31 May 2011

Victorian Parliamentary Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee
Inquiry into locally based approaches to community safety and crime prevention
Parliament of Victoria
Spring Street
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002

This submission is a personal response to the Committee’s Terms of Reference, which arises from our various experiences as Area Manager, Deputy Area Manager, Newsletter editor and Secretary of Warrandyte Neighbourhood Watch (NHW) as well as Coordinator of the Pound Road Warrandyte Community Fireguard Group (CFG) which has been operating for 13 years. As we have not had sufficient time and opportunity to canvass the views of our NHW and CFG group members before assembling this submission, there may well be members with different viewpoints.

WHERE DO WE START?

Locally based volunteer-operated community safety and crime prevention groups in our area include Warrandyte Neighbourhood Watch (NHW) and a significant number of Community Fireguard (CFG) groups. While Neighbourhood Watch activities are managed by Victoria Police and Community Fireguard by the Country Fire Authority (CFA), the frontline activities of both organisations rely on active and continuing participation by local volunteers. Both of these community organisations require prior demonstration by local residents to the relevant government agency that there is a sufficient need in their proposed catchment area and that an adequate and continuing supply of suitable, able and willing volunteers is available before the agency is prepared to devote time, effort and resources to facilitate the proposed new group’s activities.

Victoria Police maintain a Neighbourhood Watch website and other publicity resources aimed at facilitating NHW objectives, which includes materials for potential inclusion in local NHW newsletters. One Victoria Police member has been appointed to facilitate NHW activities in our division. NHW activities are supported by a state level business sponsor together with contributions from many local councils, politicians, businesses, organisations and individuals, in both cash and kind. Local support contributions include provision of newsletter paper, printing of newsletters and installation of NHW and CFG roadside area signage.

CFA region 13 has a part-time CFG Coordinator assisted by a team of CFA-trained sessional facilitators providing a range of appropriate bushfire and personal safety information and training sessions each year. Warrandyte CFA and other local community organisations assist by providing accommodation for information and training sessions and with newsletter copying.
(a) the breadth of locally based groups and organisations addressing community safety and crime prevention issues within Victoria, particularly with regard to local government and Neighbourhood Watch

Warrandyte NHW was initiated in 2007 by members of the Pound Road Warrandyte CFG who agreed to “champion” the proposed NHW program in their area with active facilitation by Sgt Pete Henry, the local Victoria Police NHW Coordinator and Sgt Keith Walker, officer in charge at Warrandyte.

Enhanced NHW and CFG coverage, particularly in known high-risk areas, necessarily involves recruitment of significant numbers of willing and able local people prepared to be accredited as volunteers. Experience has shown that the recruitment process requires identification of an effective local "champion" at the outset who is prepared to do what is necessary to initiate the process, recruit volunteers and kick-start the program.

While the Warrandyte NHW area coverage has extended since then to now cover some 700 properties – only a portion of our potential catchment area - further coverage expansion is dependent on availability of volunteers prepared to "champion" the NHW program in their area. As Warrandyte is not a recognised high crime area and there are many competing volunteering activities, recruitment of new volunteers from within our existing and proposed coverage areas is slow.

We are fortunate that the Warrandyte community is a low crime area and our NHW aim is to keep it that way. The downside is that community awareness of crime prevention is relatively low with consequent reduced interest in NHW activities and NHW volunteering.

This contrasts with the high level of awareness of bushfire risk and interest in participating in CFG activities, which is due in part to proactive CFA and local Warrandyte Diary newspaper promotion. There is a significant number of CFG groups in the Warrandyte community with each operating in a slightly different manner due to neighbourhood and leader variations. Nevertheless and despite local community recognition of our exposure to direct bushfire and consequent ember attack, Warrandyte CFG groups only include a limited number of our at-risk families and properties, due to an inadequate supply of motivated individuals to "champion" initiation of a CFG group in their street or area.

It is submitted that the community safety and crime prevention effectiveness and coverage of both NHW and CFG groups should be facilitated and enhanced by ‘proactive’ marketing campaigns managed by marketing organisations rather than the present ‘reactive’ agency response approach.

(b) the approaches adopted by these groups in promulgating community safety and crime prevention practices, programs or initiatives;

Warrandyte Neighbourhood Watch’s Victoria Police-accredited volunteers distribute a monthly newsletter (example copy attached less NHW masthead and footer) to all families and properties in our area. The newsletters focus on provision of crime awareness and prevention information.

While Victoria Police provide a range of generic crime prevention information intended for inclusion in NHW newsletters, local NHW newsletters need to focus awareness and prevention advice on issues of particular relevance for their community to actively support local policing
imperatives. It is also important to translate jargon terms and ‘police speak’ words into language that is appropriate for the local community.

Pound Road Warrandyte CFG distributes a number of our own CFG newsletters (example copy appended) to member families during each bushfire season together with occasional CFA-sourced *Fireguardian* newsletters. Our CFG newsletters include information on joining Community Fireguard, local telephone tree membership and operation, bushfire and personal safety advice as well as advertising CFA training opportunities. We are not aware of any similar newsletters elsewhere in Victoria.

Pound Road CFG Group has operated an effective bushfire emergency alerting system during each summer bushfire season. Our alerting system uses three independent local radio scanners (purchased by CFG family member contributions) monitoring CFA VicFire broadcasts and fire brigade fireground communications to initiate appropriate telephone emergency alert messages to CFG member families. The alert system includes quality assurance measures to ensure all members are contacted. More details are included in our appended submission to the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission.

Responding to different local community capabilities, Brackenbury Street East CFG in Warrandyte developed an alternative bushfire alert initiative titled CMAS (Community Messaging and Alert System) which uses mobile phones to send and receive text alert messages to CFG group members.

