

Colinton Courier

Newsletter of the Colinton Rural Fire Brigade * No 87* February 2009



Victorian fires:

We offer our condolences to families and friends of those lost in the Victorian fires, and solidarity to our colleagues in the Country Fire Authority.



Committee 2008-2009:

Fire Captain: Graham Povey

Senior Deputy: Nick Goldie

Deputies: Bob Morison, Jeremy Mears

President: Martin Hughes

Secretary: Nick Goldie

Treasurer: Bob Morison

Training Officer: Jeremy Mears

Equipment Officers: Graham Povey, Nick Goldie

Community Awareness: Nick Goldie

Permits: Graham Povey

NSW RFSA Delegate: Jeremy Mears

Blood needed urgently:

adapted from myRFS 9 February

Given the situation in Victoria and the number of casualties the Red Cross urgently needs blood donations.

Visit <http://www.donateblood.com.au> to see if you are eligible to donate. If you are able to give blood, please do, it is needed more than ever now.

Contact details for information, donations and support:

- For assistance contacting relatives call the Red Cross on 1800 72 70 77.
- You can donate to the Red Cross Victorian Bush Fire Appeal 2009 by calling 1800 811 700 or visit the Red Cross Website.
- Donations can also be made via the Salvation Army at salvos.org.au.
- You can also donate any clothes, blankets or furniture to your nearest Salvation Army or other charity collection point.
- To offer horse agistment please contact the Triple R Equine Welfare Crisis Network.
- For offers of accommodation for small animals please contact Animal Aid.
- To help with wildlife rescue please contact Wildlife Rescuers. 

Volunteers to Victoria:

At the time of writing, there has been no call for volunteers from Cooma-Monaro to go to Victoria. RFS Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons has asked any RFS member who is willing to go, for at least 72 hours, to register with their local Fire Control Centre (Cooma 1 300 722 164). 

Stay and defend, or go?

Victorian Premier John Brumby, as well as the RFS and CFA Commissioners, acknowledged that the standard advice to people in bushfire situations will need some re-thinking. In principle, though, it remains true: decide whether you will leave - early - or stay and defend your home. But as John Brumby said, there is a new

reality. No one has experienced fires like those which devastated Victoria, and the heatwave which accompanied the fires smashed records derived from 154 years of record keeping.

Leading CSIRO scientist Kevin Hennessy has made a long study of climate change - whether it is human induced or a result of natural variability. For some years he has been predicting longer dryer summers, shorter 'windows of opportunity' for hazard reduction activities, and fire seasons starting earlier and being generally more intense. These changes will be obvious by 2020, he says.

In the *Sydney Morning Herald* (Tuesday 10 February), environment editor Marian Wilkinson reported that Hennessy had said the number of days with a very high or extreme risk of bushfires has begun rising, with climate change playing a role. "We observed a large increase in fire-weather risk from about the year 2000. So part of this increase in risk has begun and has been observed," said Hennessy, who was attending the 9th International Conference on Southern Hemisphere Meteorology and Oceanography in Melbourne.

Climate scientists have generally been cautious about associating the Victorian fires with climate change, saying that there is a *probable* link, but that individual events cannot be directly blamed on anything beyond individual circumstances. They are in no doubt, however, that the *trend* exists and that Hennessy's predictions are very likely to be accurate.

In this context, John Brumby's words make good sense. If you are going to leave, leave VERY early before you even think that you are in danger, preferably early in the day, in good visibility. And if you are going to stay, make sure that you are properly prepared with adequate fire-fighting equipment, enough water, and a clear understanding of what you could be facing ("... blown by a wind of great force,

they roared as they traveled. Balls of crackling fire sped at a great pace in advance of the fire, consuming with a roaring explosive noise all that they touched." (*Judge Leonard Stretton, in his report on the fires of 1939.*)

Also mentioned by Premier Brumby, and which will certainly be considered by the commission of enquiry, are preventive measures including permanent fire breaks, bunkers or shelters, and much stricter building codes in bushfire-prone areas. ↪

Fire shelters:

Dr Bob Leicester, of CSIRO and the Australian Bushfire CRC, is currently part of the team investigating the Victorian fires. He wrote this summary as part of an informal discussion with his Australian and US colleagues. We reproduce it with his permission.

