

BLACK SATURDAY

Preceding the occurrence of "*Black Saturday*" Victoria was subjected to a succession of high temperature days, this obviously pre heated the forest area and caused flammable gases to be driven off from the combustible products present in the forest. These combustible gases would be encapsulated within the forest canopy and lay dormant awaiting ignition from the fires that occurred on "*Black Saturday*" this together with the accumulation of flammable debris on the forest floor provided, on ignition, a thermal output fire ball that could only be described as being in Atomic like proportions.

There was no obvious defined fire front where an attack could be established, large areas ignited simultaneously, creating a fire spread of enormous proportions that involved all flammable material in its development.

What commenced as a fire fight became a fight for survival.

It is not known what flammable vapour monitoring techniques were carried out in the forest prior to *Black Saturday*.

Considerable comment has evolved on the need to carryout *Fuel Reduction Burning* which is sometime referred to as *Controlled or Prescribed Burning*, it should be appreciated that any fire in the forest area, is out of control until it is extinguished, there no way any fire in the forest can be considered under control.

To evaluate *Fuel Reduction Burning* a number of factors must be considered :

1. when comparing the vast tracts of forest in Victoria and the area the current program of *fuel reduction burns* achieves - the percentage comparison would question the justifiable achievement
2. could the current cost per annum of the *fuel reduction burns* carried out be better used in other areas of fire prevention and protection ?
3. is there any historical statistics where *fuel reduction burns* have had any significant effect in major wild fires to justify the exercise ?
4. there are instances where *fuel reduction burns* have become out of control wild fires !
5. the pollution factor created by *fuel reduction burning* is of major concern
6. the long term health effect to personnel conducting the fuel reduction burn over a prolonged period of time without the protection of self contained breathing apparatus could lead to workers compensation claims in the future, *it could be compared with the asbestos situation*
7. the claim that the original inhabitants (aborigines) carried out *fuel reductions burning* requires justifiable evidence, why would a nomadic race with out permanent habitation place themselves at risk in the forest ?

The most probable cause for pre settlement forest fires was from lighting strikes.

The treeless western plains of Geelong are probable evidence where it is believed that the Aborigines often burnt the grass land area to encourage the native animals to the graze , thus denuding the area of trees and provide them with game for food. Is there any evidence to support this theory ?

8. Were there areas where *fuel reductions burns* had been carried out in the areas involved in the *Black Saturday* fires, if so what effect did this have on the subsequent fire development.?

In lieu of *fuel reduction burning* it is a considered opinion that permanent defined strips of land in the forest be established as sterile areas to provide compartmentation of the forest and any fuel reduction of the forest floor be achieved without the use of fire.

It is obvious that what commenced as a local fire fight developed into a fight for survival for those responding to the initial response.

It is obvious that the initial fire fight response on *Black Saturday* did not have the required speed and concentration to be effective.

The subsequent fire development was beyond the scope of the follow up response.

There is no criticism of those who responded they plainly did not have the logistics to be effective in the initial stages.

The overall assessment of Victoria's indeed that of the Australian - Fire, Ambulance and Rescue Response Service scene indicates that they are still in pre Federation mode (pre 1901), with numerous and separate administration and operational empires at State and Federal level

Before Federation each Colony (now States) had separate Army and Naval Forces, after Federation they became the Australian Defence Forces.

Is it time to after 100+ years to develop the same concept for the Emergency Response Services ?

In the overseas scene, especially Germany, indicate there is a trend to Amalgamate all emergency services under the one administration and operation structure.

When the Berlin Wall fell over and the reunification of Germany occurred the Emergency Service were confronted with and incredible difference in philosophy in management and operation procedures, Thus in true German efficiency all services were amalgamated into an Emergency Response Service

Thus every emergency in Germany is responded to by the same State Authority, i.e. FIRE BRIGADE who in are reality the Emergency Response Service

The duties of the German Fire Service are :-

1. Firefighting
2. Technical rescue interventions
3. Environmental protection (including hazardous material incidents)
4. Specialist technical rescue, water rescue, Divers, high angle rescue,
5. Trauma and Emergency medical services, transportation of patients
6. Major incidents and Disaster Control

Basically the German Civil Emergency Response Service responds to every emergency that occurs, be it fire, storm flood, trauma, accidents, hazardous material incidents etc etc

German facts and figures

357,050 square kilometres divided into 16 States population of 82 million persons

Fire Service : - Emergency Response Service

1. 23,000 Volunteer Fire brigades
2. 1.3 million Volunteer Firefighters
3. 261,000 junior Firefighters (10 to 16 years)
4. 100 Professional Fire Brigades
5. 27,600 Professional Firefighters
6. 800 Industrial Fire Brigades
7. 30,000 Industrial Firefighters

Thus if the German template were applied in Victoria there would be an amalgamation of the emergency operational structure of the following :

- 1.. Melbourne Metropolitan Fire Brigade
- 2.. Country Fire Authority
- 3.. Airport Fire Services (formerly Australian Department of Civil Aviation)
- 4.. Industrial Fire Brigades (e.g. Shell refinery)
- 5.. Contract Fire Services (that operate at Puckapunyal & Bandiana Military)
- 6.. Ambulance Service of Victoria (recent amalgamation of Metro & Rural Services)
- 7.. St Johns Ambulance Brigade
8. Environment Protection Authority (E.P.A. emergency response)
9. State Emergency Service created after Cyclone Tracey (Darwin) and operates Australia wide
10. Department of Sustainability & Environment - Firefighting Section
11. Parks Victoria – Firefighting Section.