The *Firelinx* emergency bushfire alerting system was developed by another Warrandyte community CFG group. Pound Road CFG group members participated in a trial of the *Firelinx* system during the 2009 -- 2010 bushfire season.

*(c) the extent to which these organisations are effective in engaging with local and state agencies in the development of policy;*

As the community safety and crime prevention needs vary markedly between different Victorian communities, there will be significant local knowledge on relevant issues by Victoria Police members, NHW volunteers, CFA volunteers, municipal employees and members of the public. At present there is limited if any mechanism for documentation and wider dissemination of this local knowledge to other communities where it might be of value.

We are not aware of any coordinated mechanism for local NHW or CFG groups to assist with development of state agency policy. While we understand that there is a state level NHW organisation, communication to and discussion of their decisions at local NHW group level does not appear to be effective in our experience. A similar situation is perceived to affect our ability to communicate potentially useful initiatives up the NHW hierarchical tree and to or from other NHW groups beyond our local community area. While occasional *NHW Sentinel* magazines contain brief public relations-type articles on activities by selected NHW groups around the state, there does not appear to be any coordinated state-wide dissemination of effective initiatives in a form suitable for adoption by local NHW groups.

On the other hand, we enjoy an effective and mutually beneficial relationship with our local Victoria Police members with the aim of identifying and minimising preventable crime in our community. Appropriate prevention activities for relevant local issues and other significant crimes are publicised in our local NHW newsletter which is received by all families, businesses and properties in our area.
CFA region 13 organise CFG leaders’ meetings, usually annually, to provide a feedback forum on issues of mutual interest to the CFA and CFG groups. These meetings have been effective in generating a number of appropriate improvements in CFA publications and other activities. The meetings have also been effective in providing opportunities for learning about, discussing and optimising local CFG group initiatives. We are not aware whether these positive local region 13 initiatives have been communicated to other CFA region leaders elsewhere in Victoria.

Although Pound Road Warrandyte CFG group made a submission to the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, the Commission’s subsequent report appeared focused on other issues deemed more significant with minimal focus on the potentially life-saving prospect of effective CFG group activities.

(d) whether institutional or other arrangements support or impede such local groups in engaging in the development of community safety initiatives;

This topic is poses a wide range of responses.

‘Support’ items start from the ongoing existence of NHW and CFG groups across Victoria and their active support by Victoria Police and CFA. These are supplemented by ongoing support from local councils, politicians and many others, as reported above.

Periodic photocopied CFG Fireguardian newsletters distributed to all CFG members in CFA region 13 contain information of direct relevance for readers including information on planned CFG training and information sessions. It is understood that the cost of the Fireguardian newsletters will be further reduced in future by e-mail distribution. It is also relevant to note that Fireguardian content includes useful information provided by local community CFG groups. We do not know if this useful information is disseminated more widely to CFG groups or members in other CFA regions elsewhere in Victoria.

We have also received a number of useful publications from CFA region 13 which are understood to have resulted from feedback from local CFG groups. One example is the publication on appropriate treatment of vegetation in fire prone areas to minimise the impact and spread of bushfire.

‘Impede’ items needing consideration include deficient communication of timely advice on proposed changes, such as the proposed extension of NHW coverage to all Victorian properties and the proposed conversion of CFA communications from analog to digital technology.

While we understand that a decision has been made at state level that all Victorian properties will be covered by Neighbourhood Watch, we have no information on how this is supposed to happen, who will be managing the proposed expanded coverage program, what resources might be provided to facilitate its implementation or what our role might be. And if it is appropriate for all Victorian properties to be included in NHW coverage areas, it appears appropriate to ask why a similar ruling to include all potentially at-risk communities in Community Fireguard programs has not been made, particularly when the CFG program aims to address potentially life-threatening issues whereas NHW is more focused on potential property losses.

Although there has been no formal notification to CFG groups, we believe that conversion of CFA communications from analog to digital technology may occur in the near future as Victoria Police and Ambulance Victoria have already converted to digital. Most if not all Victorian CFG groups and
many individual CFG members rely on their analog technology radio scanners to monitor CFA bushfire communications to keep aware of potential fire risks to their area. A CFA change to digital technology would necessarily force those CFG groups and individuals to purchase expensive digital scanner units to maintain their vital awareness of potential bushfire risks. There is also concern that digital CFA and DSE communications to and from fireground units might be encoded for confidentiality similar to Victoria Police and Ambulance Victoria messages, which would send a very negative message to community CFG groups and seriously impair their community safety effectiveness.

There is a perceived need for CFA bulk purchasing arrangements to recognise downstream Community Fireguard requirements -- particularly for conversion of CFA communications from analog to digital technology. While the Pound Road Warrandyte CFG group of over 40 member families has some volunteer-sourced funds for possible future purchase of a digital scanner, we would need more to purchase even one digital unit while retail purchase of digital scanners would be significantly more difficult for smaller CFG groups. It is therefore perceived as essential that future CFA communications equipment purchase contracts should extend to include availability of digital scanners to approved CFG groups at a more affordable price. In short, an appropriate "support" need.

Pound Road Warrandyte CFG group has been advised by CFA staff of their expectation that all CFG members should receive the "official" four or five session CFG training package, with exclusion by some CFG groups of families who have not received that training represented as ‘best practice.’ Our CFG members have objected to ill-informed criticism that we are "just a telephone tree and not a proper CFG group" which is both inappropriate and denigrating to our volunteers. That criticism arose in part due to our perception that "exclusive" membership barriers are contrary to good sense and antisocial -- our approach is ‘inclusive’ rather than ‘exclusive.’ We believe that to exclude potential CFG members is to exclude them from receiving available and potentially life-saving information and neighbourhood cooperation which are not necessarily available from other sources.

