

**Newsletter Date**

**Autumn 2005**



# Brigade Newsletter

## A New Cat 7 Twin Cab !

During the District Championships at Winmalee in April, our Captain accepted delivery of a brand new Tanker.

RFS Commissioner Phil Koperberg presented new vehicles to a number of Brigades in the Blue Mountains and our Cat 7 will be a tremendous asset, improving our fire fighting capability

As fate would have it, just prior to the handover, the Captain received a message from DFCO Jack Tolhurst that our old Cat 7 truck had been involved in an accident with a tourist bus on the Mt Irvine Road. With a blown tyre and extensive damage on both sides of the truck (which had been pushed up onto the guard rail) the tanker was placed 'out of commission'.

We have yet to put the new vehicle to the test, but those firefighters who inspected the vehicle at training this month, all commented on how good and practical the new changes and innovations are.



## **Truck Licences**

Light Rigid (LR) and Medium Rigid (MR) licences are needed to drive the Cat 7 and Cat 1 vehicles respectively.

The Brigade needs many more drivers at both levels.

Where the licence is required principally to drive an RFS vehicle, the RTA will waive application and knowledge testing costs.

If you are willing to apply for a permit and undergo the knowledge test, please see the Captain who has the application forms and a letter to the RTA requesting the waiver of costs.

Knowledge tests can be practised on-line through the RTA Website as many times as you like. There are 40 questions and 20 are selected randomly. The same questions are used when you go for the test as are on the practice website. Access can be made available through the Brigade Station Computer

Once you have a learners permit, we have Brigade Members who are willing and able to give Driver Instruction/training on the Fire Vehicles.

## **AGM Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> June at Mt Irvine Community Hall**

The AGM for the Mt Wilson/ Mt Irvine Rural Fire Brigade will be held at 4.00 – 5.30 pm. However, from 3.00pm, there will be afternoon tea, open displays and a video on structural fires.

The open displays will include exhibits and goods from Lithgow Fire Protection, Rural Fire Service Association Shop, Community Education FireWise Trailer, wall displays of planned Prescribed Burns in our area, as well as the New Cat 7 and Cat 9 trucks.

***All Fire Fighters are asked to wear Yellows***

## Guess who's coming to dinner?

When planning a dinner on the Mountains, be sure to include no fewer than five qualified firefighters on your guest list. That way, should your house catch fire during the dinner, you will be sure to save it before the brigade arrives.

We were having dinner at "Culverden" recently when an upstairs flood light set fire to the surrounding timber. Our experience may be helpful to other villagers to ensure a similarly lucky result.

Because it was outside on the balcony, the smoke alarms were not triggered, and the lights downstairs were not affected, even though the circuit breaker for upstairs had tripped. It was only when I was in the kitchen between courses that I heard a noise outside and pulled the curtains back to be greeted by the horrific sight of burning chunks of timber falling onto the path from upstairs. Outside, flames were leaping high into the night air, which mercifully was only 8 degrees and absolutely windless.

At this point the five fire-fighters and a grandmother around the table swung into action. Pets were collected and put safely in cars, and a '000' call was made. Ladders were taken upstairs to allow access to the roof. The fire extinguisher from the kitchen was taken upstairs and emptied on to the blaze. At the same time a chain of buckets and saucepans of water was organised. Meanwhile, David placed our Davey fire pump on the edge of our newly-lined dam (which at last holds some water) and connected lengths of hose to reach to the roof.

At that point RFS crews from Mt Wilson/Mt Irvine, Mt Tomah and Bell, and the Brigade from Mt Victoria had all arrived to prevent further damage.

In hindsight we could have made the following improvements:

- **Torches.** With no electricity upstairs and everybody needing to see, we needed more large lanterns readily to hand. We now have six.
- **Fire extinguisher.** We had a 1kg extinguisher in the kitchen which was better than nothing, but larger capacity extinguishers and more of them would have been helpful. We have since bought new and bigger extinguishers for upstairs, downstairs and the garage from Ian at Lithgow Fire Protection Services (Ph: 6351 2307) who will advise you on the best set up for your property.
- **Jemmy.** It was important to pull the timber off the underside of the roof over the balcony to fight the fire in the roof space. A jemmy would have made this quicker, although it is not advisable for those not trained in structural fire fighting to open up timber, allowing more oxygen to the fire.
- **Fire Pump.** Valuable time was lost in having to refuel the pump. Make sure it is fuelled at all times, though the fuel should be replaced every 6 months in order to prevent it from going 'stale'.

