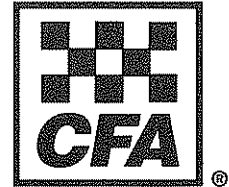
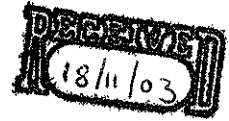


Patron: John Landy, AC, MBE, Governor of Victoria

Our Ref: NB:AR:lw
Enquiries: Alan Rhodes
Telephone: (03) 9262 8406
Fax: (03) 9262 8399
Your Ref:



14 November 2003



Ms Kristen Murray
Executive Officer
Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee
Level 8
35 Spring Street
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

Dear Ms Murray

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY – INJURIES AND FATALITIES ON VICTORIAN FARMS

Thank you for your letter of 7 October 2003 giving CFA the opportunity to comment on the terms of reference for the Parliamentary Inquiry.

Please find attached CFA's submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry into the Causes of Fatality and Injury on Victorian Farms.

Should you have any queries regarding this submission, Naomi Brown, Director Community Safety, can be contacted by telephone on 9262 8406 or by email at naomi.brown@cfa.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

Neil G Bibby
Chief Executive Officer

Headquarters: 8 Lakeside Drive, Burwood East, Victoria
Postal Address: PO Box 701, Mount Waverley, Victoria 3149.
Telephone: (03) 9262 8444 Fax: (03) 9264 6200

Creating a safer community

CFA SUBMISSION TO THE PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO THE CAUSE OF FATALITY AND INJURY ON VICTORIAN FARMS

Rural and Regional Services and Development Committee

The following CFA submission has been documented according to the Terms of Reference provided by the Rural and Regional Service and Development Committee.

1. The main causes of fatality and injury on Victorian farms and other primary industries compared to other jurisdictions.

CFA has an emergency response role beyond the traditional fires services role. During the five years from July 1998 to June 2003, CFA attended a total of 102 incidents involving injuries or fatalities on Victorian farms (31 fatalities and 77 injuries)¹. These resulted from a variety of incidents such as fires, car and tractor accidents, hazardous chemicals and other assorted accidents and emergencies. During this time period there was one CFA fatality, which occurred when a CFA member was killed by a moving object while responding to an incident².

In Victoria, the actual number of fatalities or serious injuries caused by the direct impact of wildfire on farms is low. According to CFA data, in the five years between July 1998 and June 2003 there were a total of 3 fatalities and 29 injuries associated with outdoor fires on farms³. However, at least some of these injuries / fatalities were caused by other events and accidents associated with fire rather than as a direct effect of uncontrolled wildfire; e.g. as a result of heart attack or other medical condition.

The number of fire related fatalities that occur in Victoria is significantly higher for residential house fires than it is for wildfires⁴. There are a number of high-risk groups in relation to residential fires such as the isolated elderly or incapacitated adults. CFA data suggests that farmers are not a high-risk group in relation to residential fires and there were no reported fatalities and five injuries caused by residential fires during the five years from July 1998 to June 2003⁵.

Victorian Injury and Surveillance and Applied Research (VISAR) provided additional data for this submission. According to the Victorian Emergency Minimum Dataset (VEMD), there were 54 presentations of farm injuries caused by fire, flames and smoke in Victorian emergency departments between January 1997 and December 2002⁶. The 54 presentations overwhelming involved males (89%) and were largely due to burns or corrosions (74%). Over 25% (15 incidents) of fire related injuries on farms involved children less than fifteen years of age.

¹ FIRS data for five year period 1/7/1998 to 30/6/2003.

² CFA Occupational Health and Safety Data 1998 – 2003.

³ FIRS data for five year period 1/7/1998 to 30/6/2003.

⁴ Rhodes, A and Reinhold, S Residential Fire Fatalities Report, Country Fire Authority

⁵ FIRS data for five year period 1/7/1998 to 30/6/2003.

⁶ Victorian Emergency Minimum Dataset, January 1997 to December 2002.

Many farmers are exposed to fire through routine burning activity such as stubble burning, burning off, wildfires on or near their property or through volunteering with CFA. Generally speaking, grass and stubble fires are low intensity and farmers often have the skills and experience to deal effectively with the risks involved.

3. **Current programs and initiatives designed to improve occupational health and safety on Victorian farms.**

CFA currently offers a range of interventions to reduce the risk of death or injury from farm fires:

- **Bushfire Blitz and Community Fireguard** are interactive community education programs, which target communities living in a high wildfire fire risk area. Bushfire Blitz and Community Fireguard are delivered as interactive meetings in rural / farming communities. The focus of the meetings is on basic wildfire / grassfire behavior, personal safety, house survival and recognition of local risk.
- **Brochures.** CFA distributes a number of brochures that have relevant fire safety messages for farming communities:
 - **Grassfire** brochure, which features safety messages in relation to grassfires
 - **Farm Fire Safety** brochure, which provides information about assessment and management of farm fire risks, asset protection and regulations that relate to machinery maintenance.
 - **Can I Can't I** brochure, which documents the rules and regulations regarding fires and use of machinery during the Fire Danger Period and on days of Total Fire Ban.
- **Summer media and public relations campaign.**
 - A statewide radio and press advertising campaign is delivered in early summer each year.
 - An ABC radio phone-in day is conducted in November each year, This involves radio interviews with CFA staff about wildfire preparedness and direct interaction with the community through the CFA 1800 telephone line.
 - Pre recorded CFA announcements about wildfire safety are broadcast by ABC throughout the summer period.
 - Public relations activities include displays and local media activity throughout rural Victoria.
- **Information Flow.** CFA has delivered an information flow strategy aimed at delivering accurate and timely messages to communities affected by a wildfire, in order to support appropriate response and proactive measures. Information Units will use various dissemination methods to reach communities impacted on by wildfire including electronic media, telephone trees, public meetings, call center and web.

- **Other fire safety programs.** CFA delivers other fire safety programs in rural areas including:
 - **Reduce the Risk.** A residential fire safety program to enable residents to prevent and deal with house fires
 - **Winter media campaign.** This campaign focuses on public awareness of increased residential fire risk during the winter months.
- **Multicultural services.** CFA delivers messages to multicultural communities including farmers and itinerant farm workers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. This is done through ethnic radio and translated publications of CFA fire safety messages.

5. The financial and social cost of death and injury on Victorian farms

Although wildfires affecting farms are not a major cause of fatalities or serious injuries, they do destroy houses, farm buildings, fences and livestock with reasonable frequency. There is evidence that fire has a significant effect on the health and well-being of farmers who have experienced wildfire on their property.

Research from the recent fires in North Eastern Victoria and Gippsland showed that approximately a quarter of farm residents in the fire affected area identified that they suffered trauma, stress and depression as a result of the fires. Nearly half of the survey respondents living on farms reported that the fires caused significant damage to their business (48%), farm fencing (53%), pastures (50%), stock fodder (22%) and livestock (22%)⁷.

The damage caused by fires is highly traumatic and can have a devastating effect on farmers and their families. Fires that occur during droughts or particularly dry years cause additional stress to farmers already grappling with the affects of severe conditions.

6. The need for future strategies to reduce incidence of injury and fatality on Victorian farms.

CFA is in the process of developing fire readiness / fire management strategies to meet the needs of isolated rural communities.

⁷ CFA 2003. Community Safety Post Incident Analysis (Wildfire) Community information flow, preparedness and response. CFA publication.