Another "impede’ item arises due to CFA staff privacy concerns which limit the distribution of local CFG leaders’ contact information unless specifically approved, and has inhibited effective local interaction and dissemination of initiatives between CFG groups in our community and presumably more widely across the state. While this problem is being circumvented to some degree in our community through local social interaction and communication, it remains as a significant barrier to dissemination of effective community safety initiatives and needs sensible management action.

On the NHW side, the occasional *NHW Sentinel* magazines are perceived as expensive, glossy, "feel good" public relations exercises with an extremely limited distribution. We perceive that NHW could learn from CFA-sourced CFG newsletters, at least the photocopied *Fireguardian* distributed to all CFG group members in our CFA region 13.

(e) **whether there is a cost benefit to the community for current crime prevention strategies;**

While we are not aware of any formal cost benefit analyses of current crime or bushfire loss prevention strategies, we firmly believe that NHW and CFG activities are cost beneficial for our community. As individuals we recognise the significant benefits to our neighbours and us but are not aware of the total costs incurred for these programs.
It is recommended that formal cost benefit analyses of NHW and CFG activities should be conducted, hopefully with the assistance of relevant government agencies, municipal councils and insurance companies. It would also be useful if the cost benefit study investigated the potential outcome impact of amalgamating local community volunteer emergency activities as noted below.

(f) whether alternate models for such organisations may improve outcomes; and

It is submitted that the Committee should consider an appropriate level of amalgamation of state agency-controlled local community volunteer organisations, in particular Neighbourhood Watch and Community Fireguard, with the aim of maximising the effectiveness of local community volunteer effort and dissemination of relevant information both downward from and upwards to state management level while minimising the need for government resources, management and bureaucratic involvement.

It is also appropriate to recognise that the tendency for a ‘one size fits all’ approach inherent with centrally managed organisations needs to be balanced against the wide range of local community safety needs and crime prevention imperatives across the different Victorian communities. The balance should be facilitated by encouraging and appropriate state-wide dissemination of feedback from local NHW and CFG groups about their particular challenges and initiatives.

NHW and CFA volunteers are covered by a state-wide insurance program while involved with NHW and CFA activities; a similar arrangement for CFG volunteers should be considered.

(g) local community safety and crime prevention arrangements in other jurisdictions, particularly within Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

It is recommended that the Committee should approach Queensland Police for information on local policing initiatives and NHW programs operating in that state. I have evaluated some of the initiatives operating and being trialed in Townsville, where Sen Sgt Janelle Poole and her NHW-focused team of Queensland Police members and associated volunteers in Townsville have introduced and are operating local crime prevention initiatives that are perceived as significantly more effective than contemporary Victorian NHW program activities. One example initiative uses NHW volunteers to promptly letterbox relevant awareness, prevention and crime reporting information brochures to properties in the immediate area after a burglary or theft event.

On the other hand, Queensland appears to share Victoria’s inadequate communication system for promptly disseminating relevant crime prevention information and initiatives to local NHW areas. For example, Townsville NHW groups had not been made aware until recently of the one-way screw program for securing vehicle number plates operating in Victoria.

It is also recommended that your Committee’s review would benefit from information on local community policing in Canadian provinces, where initiatives have been introduced that could be beneficial for Victoria. One example is the use of accredited and trained volunteers, usually retired people, to staff small but accessible CrimeStoppers–type information offices at the main entry point to major shopping centres. These volunteers provide an easy public contact point for reporting possibly criminal activities, obtaining appropriate crime prevention, security and community safety information and attracting new volunteers.
Pound Road Community Fireguard Group

Our Fireguard group (hereafter CFG) has twelve years’ experience of discussion about effective bushfire alert communication, including on-going liaison with other CFG groups on alternative communication technologies.

Our CFG group of 75 residentially zoned members abuts the Warrandyte State Park and is downwind (south and southwest) of an extensive forest and woodland area. A number of our members’ properties also abut the Pound Bend Tunnel Park which is always open to the public and poses a significant risk of deliberate or accidental bushfire ignition.

Our CFG members funded the purchase of two radio scanners to monitor Country Fire Authority (hereafter CFA) radio transmissions from the VicFire control room and CFA vehicles at the fire front. We now have three scanners including one privately-owned unit providing appropriate alert messages to our nine Phone Trees. Scanner operators have agreed policy guidelines for initiating alert messages based on weather conditions, fire location and direction. Policy guidelines are discussed and agreed by an informal ‘committee’ of present and past Tree Heads.

Consistent with the ‘Keep it simple’ maxim, our guideline is ‘No news is good news for our members’ with our alert messages limited to brief advice that there is a bushfire potentially posing a risk to our members. The understanding is that CFG members must have an effective Bushfire Plan that they will have already activated or now be activating. If members wish to obtain further information about the bushfire and its progress, they have been advised to go to the Victorian Bushfire Information (phone) Line or the CFA website. We are aware that other CFG groups do such things as advising members that the following day has been declared a Total Fire Ban (TFB) day and calling up members on TFB day mornings. For the 2008-9 bushfire season, our CFG group policy added a ‘bushfire emergency is now finished’ reassurance message for members after the CFA fire fighters have advised VicFire that the fire is fully controlled.

Each Phone Tree operates in a loop for quality control - to ensure all Tree members have been alerted and to monitor the loop completion time against our 10 minute guideline target. Each Phone Tree membership is limited to ten members to facilitate rapid alert message transmission. At least two ‘dummy runs’ are held before each bushfire season to ensure that members are ‘up to speed’ with both their communications and loop completion time.

We have investigated a number of alternative bushfire alert communication systems, including SMS/text messaging and alternative phone-based alert messaging. Our decision to stay with simple phone messages was based on:

- ensuring that all members are contactable (loop QC), including members without mobile phones
- identifying members needing assistance, and
- maintaining neighbourhood relationships.

