

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

This season ... an early warning to our north

This spring, parts of New South Wales has been hit by severe and deadly fires in the Blue Mountains and up and down the coast around Sydney. While the fire danger period in these parts normally begins in October each year, the conditions this year have been much drier than normal - setting the scene for significant fire activity.

In recent years, fire seasons in NSW have tended to extend right through to December but historically the fire danger in such areas begins in October-November before pushing southwards to Victoria.

The pre-season conditions in the Dandenongs have not been the same as in the Blue Mountains. While there have been good winter and spring rains, there was less than average rainfall in the earlier half of the year. This could translate into problems later in the summer depending on the weather conditions in the meantime. Whatever the scenario, the scenes from NSW are a stark reminder of the devastation that uncontrolled fire brings to communities like ours.

What should I do?

Plan for fire ... it's that simple. At some point most years, we will have bushfire activity in our local area to a greater or lesser extent.

Look and listen to the stories of those in NSW and *learn* from them ... Did families know where each other were? What clothes were people

wearing when the fire arrived? How many had a real plan about what they would do? Did people take unnecessary risks that put themselves and others in danger because they had no plan?

There is still time ahead of the arrival of the fire danger period in the Dandenongs to clean up around your property and do some simple maintenance around your home that will increase its chances of survival even if you are not there. **You must have a personal or family bushfire plan** so that your family knows what to do *ahead* of a fire emergency developing.

What should we do?

Whether or not you plan to be here when a bushfire comes, it pays to prepare for the worst. Preparation around your home and property will help your own and the neighbouring properties survive in the event of a fire.

There's always something new ...

Every season is different so even if you've attended a community meeting in previous years, it's



important to attend one this year - local conditions, shelter options and emergency warning systems can all change from year to year.

It is important to know what you are going to do on days of high risk. Planning involves making decisions well ahead of the fire danger period about how you and your family will deal with a number of issues: precious things, pets and people. Having a clear vision about how you plan to act on danger days, what your "fallback" plan is if the first plan fails.

The Ferny Creek community fire refuge ... what does it mean for me? See over ...

And now, your brigade needs ... **YOU!**

Our community is constantly changing. Over the past few years there has been a continuous cycle of people moving in and out of Sassafras and Ferny Creek. We know from the Australian Census that around one-third of the community changes every five years.

Demographic change has a big impact on organisations like CFA, especially in more rural communities but also in outer-urban or "interface" areas such as ours.

The way in which people live and work, the location of their employment, the make-up of their families, the age profile in a community ... all these are important factors in determining their availability to participate in community organisations, including fire brigades.

Our brigade is now looking to boost its membership ... we especially need people who are willing to take on the challenge of becoming an operational firefighter. It's not a role for

everyone, but it can be immensely rewarding.

Being a firefighter is a great way to develop new skills - many of which are useful in day-to-day employment. You also get to meet a range of people from your own community (our members come from all sorts of backgrounds). And you get the huge satisfaction of doing something for the community in which you live and more widely across Victoria and even interstate.

The brigade has other **non-operational** roles too. These range from community education to administration. While these opportunities are more limited, it means everyone can make a contribution.

So feel free to drop in to the fire station in Clarkmont Rd, Sassafras on Wednesday evenings or Sunday mornings to discuss.

Come along and learn some more!

This year, there is a range of community events and other ways to learn more about bushfire survival in this part of the world and beyond.

Fire Action Week - Check out the Community Fire Refuge pilot

If you live close to the Ferny Creek Primary School, then come along on *CFA Sunday*, 24 November 2013 to familiarise yourself with the workings of the Community Fire Refuge pilot. From 10am to 3pm. Guided tours of the refuge facility every half hour. Learn where the refuge might fit in your fire plan.

Community Meetings

There will be two *Fire Ready community meetings* in the brigade area this summer:

- Wednesday 15 January, 2014 at 7.30pm
Fire Station, Clarkmont Rd, Sassafras
- Saturday 18 January, 2014 at 2pm
Fire Station, Clarkmont Rd, Sassafras

Information and Family Fun Day 2014

The Sassafras-Ferny Creek, Kalorama-Mt Dandenong and Olinda fire brigades are again combining to hold an *Information and Family Fun Day* at the Olinda Community Hall, cnr Olinda-Monbulk Rd and The Georgian on Sunday 2 February, 2014 from 10am to 3pm. Representatives from other emergency agencies will also be in attendance. Lots of free stuff for the kids!

Brigade & CFA contacts

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CFA Eastern Metropolitan Region HQ: 8739 1300

CFA Website: www.cfa.vic.gov.au

Brigade website: www.sassafrascfa.org.au

Facebook:

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



The Community Fire Refuge and me ...

As part of a pilot being conducted by the Victorian Government, the Ferny Creek Primary School is one of three sites (the others are at East Warburton and Blackwood) selected for a Community Fire Refuge pilot. The provision of community fire refuges is one of the bushfire shelter options recommended by the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission.

The brigade has been involved in the development of the pilot and in the community consultations around the project, along with the Shire, the CFA, the Fire Services Commissioner, the school and other community members to ensure a successful pilot and an outcome that suits the local community. The refuge will now be trialed over the coming fire season.

Here are some things you must know:

- The refuge is place of last resort. It should never be your primary plan to go there.
- It will best serve residents in the School Rd and One Tree Hills areas. Travelling to the refuge from further away will be risky during a fire.
- The refuge may not provide a greater level of safety than the location you are leaving.
- The refuge has a limited capacity.
- It is not a "drop in" centre. There will be no capacity for people to hang around the refuge on high-risk days. It will only be opened during an emergency.

For more information about the pilot, www.firecommissioner.vic.gov.au

Burning off: Do the right thing

The brigade is often called out to burn offs out of control or burn offs days when council bylaws don't permit. These calls are a nuisance and unnecessarily cause public alarm.

Follow some simple rules:

- Check and follow local regulations or laws set down by CFA or your local council
- Notify neighbours at least two hours before starting the burn
- If your burn off is substantial or likely to create a significant smoke nuisance, notify the Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority (ESTA) on 1800 668 511
- Check the weather forecast for the day of the burn and a few days afterwards
- Check the fuel moisture conditions
- Establish a fire break of no less than three meters cleared of all flammable material
- Make sure there are enough people to monitor, contain and extinguish the burn safely and effectively.
- See more at:
<http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/plan%2Dprepare/burning%2Doff/#sthash.ftuqWfJ1.dpuf>