We were incredibly lucky to have been present and able to fight the fire before it had a chance to gain hold of our wooden house. Thanks to our impromptu crew John Lee, Eleanor Herriott, Penny Ewing, David Howell and Colleen Scott, and the prompt arrival of the Brigades, the damage was limited to one corner of the house.

And after it was all over and everyone had left, we sat down at the table and finished the dinner. It was not burnt.

Sarah Howell



## Hazard Reduction Prescribed Burns

The Brigade has been able to carry out three of our approved Prescribed Burns and assist the NPWS with one of their approved burns before the rain set in. Since then the weather has not been warm enough to dry the Bush out and get more done, but then 3.5 burns is better than none, and we hope to do more in the spring, in the lead up to what is looking like a bad summer.

Thanks to all those brigade members who were able to attend. As many said after their participation, "it is the best form of training there is!-- I didn't realise how hot it gets and the impact of the smoke"

A special thanks to Senior Deputy Captain Peter Raines who put in many hours planning the burns and preparing the paperwork.

During these burns, Paul McGrath from the RFS Headquarters and a Prescribed Burn Supervisor (PBS) was able to attend and assess Barry Freeman as a PBS. With this qualification, our brigade is now able to supervise our own burns, thus eliminating one more hurdle for conducting future burns.

Other Brigade members who have completed the PBS Training and are awaiting the opportunity for assessment are Peter Raines, Alan Gunn and Tim Gow.

It is good to see the NPWS so active this Autumn. All up the NPWS have undertaken 17 PB's totalling 10,000 hectares, including the Mt Wilson North burn at Boronia Point. Unfortunately, the weather turned bad on the afternoon of the Mt Wilson North Burn and it was not successfully completed. The NPWS hope to complete other planned and approved burns in spring.

**Find us at <http://mtwilson.rfsa.org.au>**

## Fire Protection for your Home – Smoke Detectors

It is planned in each future edition of the newsletter to include an article of a fire management topic that is of interest to the community at large. The first in a series of such articles is one that highlights the role, features, installation and maintenance of domestic smoke detectors.

### Smoke Detectors

Smoke detectors are easily installed and are an inexpensive precaution against tragedy. They do not prevent or extinguish fires, but provide an early warning that fire has started, giving you precious extra time to evacuate. This is especially important at night, when occupants of the house are asleep.

Most fatalities from house fires occur at night.

### Choosing a smoke detector

There is a wide range of fire alarm units and systems available. For most existing homes, a battery operated smoke detector which you can install yourself is sufficient.

New dwellings must have the smoke alarm connected directly to the dwelling's power supply as well as a battery back up.

There are two kinds of smoke detectors: ionisation or photo electric. With either operating principle, an alarm is sounded at the first trace of smoke.

Features you should look out for in choosing a smoke detector include:

- Australian Standards. Self contained smoke alarms must comply with AS 3736. Look for the Standards mark issued by the Standards Australia. Alternatively, smoke detectors labelled Scientific Services Laboratory AS 3786 are acceptable.
- Battery requirement. Look for smoke detectors that require low cost, low voltage batteries that last at least one year.
- Low battery warning. Smoke detectors emit a "beep" every 30 seconds for up to a month to indicate the battery needs replacement.
- Test button. Smoke detectors must be tested regularly. The test button should be easy to locate and operate, even when the smoke detector is installed on the ceiling.

### Where to install your smoke detector

Smoke rises, so to detect smoke as early as possible your smoke detector should be installed on the ceiling or high on a wall.

The best placement of smoke detectors depends on the situation in your own home. Keep the following pointers in mind:

- One smoke detector may not be enough. Install a smoke detector outside each sleeping area and on each floor of the house. You may also wish to install a smoke detector in the bedroom of someone who is a particularly sound sleeper or who is apt to be careless with smoking materials.
- Kitchens. Many home fires start in kitchens. However, because smoke from cooking will set off the alarm, installing a smoke detector in kitchens can cause a nuisance. Special models are available for use in kitchens and caravans.
- Avoid draughts. Do not install smoke detectors near windows, doors or air sources where draughts could affect alarm sensitivity.
- Avoid dead air spaces. A dead air space is an area in which trapped hot air will prevent smoke from reaching the alarm. This generally occurs at the apex of cathedral ceilings and the corner junction of walls and ceilings and between exposed floor joists.
- On a ceiling the smoke detector should be located 300mm from any exposed beam, cornice or wall.
- On a wall, the smoke detector should be located 300mm to 500mm from the ceiling.
- On a cathedral ceiling, the smoke detector should be located 500mm to 1500mm from the highest point.
- Stairways. On stairways, install detectors in the path people will most likely take to evacuate the building. This will ensure an alarm will be raised before smoke makes the exit impassable.