It also recognises that text messages are:

- in small letters which could be difficult to read due to eyesight limitations or adverse circumstances
- may be delayed for hours by congestion
- may be missed due to noise obscuring the message alert tone, and
- may be ignored if the recipient is busy at the time of receipt.

CFG members ‘sign up’ at the start of each bushfire season with:

- their names, addresses, mobile phone number and one alternative phone contact number
- their ‘stay and defend or leave early’ policy, and
- the number of Phone Tree list wallet cards they require for themselves and family members.

The cards cost $1.00 each, which funds their manufacture and provides a cash reserve for potential future purchase of digital scanners, for possible CFA conversion to digital communications. All Pound Road CFG cards and newsletters are printed on a year-specific coloured paper (the 2008-9 season colour is PINK) to minimise risk of confusion.

Pound Road Warrandyte Community Fireguard Group
Our CFG members receive specific newsletter advice on handling CFG alert communications. Our CFG group arranges a meeting each year on a topic of perceived relevance for our members. Our newsletters (recent copy appended) cover a range of bushfire emergency planning and preparation issues, supplemented by twice yearly ‘Fireguardian’ newsletters provided by the CFG Coordinator for our CFA Lower Yarra Region in Lilydale.

**EFFECTIVE EMERGENCY COMMUNICATIONS**

Effective communication is perceived as the major issue with the ‘Keep it simple!’ maxim as the key guideline.

Areas needing public discussion include:

- forward planning for digital communication technology
- availability and funding of radio scanners and associated communication technologies
- employment of audible siren alert warnings in bushfire prone areas
- problems of landline, mobile phone and text messaging network access
- congestion of communication networks during emergency periods
- significant text message delivery lags
- failure of the ‘Esplin’ text messaging initiative
- ABC774 radio broadcast alert and information messages
- the role of Internet information
- consistency of public advice about the 000 emergency lines
- consistent advance publicity about schoolchildren safety during and after school hours
- publicity about potential refuge areas
- publicity about road closures and diversions
- other communication bottlenecks, and
- the role of Forest Fire Danger Index numbers.

A number of additional communication issues are raised and discussed in this submission, but have not been repeated in the following paragraphs for brevity.

**Digital communication technology**

With Victoria Police and the Ambulance service already converted to digital communications, there are concerns that the CFA and DSE emergency fire fighting communications will also convert to digital communication in the foreseeable future. That poses the need to **not** invest in additional analog radio scanners now, pending the need to purchase significantly more expensive digital scanners when the CFA and DSE conversion affects our areas of interest. While our CFG is progressively setting aside funds to assist with that possible future purchase, we are aware that other CFG groups will not have the funds to finance purchase of digital scanners.

There is a need to determine the future emergency communications policies and investment programs for our fire fighting services and for those forward programs to be widely publicised well ahead of the conversion dates.

**Availability and funding of radio scanners**

It is understood that the CFA radio communication facilities operate on the basis of advance bulk equipment purchases. It is submitted that the CFA could usefully include bulk purchase of appropriate radio scanners for on-sale to CFA-approved CFG groups. That proposal would both assist with the future issue of digital conversion and the cost to CFG groups of purchasing scanners at one-off retail prices.

**Associated communication technologies**

As noted above, we have investigated a number of alternative bushfire alert communication systems, including SMS/text messaging and alternative phone-based alert messaging. Some of these are known to be used by other CFG groups in our CFA Lower Yarra Region 13. There is perceived scope for limited CFA funding to assist development of innovative communication techniques and the widespread dissemination of information about successful initiatives.
We propose to participate with other adjoining CFG groups in the Emergency Service Commission’s evaluation trials of the Firelinx emergency communication system, which could significantly improve our bushfire alerting effectiveness.

While the issue of CFA-sponsored phone services for CFG groups has been raised, it is perceived that there are too many CFG groups and too much administration expense to justify the proposition.

**Audible siren alert warnings in bushfire prone areas**
There has been much discussion about the utility of audible siren warnings for the community. In part, this arises from the CFA decision to discontinue the use of Fire Station sirens since CFA firefighters are now called by radio pagers. The discontinuance of siren alerting was not publicised in the media, resulting in many residents perceiving that they had been let down by the CFA’s failure to explain why the sirens had been silenced. Subsequent discussion identified that the majority of siren-associated CFA events were motor vehicle accidents, oil spillages on roads and the like - not bushfires. CFA members were also aware that many residents became worried by the siren sounding without their knowing whether the siren indicated a nearby bushfire while others ignore the siren - presuming it’s a road accident.

While a number of suggestions about alternative siren sounds have been made to indicate particular emergency situations, the paramount concept is to ‘keep it simple’ by avoiding potentially confusing alternatives. Other factors adversely affecting the utility of fire sirens (in our locality, at least) are the hilly topography, noise dissipation by bushfire day high winds and wind noise in the surrounding woodland trees. As not all residents in an at-risk area may hear a fire siren, those who do not hear may be placed at increased risk if they are expecting to hear the siren before they activate their Fire Plan. Waiting to hear a siren before starting bushfire risk abatement is not perceived as sensible - fire sirens are not air raid warnings! The conclusion - sirens are a relatively ineffective bushfire alerting means in our area.

**Landline/mobile phone/text messaging network access and congestion during emergency periods**
The issues of digital and analog phone network congestion and significant message delivery lags during larger emergency situations have been raised. Our CFG members are asked to have their mobile phones operating and with them at all times during high fire risk periods as well as keeping all phone calls brief and checking their answering machines regularly.

The evidence of overloaded communications networks during emergencies poses the possibility of reducing phone network congestion in overloaded areas by automatic progressive truncation of call durations during emergency periods. If such a measure is possible, it would be appropriate to give widespread publicity to its adoption before implementation.