"The wildfire front passes relatively quickly; a matter of seconds (20-30 seconds) in the case of grass fires and minutes (1-3 minutes) in the case of a forest fire. The cladding of all houses (with the possible exception of some of the new plastic claddings) can easily withstand this radiation without fire penetration. So just about any house gives good shelter to people against the lethal effects of the wildfire front.

"Just before and for perhaps up to an hour after the front there is a ferocious stream of embers which can seep into openings more than 2.5 mm wide or lodge in corners and if assisted by radiation burn a hole into the house. If left unattended these embers may ignite the furnishings in the house (or roof space) typically 20 minutes to two hours after the front has passed. I checked one unattended school that had ignited 6 hours after the front had passed. The ember attack rarely penetrates further than 300m from the forest edge into an urban

area. Often a person armed only with a bucket and mop can 'save' his house.

"Our statistics are that of houses attacked by embers, about seventy per cent are lost if there is no human intervention, and only 10% are lost if the occupant or a neighbour intervenes. So it is in the interests of insurance companies to encourage the 'Stay' option of the 'Stay or Go' policy! For houses near the forest edge more than ninety per cent of the losses involve ember attack and only five to ten per cent are due to radiation alone.

"The statistics are not in for the latest wildfire, but for past fires nearly all the deaths have been to people caught outside their homes, usually in vehicles making a last minute evacuation.... the worst possible decision and strongly discouraged by the fire authorities.

"It is rare to have a death within a house, and this event usually leads to considerable investigations. I believe that the CFA now advises residents who decide to 'Stay', that they should at all times keep an eye on the fire situation."

Call-out:

Friday 6 February, Seven Bravo (Graham, Jeremy, Ray) was on stand-by to attend a lightning strike at Yaouk, but were not required. All brigades were on stand-by on Saturday and Sunday 7 – 8 February, as a Total Fire Ban was in effect.

Training:

The Colinton Brigade conducts training every month on the second Saturday, at two o'clock, at the Station at Colinton. Everyone is welcome.

The Junior brigade is in action, every second Thursday night. Contact Bob Morison or Tony Campbell for details.

Help: from Sally Hughes

There may be occasions when our Colinton RFS members are at a fire or other incident and need sustenance. If you are able to consider contributing your time during such an event to making sandwiches, etc. please contact me and I will add your name to the list of food preparation volunteers.

Additionally, if you can come along to the Colinton RFS shed at 11.30am on *Saturday 14 March* we would have the opportunity to talk with active members about other ancillary help they needed during the 2003 fires so that we could have an idea of how we could assist should occasion arise.

Contact: Sally Hughes 62359093 or mshughes@activ8.net.au - please include your name, phone numbers and email address.

*Items for **The Colinton Courier** to Nick Goldie at horehound@yless4u.com.au
02 6235 9190*

by the first Saturday each month, or to any Committee member. For production assistance we are grateful to:

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***The Colinton Courier** is also available at*

www.michelagoregion.org.au/bushfire/brigades.htm

*Views expressed in **The Colinton Courier** are not necessarily those of the editor, the Brigade, or the RFS.*

Training (2):

The 2009 Training Action Plan is now available. Note that chainsaw courses (TFT, TFI) will be held in Nimmitabel on 5,6 March (evenings) and 7,8 March (day). A Rural Fire Driving (RFD) course is scheduled for Berridale on 3,4,5 April, and a Crew Leader (CLV) course for Cooma on 18,19 April. Details from Jeremy. 



Gill gets pumped

Brigade membership:

Membership: please pay by cash at training, or cheque to The Treasurer, Colinton Rural Fire Brigade, 88 Weemala Lane, Michelago NSW 2620.

Membership fees: \$10.00 for residents, \$50.00 for non-residents. Donations are always welcome. If paying by mail, please provide a return address so a receipt can be mailed to you. 



Neat hose-work



Essential numbers

Emergency 000

Fire:

**Cooma Monaro Fire Control
(24 hrs)**

**1 300 722 164
02-6455 0455**

Fire:

**Captain and Permit Officer:
Graham Povey**

**02-6454 4150
0419 406 908**