Find us at <http://mtwilson.rfsa.org.au>

## **Fire Protection for your Home – Smoke Detectors (continued)**

### **Testing and maintaining your smoke detector**

A smoke detector that doesn't operate in an emergency is a dead loss.

It is important to test each unit regularly, once a month at the minimum. You should test the unit manually even if it has an indicator light or low battery warning.

When the batteries are low, replace them. This is usually necessary once a year. Make it a habit to replace the batteries once a year on a date you can remember, such as your birthday, or when you change the clocks for daylight savings.

Keep the unit clean. Usually this requires carefully vacuuming out the dust and dirt once a year. Never paint your smoke detector- paint could damage the unit.

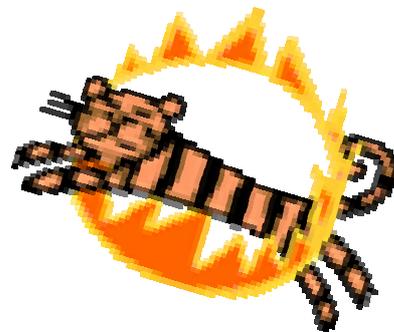
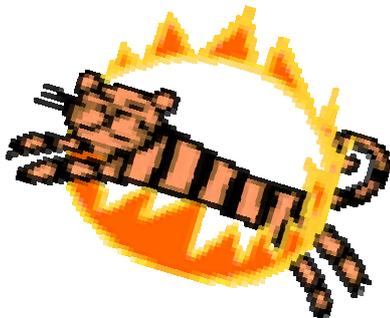
### **What to do when the alarm sounds**

A fire alarm is only effective when people respond properly.

The following procedures can be established

- When you install your smoke detector, have a family meeting to discuss fire emergencies.
- Draw a floor plan of your house and mark exit paths and alternative exits.
- Post the 000 and Fire Brigade numbers near your telephone.
- Practise with your family what to do when the alarm sounds.
- Exit quickly and meet outside at a pre-arranged meeting point (the letterbox is a good place) to ensure everyone is safe.
- Crawl low in the smoke.
- Feel doors before opening them. If they are hot, fire may be on the other side; take another route.
- Once out, stay out.

Remember a smoke alarm gives you advance warning; use those precious minutes to get out safely.



## 2005 NSW RFS Survey—Volunteers have their say

The NSW Rural Fire Service has launched the 2005 volunteer survey which will give volunteer fire fighters an opportunity to provide their thoughts on firefighting equipment, Statewide exercises and the structure of Incident Management Teams.. It is an opportunity for the RFS to understand more about the volunteers and their communities that they work so hard to protect.

The anonymous survey is straightforward and participation is voluntary. The survey can be completed on-line by visiting the RFS website at [http://www.rfs.acenet.com.au/rfs\\_survey.html](http://www.rfs.acenet.com.au/rfs_survey.html) or a copy of the survey will be included in the May 2005 issue of the Bushfire Bulletin.

If you do not receive the Bulletin and don't have access to the WWW, but you would like to complete the survey, please let Captain Barry Freeman know and he will be able to provide a survey questionnaire. The survey should be completed by June 6th.

## Action Stations

The Brigade has been busy with a number of call outs including **3 in one week!!** Special mention needs to be made of Helen Freeman who turned out on all three.

On **Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> April**, the Brigade together with Mt Tomah attended a serious motor vehicle accident (MVA) on the Bells Line of Road near the Mt Wilson turnoff

On **Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> April**, the Brigade again attended an MVA on Bells Line of Road near Bell

*We always hope that it is not a resident or friend, but we turn out because we can help, and it just might be one of our own that needs help.*

On **Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> April**, the Brigade responded to a structural house fire in Wyndham Avenue, Mt Wilson. The fire was contained on the upstairs veranda and in the roof line. Thankfully the damage was minimal, thanks to the speedy response of the brigade (out the door 7 minutes after the emergency page) and the welcome support of Mt. Victoria NSWFB, Mt Tomah RFS and Bell RFS.