**Significant text message delivery lags**
We have investigated possible use of text messaging, which was claimed to be substantially instantaneous. Our CFG members experienced up to four hour delays in receipt of text messages between phones only 400 metres apart and during periods which were not reported to involve congestion delays. Our trial was discontinued as a result.

**Failure of the ‘Esplin’ text messaging initiative**
The emergency SMS messaging on Monday 2 March 2009 failed to reach the number of Victorian mobile phones reported in the media. Some did receive the message but many others didn’t despite being with the same supplier (e.g. Telstra). An email to Emergency Services querying the cause of the failure did not elicit any response. There is an obvious need to investigate why the SMS messaging failed in order to remedy the failure for the future.

**ABC774 radio broadcast alert and information messages**
The ABC774 coverage of bushfire events was useful, but with communication lags that were understood to be significant in important cases. There were also timeliness lags due to the volume of information being made available during the widespread emergency situation. It is understood that ABC editorial policy requires senior official approval before CFA-sourced information can be aired - posing delays before the messages are broadcast. There is also a perception that ABC personnel might have delayed
communication of immediately-significant information to avoid breaking into an on-air program and waited until their next allotted ‘emergency’ spot time before making the announcement.

**Role of Internet information**
The CFA website provides access to a lot of potentially relevant information. However, the CFA website suffers from the perception of presuming that everybody has fast broadband Internet access, which is a problem across all government departments and agencies. As a specific example, the Bushfire Royal Commission community consultation webpage was 851kB file size for only two pages with minimal text content which could have been conveyed by a 4kB file size. Many, particularly older, citizens are not Internet users, while access to and adoption of broadband Internet are limited across private homes.

The utility of the CFA website as a source of bushfire information is questionable. Delayed updating of the CFA website during widespread bushfire emergencies has been noted elsewhere. While the information on the CFA website during moderate bushfire emergencies is useful, it is necessary to consider how many people in high bushfire risk areas are going to sit down to access their computer during an obvious emergency situation with possibly no power available to run their computer.

There is perceived scope for significant improvement of the Internet bushfire reportage. The *Okanagan Mountain Fire Watch* website (appended) during the August 2003 fire near the city of Kelowna in British Columbia is an example of good practice provision of bushfire information. Detailed fire maps were available through that website which showed up-to-date fire extent and intensity information (copies available but not included with this submission for brevity).

**Consistency of public advice about the 000 emergency lines**
There is currently a problem of mixed messages from various sources about 000 emergency messages. A Victorian Government Minister recently averred that 000 should be accessed ‘only in dire straits’ whereas police and community advice messages are to ‘make all calls for emergency services to 000 - even if you think the matter is trivial. Let the 000 operators sort out the priorities - they know what is needed and what resources are available.’ Otherwise whoever takes the call has to record the message and then relay it on to the 000 operators - a waste of both time and resources.

**Potential refuge areas**
Following the local fiasco during the 1992 Pound Bend bushfire when incoming school buses deposited some 300 school children at the (closed) Yarra River road bridge with the comment that they had to return to the city for evening rush hour transport, we were advised that in the event of a bushfire, buses conveying school children home to the Warrandyte area would deposit the children at the municipal refuge area at the Domeny Reserve. It has been assumed that the bus drivers will have been warned of the bushfire situation. It is also assumed that the school children will have access to mobile phones to alert their parents to their whereabouts. That advice has not to our knowledge been publicised in any other forum or medium. We also understand that no ‘refuge’ in our area could be safe in all circumstances.

More recent discussion on bushfire refuges and access roads has revealed a number of problems of ‘common knowledge’ and ‘historic understandings’ by most if not all local residents. Occasional references in the media to specific proposed road closure and refuge locations suffer from inadequate newspaper and newsletter circulation coverage to local residents, deficient packaging of relevant information into concise guidance kits, deficient emergency communications due to perceived legal liability inhibitions and information ‘dropping out of the memory banks’ with time. It is clear that all residents living in bushfire prone areas - particularly new residents - need a succinct and organised bushfire advice kit supplied together with access to more effective emergency communication systems.

**Schoolchildren safety during and after school hours**
This item follows the preceding item. The schoolchildren safety issue was discussed after the 1992 bushfire with positive follow-up actions completed and maintained by local schools. However there is an exposure gap if a bushfire starts or impacts locally after children have left their schools and are on their way home. We have a concern but no specific answers for addressing this potential situation although
one suggestion is for individual schools to arrange ‘buddy’ systems offering temporary shelter in students’ homes nearer the school for those living further away.

**Road closures and diversions**
We have been advised that during a bushfire it is probable that the main access roads into our area will be closed by police members from elsewhere, as Warrandyte police members will be fully occupied within our area. The issue of accessing our properties from outside the area to ensure the safety of children arriving home from school poses a need for acceptable local residents’ access identification. The alternative of leaving their vehicle at the roadblock and accessing their homes on foot poses unacceptable risks.

**Other important communication bottlenecks**
The *Privacy Act* is a significant inhibiting factor on effective communication and bushfire awareness knowledge. CFG Coordinators are not permitted to reveal information about neighbouring CFG group leaders or members to each other without the CFG groups’ written consent. CFG groups with radio scanners cannot be advised about other CFG groups not equipped with scanners and reliant on ABC774 bushfire alert broadcasts.

**Is there a role for the Forest Fire Danger Index?**
There has been discussion about the Forest Fire Danger Index (FFDI) and concepts of scaling residents’ preparations and ‘stay or leave’ activities against particular FFDI numbers. Reliance on ‘numbers’ is faulty logic in emergency situations such as bushfires. It is recommended to avoid FFDI index publicity to avoid undue dependence on ‘numbers’ and to ‘keep the message simple!’ Discussion of FFDI levels are best kept ‘in house’ for CFA communication guidance, with public broadcast messages limited to specific, substantially pre-determined alert messages. If one of the messages is to be ‘we recommend that all residents and visitors in a particular area should leave by a particular time’ because of the severity of the FFDI index prediction, then so be it. There is also the need to recognise that ‘evacuation’ orders pose downside burglary risks and policing needs.