Thus initially effectively eliminating 11 emergency response organizations into one central control

In view of the recent fire situation it may be opportune to consider an Australia wide Organization, e.g. four (4th) arm of Defence (Civil) to be administered on the same basis as the Defence Forces and funded by the Federal Government.

Thus the creation of a Federal Fire-Rescue & Emergency Service would evolve

Volunteers involved would receive payment for their services similar to that received by the Military Reserve Forces

It would be interesting to research a cost analysis of the current Military Reserve payments

This would eliminate the various States ad hoc methods of Ambulance subscriptions, Insurance Fire Service Levies, Municipal payments through rates etc.

It should be appreciated that at the present time - it is the poor, who cannot afford Ambulance Membership subscriptions and Fire Insurance, - are the most disadvantaged.

Currently in Victoria the Fire Services charge for their attendance at uninsured properties thus you can loose the lot and have to pay for the Fire Brigade attendance also the Ambulance Service charge non subscribers for their services.

To remove the Fire Service levy from Fire Insurance would be a gain for both the insured person and the Insurance Companies.

Check your policy and see how much the Insurance Companies have to collect in regards the Fire Service levy.

Municipalities would no longer from the rates collected make payment to maintain the Fire Service.

Ambulance Services would no longer be obliged to collect Annual Ambulance Subscriptions.

A Community gain could be achieved by establishing the Australia wide Civil Emergency Response Service - requiring every person applying for unemployment payments to become a participating operational member

and be available and rostered on the current Fire Brigade Platoon Shift roster i.e. 2 day shifts of 10 hours followed by 2 Night shift of 14 hours (required if necessary to sleep at the current Fire Station) and then 4 days off, this could be established Australia wide at the present Fire Stations

with every Urban and Rural area having an immediate Emergency Response Service of either or a combination of - Professional, Part Paid Volunteers and those receiving Unemployed payments

This would effectively provide training of virtually all Australians in the aspects of discipline, Firefighting, Rescue, First Aid and Trauma skills together with personal development.

And provide them with a potential career path and the motivations to leave the DOLE structure mentality and progress into gainful employment

The current proposal of reducing the HEX fees by University Students partaking in Community Service could be incorporated in this Service

It must not be misconstrued as a potential compulsory National Service

It would need to be identified as a Civil Community Emergency Response Service Organization

Providing Emergency Response to all emergency incidents.

In reality it would be a scheme that to qualify for unemployment benefits one has to contribute to the well being of Australia who provide this benefit

It is obvious this proposal would receive considerable opposition from the numerous Empire building Organizations that currently exist !

It could be anticipated that virtually every suburb, rural town and community would have an Emergency Response structure in place, in many cases fully manned by those receiving unemployment benefits

There would only be one (1) Emergency response Station at each location, not the current Fire, Ambulance and State Emergency Service buildings.

In essence the Federal Emergency Response Service (F.E.R.S.) would provide the administration and operational response currently provided by the separate Fire, Ambulance and Rescue Organizations that currently exist.

There is potential benefit to the declining Rural Community

In conclusion it is obvious from the events of *Black Saturday* and indeed from the historical events of the past century of major civil emergency occurrences, the current ad hoc system of administration, operational procedures and co ordination only effectively functions on the small local scale.

When events develops beyond the scope of the local response, those involved find themselves and their families in a fight for survival with their own personal safety and assets under threat.

It must be appreciated that vegetation fires in the rural area have the potential to rapidly become fires of major and catastrophic proportion, involving considerable area under threat.

There must be immediate and total commitment of all resources in each instance to prevent the fire development.

In essence each fire responded to must be subjected to over kill and not the current build up of resources as the fire develops.

It is essential that rural areas be subjected to at all times to constant appraisal and surveillance to monitor the fire potential, and risk assessments be carried out.

During fire development the consideration of asset protection be replaced with evacuate and let it burn strategy should be considered, thus preventing loss of life

Residents must be kept informed and alerted of impending danger

In times of extreme weather conditions, Residents are inclined to encapsulate themselves in the comfort of their dwellings and are completely unaware of what is occurring and posing a threat to their safety.

*remember the air raid sirens installed in all locations during the 2nd World War !
modern communications have the ability to provide personal warning systems*

In view of the events of recent times and the record of historical occurrences of the past, It is time that a Federal Emergency Response Service be implemented to provide the funding, administration and operational response to all civil emergencies that occur and have the ability to respond with speed and concentration together with the mobilization of personnel and equipment both State and Australia wide.

Submitted for consideration

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