on 31 July 2010. The following is an abridged version of an article by brigade captain John Schauble published in The Sunday Age on the following day.)*

Bushfire. One safe option. Leave. Early.

Nothing in more than 1000 pages of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission report counters this fundamental truth. That is because there has always been the only absolute in a bushfire: if you're not there, you won't be killed by it. Black Saturday did not change that.

The royal commission - to its credit - accepted that "the central tenets of the stay or go policy remain sound". But it acknowledged its weaknesses and the efforts being undertaken to build a more robust bushfire safety policy.

The commission also acknowledged that many of the things that need to happen can only occur incrementally. It acknowledged that the work done by the state's fire agencies towards protecting people from the ravages of fire has been significant. It has also noted that both the state and its individual citizens share responsibility for bushfire safety.

In the end, the crux of the matter for those of us who live in high fire risk areas is this: how do we stay alive when threatened by bushfire?

The fact remains that leaving early is the best strategy. Every other action carries a degree of risk. Staying to defend your home, "wait and see", going to a refuge, finding a neighbourhood safer place, waiting for an evacuation order, cowering in a dam, huddling in a ditch ... every other option that involves in staying within the fire zone has an element of deadly risk.

The simple question for people in bushfire-prone areas is this: "Am I prepared to accept that risk?" No-one else can answer that question for you. Not the government, not the fire agencies, not the police.

Many people will continue to stay and defend. But an even greater number will do nothing. All of the research since Black Saturday is clear on this point. People will not prepare or plan, they will continue to "wait and see", leave late, panic and wait for someone else to tell them what to do.

In an effort to accommodate circumstances in which people are caught unawares by a bushfire or where their plans have actually failed for some reason, the government and the fire agencies are now preparing a suite of survival options.

It has to be said that being "caught unawares" by a bushfire is mostly a euphemism for laziness or inattention. When it's stinking hot, there's a howling north wind, the landscape is parched and you're surrounded by bush or grassland, fire is a constant threat. Anyone who doesn't understand that needs to live somewhere else.

Options such as refuges and neighbourhood safer places, let alone any other vaguely safe "places of last resort", may actually encourage people to stay too long in danger in areas at risk of bushfire.

The official message may be that these are fallback positions. The reality is that you can't just wait and see and if it all goes pear-shaped, make a last minute dash for the bolt hole. No, you can't, not with any certainty of survival anyway.

## Community meetings ...

Community fire bushfire preparedness meetings will be held locally held over the coming weeks.

- Mon 29 November, 7.30pm, Sassafras Primary School, Mt Dandenong Tourist Rd, Sassafras
- Wed 1 December, 7.30pm, Ferny Creek Primary School, School Rd, Ferny Creek
- Sun 16 January 2011, 3pm, Sassafras-Ferny Creek Fire Station, Clarkmont Rd, Ferny Creek

A more extensive list is published on the CFA website [www.communityprograms.cfa.vic.gov.au](http://www.communityprograms.cfa.vic.gov.au)

## Briefly ... briefly ...

### NEW BRIGADE MANAGEMENT TEAM MEMBERS

Some new faces have stepped up into the brigade management team in recent months. Sarah Krumins has become Secretary, with Paul Hicks and Jeff Harbourd falling in as Lieutenants. Long-serving brigade officer Alan Potts has relinquished his officer's role but remain an active member, while Anna-Marie Shew and Karen Noonan have both moved from the district.

### CAROLS ON THE MOUNTAIN

Don't forget to join us for a night of song and family fun at the annual Carols on the Mountain on Saturday 11 December at the Ferny Creek Recreation Reserve from 6pm. Lots of activities along with the chance to test out those lungs ...



**PREPARE.  
ACT.  
SURVIVE.**

### Brigade & CFA contacts

*John Schauble 9755 1402*

*Sarah Krumins 9755 1981*

*Fire Station (answering service): 9755 1078*

*E-mail: [secretary@sassafrascfa.org.au](mailto:secretary@sassafrascfa.org.au)*

*Brigade website: [www.sassafrascfa.org.au](http://www.sassafrascfa.org.au)*

*CFA Eastern Metropolitan Region HQ: 8739 1300*

*CFA Website: [www.cfa.vic.gov.au](http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au)*

*Victorian Bushfire Information Line: 1800 240 667*