**COMMUNITY FIREGUARD**
Community Fireguard groups are effective bushfire information and emergency communication resources within local communities. They also promote and maintain effective neighbourhood networking, which might not otherwise occur particularly in ‘dormitory’ residential areas with adults working elsewhere.

CFA-directed promotion and establishment of CFG groups has been an on-going task over a number of years, but relies on local volunteers able and willing to start up and maintain CFG groups in their area, and appropriate and continuing participation levels by residents within the CFG group area. While CFA-funded CFG Coordinators and Facilitators provide establishment, training and other resources to CFG groups in their area with further support from local CFA firefighting brigade members and municipal officers, CFG groups need active volunteers to maintain their effectiveness.

Government funding allocation for CFG promotion and coordination should not in any way diminish the CFA’s firefighting capability, but is presently quite inadequate to handle the magnitude of the task. CFA Lower Yarra Region 13 has one or two part-time CFG people who are very enthusiastic but overwhelmed by their number of existing CFG groups. As a result, there does not appear to be any active or coordinated CFG group formation and establishment marketing using local newspapers, district or street meetings or through utilising existing CFG groups as bases for expansion. There is a perceived need for enhanced government funding to enable aggressive CFG marketing campaigns on a road-by-road basis in bushfire prone areas, potentially using local volunteers, service groups, churches and the like and local enthusiasm to supplement paid CFG Facilitators.

There are a number of unmet CFG-associated needs such as publication of up-to-date comparisons of the effectiveness and utility of CFG groups, analysed by appropriate variables such as area characteristics, demography, leadership, group size.

Another significant need is for continuing, regular and proactive networking between CFG group leaders in fire-prone areas, and exchange of ideas and innovations. We are not aware of any mechanism for cross-
fertilisation of ideas between and across CFG groups elsewhere in Victoria - or for that matter, similar groups interstate or overseas. Significant improvements in communication, awareness and preparation activities do not get disseminated across CFG groups, unless they get on the agenda for discussion at annual CFG Leaders’ meetings. We don’t even know how many CFG groups there are within our own CFA Lower Yarra Region 13 or how many are active, let alone who their leaders might be. We are forced to rely on CFG information that was available ten years ago which listed the contact details for the then CFG group leaders, many of whom have changed or have become inactive due to people changes.

**Stay and defend or leave early?**

This is obviously a key area for consideration by the Royal Commission. The ‘contemporary wisdom’ CFA policy guidance has been to leave early if you have any doubts about your ability to defend your property. But that succinct recommendation necessarily includes a number of important assumptions and unmet needs. The first is that residents will have sufficiently early warning of a potential bushfire risk to their properties. As the recent bushfires demonstrated that early warning cannot be guaranteed in all cases, CFA now sensibly recommends that residents also need a ‘Plan B’ for situations where a bushfire is too close for safe evacuation - or for any other reason, such as illness or car won’t start. On the other hand, it is foreseeable that leaving early on (for example) Total Fire Ban days will after the first few occasions become a repetitive ‘cry wolf’ issue and be disregarded as ‘too conservative.’

Nevertheless, the ‘leaving early’ option has been identified as the preferred course by an increasing number of residents in our area since the recent bushfire events which were rather too close to us for comfort! While the bushfires have also had a salutary effect on older and less capable residents as well as those who hadn’t given their bushfire exposure risk much consideration up until now, time will tell whether the ‘leave early’ option will remain the preferred choice once the events of 7th February fade from view.

Guidance on issues such as what to take, where to go, who to advise with consideration of schoolchildren and pets is a perceived but unmet need which should be widely available. It is not clear whether that and other similar guidance needs have not yet been effectively addressed is due to lack of recognition of the needs, lack of resource direction, lack of appropriate people to handle the tasks, lack of or ineffective distribution of possibly already available guidance resources or the sensitivity of government departments and agencies about providing practical guidance materials that might be subsequently used in adverse litigation or media campaigns.

Another perceived need is for up-to-date comparisons between defended and vacated houses, analysed by appropriate variables. Publication of succinct information based on the study findings could improve residents ability to make appropriate decisions about whether to ‘stay and defend or leave early.’

There are needs for wider availability of concise and intelligible information on the defensibility of particular home construction formats. While Australian Standard AS3959 ‘Construction of buildings in bushfire-prone areas’ incorporates recommendations about optimal construction details, few residents have access to this document and it is apparent that few residential houses meet the specified recommendations in full. While AS3959 addresses recommendations for new or upgraded building construction, it is not a useful document for assessing the defensibility of existing houses, particularly for residents unfamiliar with building construction technology.

One significant but apparently unreported (which poses its own questions) factor associated with the widespread house destruction in the ACT bushfire was ignition of plastic natural gas service pipes under the eave lines of many of the lost properties in the suburb of Chapman. Another is the combustible leaf, dust and debris which collects in the roof and wall spaces of most conventional homes, and could ignite during or after a bushfire due to ember entry into the roof space with damage to exposed electrical wiring posing later problems when power is restored. Detailed advice about the range of similar potentially uncontrollable ignition areas in homes is necessary, subject to the needs to ‘keep it simple’ and intelligible for the average home owner.