## Basic Fire Training

Congratulations to Philip and Nicholas Beeby who completed their Basic Fire (BF) Training in April and are scheduled to do their knowledge and skills assessment on 29<sup>th</sup> May.

Jane Beeby has already completed her BF Training and been on the fireline during the recent prescribed burns. Jane is now considering Advanced Firefighter Training

With husband, wife and son all trained, the Beeby's will be a formidable team at future events or incidents

Only one other BF course is planned to be run this year . This is most likely to be over a week-end in August.

All intending participants must have their membership application processed, and their Police security check complete in order to receive their Firezone (membership) Number. Without a Firezone Number, you cannot participate in any training.

If you do not know your Firezone number, please contact Captain Barry Freeman on either 4756-2053 or 0429 429-401

## Open Training Day on Sunday 5<sup>th</sup> June 10am – 1pm

A 'Back to Basics' training session will be held on Silva Plana on the day after the AGM. All trained Fire Fighters and residents are welcome.

Watch or participate – it is all valuable learning if you are ever called upon to use the equipment. We have new equipment and new trucks so this is an ideal opportunity to upgrade your skills. (Note that Fire Fighters must wear full PPE in order to participate.)

There will be a Sausage Sizzle (including Vege Burgers) at the Mt Wilson Fire Station after the training session.

After lunch, there will be an opportunity for any interested people to be taken through the correct use of portable pumps and fire extinguishers.

## New Crew Brigade Leaders

Congratulations to Beth Raines, Stuart Donaldson and Doug Wood for gaining their Crew Leader qualifications in April.

This recognition was the culmination of both course-work, post-course projects and formal assessment by RFS assessors.

## Historical Rainfall Data — an update

In the last edition of the newsletter, David Howell provided detailed historical rainfall data, and posed two questions for the weather buffs:

- What has been the highest rainfall in one month since records have been kept?
- The minimum rainfall in a month is obviously 0mm. How many months have recorded 0mm since records have been kept?

As promised, the answers David provided are thus:

- The highest rainfall in any month was in February 1956, when 708.3mm fell – that’s an average of 24.4mm each day – just about an inch.
- Only one month since records have been kept did we have no recorded rainfall – March 1991. Sure, there have been low recordings, such as July 1970 (0.3mm) and September 1957 (0.8mm) but only once zero.

All correspondence be directed to David.



There is a lot of work that Brigade members can undertake quickly, efficiently and safely.

There are other tasks that are best left to professionals.

## Sponsorship for the 2005 Mt Wilson to Bilpin Bush Run

The 10th year of the ‘Willy to Billy’ Bush Run has received a significant financial boost with the \$5,000 sponsorship of the event by Macquarie Bank.

Many thanks to Bill Moss, who facilitated Macquarie Bank’s donation as the principal sponsor of the Bush Run this year.

Additionally, Richmond Irrigation donated \$400 to the event. These donations, along with other money raised from the annual event, will be split between the Mt Wilson/Mt Irvine and the Bilpin Brigades and form a vital part of the brigades’ finances.

Both Brigades gratefully acknowledge the generous support of all sponsors.. This year’s run will be held on Saturday, 4th August

The Bush Run web site is <http://www.bilpinbushrun.com.au/> A link to this site has been placed on the Mt Wilson RFS site.

**Congratulations to Tom and Suzanne Bassett for securing a \$500 fee on behalf of the Brigade for the recent filming of a car commercial at Mt Wilson. This money has been earmarked to purchase a High Pressure Cleaning Spray for the trucks. This is an item of equipment that has been on the ‘wish list’ for some while now.**

## Reported in the Blue Mountains Gazette 11<sup>th</sup> May 2005

**Getting Connected...**Nearly all Blue Mountains towns have access to high speed broadband internet, said the Federal member for Macquarie – Kerry Bartlett.

Mr Bartlett is encouraging residents of Medlow Bath, the main exception, to register their interest in having high speed broadband internet connected.

“The key to speeding up broadband access is to have enough local residents to put in an expression of interest” said Mr Bartlett. “Under the new reduced threshold of 70 expressions of interest, a number of communities in the Blue Mountains and the Hawkesbury have benefited”.

**Registration for the service can be made at <http://www.bigpond.com> or via Joe Landsberg**

If you have not registered your interest (no obligation) please do so, so that Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine can have the same access to technology as the rest of the mountains.

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Comments, contributions and suggestions welcome!

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