There is a number of perceived assumptions and needs associated with the ‘stay and defend’ or ‘Plan B’ option. One key assumption relates to personal physical capability to cope with the heat, smoke and physical demands for the whole duration of the bushfire emergency period. There are needs for succinct
guidance on self-evaluation of all people likely to be on the property during a bushfire emergency, including children and for handling of potentially distressed livestock and pet animals. Consideration of water and sand bucket or backpack units handling, ladder and stair climbing for access to upper floors and roof spaces and the adverse impact of sustained smoke on potential asthmatics are just some of the issues. Where is the guidance on identifying personal ability to cope with the psychological overload imposed by sustained bushfire emergency events, without electrical power, reticulated water supplies and in the smoke and dark?

The other side of the ‘stay and defend’ coin is the physical preparation. While guidance materials are available they are relatively incomplete. Selection and placement of roof access ladders, roof space fire suppression equipment, forms of window protection including against wind-blown impact damage, water, sand and other fire fighting resources are among the issues needing enhanced documentation. The same applies to selection, purchase, ready availability and wearing of appropriate protective apparel, such as hats, goggles, masks, anti-ember neckwear, leather gloves, boots and the like.

While it is recognised that the responses of individuals in bushfire prone areas will range over the whole gamut, the need is for all guidance materials to be widely available, succinct and easily understood. Where appropriate guidance documentation already exists - whether Victorian-sourced or from elsewhere, it needs to be made widely available. Where it is not yet available, there are without doubt many CFA and CFG volunteers who would be willing to contribute their time and enthusiasm toward meeting some of the perceived need areas. It remains for the CFA to facilitate and coordinate the development by the volunteers of appropriate guidance materials and to ensure its widespread availability.

Bushfire Safety Plans for residents
While the predominant focus of CFA staff is on effective bushfire suppression, residents’ and homeowners’ focus in bushfire prone areas is rather different. Our focuses are predominantly on preservation of life and property values, which drive the ‘stay or leave’ agenda. This submission has identified some of the needs for enhanced information availability, sharing and resourcing and for community group actions aimed to ward more effectively addressing that agenda.

It is submitted that property owners and occupiers need access to an appropriate range of practical emergency safety plan information. As the majority of what is needed is already available, the issue is effective publication and dissemination to residents in all bushfire prone areas. Some emergency safety plan information is presently not in a suitable - succinct and easily understood - format and needs to be rewritten as practical guidance materials. Some available information needs revision to better reflect contemporary technology and advice. Where information is specific to particular local topography, bushfire risk levels, equipment availability or resources, local versions need to be prepared by local people familiar with the specific circumstances. One simple example is advice on ensuring residents’ first-aid kits contain appropriate burn treatments and ember treatment eye wash solutions and how to use them. Another would deal with protective apparel in simple graphic format - what to wear, why each piece is important, where to purchase. There is also scope for encouraging availability through importation or local manufacture of practical fire suppression and protection items adopted in overseas countries, such as aluminised fabric arm shields for personal protection and radiant heat/impact damage protection kits for glassed areas.

As noted elsewhere in this submission, these challenges could very effectively be addressed by contributions from CFA, CFG and other community volunteers rather than relying on CFA and CFG staff to handle everything from start to finish. However, coordination of the many small projects would necessarily involve CFA/CFG Coordinators’ management. The resultant documentation can be in an appropriate range of formats from photocopied sheets through to CD, DVD and email formats - glossy printed brochures do not add value when the need is for prompt, widespread dissemination.

Effective pre-preparation ahead of each bushfire season should involve timely newspaper and media publicity appropriate for each area, with guidance on prevention measures for the following publication period. While municipal authorities are already involved in similar activities, there are perceived shortcomings due to municipal planning, environmental, health, revenue and other local policies with significant downside impacts on effective bushfire impact prevention.
Residential home bushfire protection systems
The recommended range of home protection systems starts from ‘static water’ supplies - water buckets, drums, knapsack sprays, tanks, swimming pools and dams - through petrol and diesel engine powered pumps to External Water Spray Systems (EWSS) with the addition of such tools as rakes and beaters.

There is a need for study and publication of the in-service effectiveness and utility of alternative fire protection systems, with summaries made widely available for initial guidance of prospective purchasers. While the EWSS system was ‘laboratory tested’ by CSIRO some ten years ago, there does not appear to have been any subsequent evaluation of its effectiveness in practice or development of improved or less expensive alternative bushfire protection systems. There are a number of perceived shortcomings with the EWSS spray approach particularly due to excess windage and fine spray evaporation water loss in hot and high winds, insect blockages of spray nozzles, the need for expensive regular maintenance and reliance on water supply pump engine starting and continued operation.

With the roll-out of wind-powered electricity generation units across the country, including on top of the Melbourne City Council administration building in the CBD, there is a need to consider utilising the otherwise negative destructive power of winds during bushfire events to drive low pressure water pumps and basic house fire protection systems. The issue of developing a prototype system has been raised with several CFA staff but has not elicited a response.

The role of governments
Although Black Saturday’s adverse outcomes were eminently foreseeable with severe drought and predicted adverse weather forecasts, it appears appropriate to ask why relevant military resources were not requested or made available until after the event. In contrast, Mexican military resources were promptly deployed to assist with their recent influenza epidemic.

Despite the magnitude of the February bushfire challenges, interdepartmental power squabbles were perceived to have interfered with effective bushfire prevention and fire fighting activities. One overheard example occurred at 10PM on Monday 4 February, when DSE refused access for a bulldozer commissioned by the CFA to clear a firebreak on ‘DSE land’ because DSE supervision had apparently finished for the day.

One issue that has aroused widespread adverse comment as unacceptably bureaucratic and socially irresponsible, is reports of donated cakes and foodstuffs for fire fighting volunteers being thrown out due to not meeting the fine print detail of the Food Act 1984 in that they were not sourced from registered kitchens as well as Kinglake area volunteers not being permitted to assist in sandwich making because they were not ‘certificated.’

Pound Road CFG members also raised issues of removing dead, fallen and other trees perceived to pose significant fire hazards as well as of minimising forest bushfire risks by periodic maintenance burning, but we make no recommendations on these issues.
YOUR NEIGHBOURS ARE IMPORTANT SECURITY
Effective security for our families, homes and property involves knowing what to do (and not do), how, when, where and why, doing it responsibly every day and in co-operation with your neighbours.

We are fortunate to be part of the Warrandyte community with our active and welcoming neighbourhood culture. Neighbours looking after each others’ safety and security is the basis of the Australia-wide Neighbourhood Watch movement.

The Victorian Parliament Drugs and Crime Prevention Committee has initiated an Inquiry into locally based approaches to community safety and crime prevention. Its Terms of Reference are listed below. We encourage you to make comment either to the Committee or through Warrandyte NHW.

Ian Logan, Area Manager MNH035 Phone: 9844-3062

MONTHLY WARRANDYTE AREA MEETINGS
Neighbourhood Watch meets at 7.30pm on the second Tuesday each second month for one hour to identify preventable criminal activities and safety concerns in our area for action. Community-wide events are also planned. Next meeting location and dates are:

Warrandyte Police Station
Tuesdays 14 June and 9 August 2011

Recent reported offences in or near our NHW Area for March 2011
While we enjoyed March with no reportable crime in our area, break-ins in other Warrandyte streets involved jewellery stolen from homes in Clematis Court and Antigone Court while a ride-on mower and trimmer were stolen from St Muir.

MEDICAL RECORD INFORMATION
Does your handbag or wallet contain a medical record card identifying your blood group, relevant medical conditions (asthma, diabetes, blood pressure, heart disease, epilepsy) and current medications, allergies or pacemakers?

STORE YOUR SPARE CAR KEYS SECURELY
Research by Car Safe, the National Motor Vehicle Theft Reduction Council, has revealed that thieves using the owner’s spare keys took many of the late model cars that have been stolen. The keys were stolen earlier in a house burglary and the victim had not realised that they were missing. Make sure that you store the spare keys to your cars securely.

EMERGENCY PHONE NUMBERS
Police, Fire, Ambulance 000
Crimestoppers 1800 333 000
Bushfire Information 1800 240 667
State Emergency Service 13 25 00
Nurse on call 1800 606 024
Poisons Information 13 11 26
Lifeline 13 11 14
Warrandyte Vets 9844-3071 & 9844-1937

IDENTITY THEFT COSTS $3.5 BILLION A YEAR
4.4 million Australians suffered this loss in 2008-9 due to identity theft - an average of $800 each!
Keep your family names, bank and financial card information secure from possible criminal access.

SUMMARY OF DRUGS & CRIME PREVENTION INQUIRY TERMS
(a) the breadth of locally based groups and organisations addressing community safety and crime prevention issues within Victoria, particularly with regard to local government and Neighbourhood Watch;
(b) the approaches adopted by these groups in promulgating community safety and crime prevention practices, programs or initiatives;
(c) the extent to which these organisations are effective in engaging with local and state agencies in the development of policy;
(d) whether institutional or other arrangements support or impede such local groups in engaging in the development of community safety initiatives;
(e) whether there is a cost benefit to the community for current crime prevention strategies;
(f) whether alternate models for such organisations may improve outcomes;
There's Even an April Fool Scam!
This email contains some clues showing it is a scam. Can you pick how many clues there are?

From: Bigpond Customer Care Team!!

Sent: Friday, 1 April 2011 4:51 PM
To: undisclosed recipients:
Subject: Account Alert

Account Alert
Dear Valued Member,
Due to the congestion in all bigpond Users and removal of all unused bigpond Accounts, bigpond would be shutting down all unused Accounts. You will have to confirm your E-mail by filling out your Login Info below after clicking the reply button, or your account will be suspended within few days for security reasons.
User Name:......................... ...
Password:.................... ........
Date of Birth:.....................
Country Or Territory:...................

After following the instructions in the sheet, your account will not be interrupted and will continue as normal. Thanks for your attention to this request. We apologize for any inconvenience.

Thank you for choosing bigpond.
bigpond Customer Care Team.

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bigpond! controls the data collected in this survey and may use your responses (together with existing data it has about you) to make sure its products and services meet your needs and preferences. bigpond! will treat all data collected from you in accordance with bigpond's privacy policy.

This survey is being conducted by bigpond! and hosted on Confirmit by Application Service Provider (ASP) Future Information Research Management (FIRM). FIRM does not use the information collected for any purpose.

The data collected from you may be transferred to the USA and processed on behalf of and under the instruction of bigpond! by a third-party data processor based in the USA.

Wireless Router Internet Security
Most computers nowadays have wireless connectivity for use with wireless Internet routers. These units transmit data beyond your property, posing a risk that your neighbours might receive it on their computers. Another possibility is that your neighbours might inadvertently get access to your Internet connection.

So what to do? Wireless computer software will have a password option which should always be activated to ensure that only you have access.

World Oil Prices and Number Plate Thefts
The upward spiral of petrol prices is sharply increasing the risk of number plate thefts. One-way security screws are being fitted to new cars by local dealerships to reduce the risk of number plate theft.

Are your number plates secured by one-way screws?

One way security screws are available from Bunnings stores and Warrandyte NHW (0409 577 174).

That ‘Number Square’ Puzzle
If you had trouble with the Number Square last month, here’s the answer. Our mystery password is SMITH76BJ. Can you find it now?

9 JT2M7S0FD
SYBWSB8QUT
E236DLFS45
YCNC7SFENW
J7LPWHALSU
BNRT6LTUSP
GH5WRT3IHN
S5DDF6SHMR
TNBCY6LSRS
GDDTW5FHAT

Thank you to the following business houses who support Warrandyte Neighbourhood Watch (MNH 035).