

SOUTH WEST SLOPES ZONE E-NEWSLETTER

District Mangers Report

BY ANDREW DILLON

During February, all SWSZ brigades received flood rescue kits. A kit was supplied for each appliance in our district and has now been delivered to stations. Over the past three years, brigades across NSW have provided critical assistance to communities experiencing flooding events. On a number of occasions, RFS members provided direct rescue assistance to people in flood water, resulting in positive outcomes. Many of these rescues were performed without basic flood rescue equipment or training.

Each flood rescue kit contains 2 life jackets, 2 throw ropes, and 2 water rescue helmets, all of which are contained in a large red dry bag. Training is available online and is discussed further in this newsletter.



It is pleasing to see the new Yannawah RFS Station nearing completion. This double-bay station with amenities, a kitchenette, and a multipurpose room will be a welcome addition to the Yannawah brigade and will provide a focus point for members during emergencies and other events.



This issue:

District Mangers Report	1
Flood Rescue Kits	3
Hazard Reduction Burning	3
SWSZ Fire Trail Network	5
SWSZ Medal Presentation and Shed Opening	5
WHATS NEW... Tanker Audits	6
Learning & Development	7
Zone Chaplain Neil Percival	8
FOCUS ON... Work Health & Safety	9
Photo Gallery	11



The Group Officer and Deputy Group Officer election process has commenced, and brigades have been asked to nominate suitably qualified members for these positions. The process has changed slightly from previous years, and the updated election policy can be found on the SWSZ portal, swsz.com.au. Nominations close on the 24th of April.

The South West Slopes Zone has a jam-packed training calendar for 2024, which is highlighted in this newsletter. It is pleasing to see members nominating for courses using the SWSZ website portal swsz.com.au, which is the easiest way to nominate for a course. The SWSZ district exercise will be held at the fire control centre on 15 September, and we hope to see you at this event.

Some good progress has been made with fire trails across the SWSZ. The Black Range fire trail project is now complete, and a CAT 1 tanker can traverse the entire length of the Black Range. Repairs and upgrades have also taken place on fire trails in the Reids Flat, Murringo, and Cootamundra areas. This newsletter contains further details on these works.

Thanks to our members who joined strike teams on deployment to northern NSW this past summer. A number of SWSZ volunteers and staff joined personnel from around the state at the fires around Tenterfield, Pilliga and Coonamble.

Thankfully the fire outlook for January and February in our part of the world did not eventuate and members were able to focus on other activities rather than fires.

Stay safe everybody.

"A CAT 1
tanker can
traverse the
entire length
of the Black
Range."



FLOOD RESCUE KITS

During the recent large-scale flooding events, NSW RFS crews performed several flood rescues across the state. They were often the only emergency service available in the affected areas.

To assist RFS members in providing better flood rescue services, brigade stations across the state have received a flood rescue kit for each appliance (for brigades without a station, the kits have been delivered to the tankers).

These kits contain life jackets, helmets, throw ropes, and an instruction card. They can be stored in the brigade stations and loaded onto tankers when needed. The recent distribution of these kits to all brigades across the state will aid our members in caring for their communities and themselves during significant flooding events.

FUEL - our online training platform, provides a 40-minute flood rescue awareness training module. Please don't hesitate to contact the Fire Control Centre if you need help accessing this training online.

The photos below were taken at a joint training day involving the NSW RFS and NSW SES at Jugiong. Jugiong is one of the few brigades in the South West Slopes Zone (SWSZ) that could face flooding where a rescue may be required. The pictures show members Wes Leseburg and Peter Bulliman with helmets, throw ropes, and life vests supplied by the RFS, along with Thomas Hogg and Kyle Collins from the SES. It is great to see the local SES unit and the RFS working together to improve the emergency response in the community.

It is crucial to note that the State Emergency Service is the primary agency for flood rescue, and the role of the RFS is to support the SES. However, RFS crews may occasionally encounter people requiring assistance in flood water. In such situations, the new flood rescue kits may prove helpful. All brigades should take some time to familiarise themselves with the new kits.



**“The State
Emergency
Service is the
primary
agency for
flood rescue”**



HAZARD REDUCTION BURNING

Thanks to all our members who assisted with various hazard reduction burns across the district at the end of last year. In all, we completed 13 burns. Many of these burns were undertaken within strategic firebreak areas surrounding towns and villages across the district.

These burns are an excellent way for members to familiarise themselves with brigade tankers and equipment, particularly after attending scheduled training. In fact, there may be no better way to learn about fire, its behaviour, and control than by attending a hazard reduction burn. It is also an excellent way for new members to be mentored by experienced firefighters.

The SWSZ has several hazard reduction burns planned for this Autumn. We will need tankers to undertake these burns safely and effectively, so please contact the FCC now if you are interested in assisting.

Several grass burns will also be undertaken in the Gundagai area, with burns planned for locations adjacent to the Hume Highway.

In early February, nine tankers and crew from several brigades attended a burn on the rail reserve adjacent to Chillingworks Road at Maimuru. A big thank you to the Miamuru, Cootamundra, Young, Bribbaree, Boara and Murringo brigades.



PHOTO: HAZARD REDUCTION BURN
AT HUME HIGHWAY GUNDAGAI



PHOTOS: CHILLINGWORKS RD HR
PAGE 04



PHOTO: UPGRADES TO THE DINNER HILL FIRE TRAIL
REIDS FLAT NSW

FIRE TRAILS

Throughout NSW there are approximately 1.3 million properties on bush fire prone land. Firefighters rely on roads, trails and other tracks on public and private land to access the landscape to prevent, fight, manage and contain bush fires.

It is critical to identify, build and maintain an effective network of accessible fire trails that suit the firefighting operations, in support of community protection, conducted across NSW.

SWSZ STRATEGIC FIRE TRAIL NETWORK

The NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) is responsible for maintaining and repairing fire trails located on private properties within the district. The South West Slopes Zone has a Fire Access and Fire Trail Plan (FAFT Plan) which contains a register of all the fire trails located within the district. In the last few months, various repairs and upgrades have been carried out on parts of the Strategic Fire Trail Network, namely in the Barwang, Murringo, Wambanumba, Graham and Reids Flat areas, including the Moppity FT, Milgadara FT, Murdering Gully FT, Douglas FT, Connors FT, Dinner Hill FT, Mt Baker FT, Box Hill FT and the Dananbilla FT.



WHATS NEW...

Tanker Audits

During the months of February and March, an extensive audit was carried out on our Tankers to record repairs and maintenance needs.

During these inspections, it was found that approximately 40% of the vehicles had clogged spray bars/nozzles, with some vehicles also showing signs of seized cables or valves. Most of these can usually be fixed if members ensure that when using the vehicles they activate them a few times, while also ensuring their foam systems are turned off when carrying out this procedure.

For issues relating to seized spray cables, members can easily diagnose whether it is actually the cable or valve by completing these checks:

1. Pull out the split pin and bolt.
 2. Test the cable by pushing and retracting the cable.
- Test the valve by activating the valve handle



Did you know...

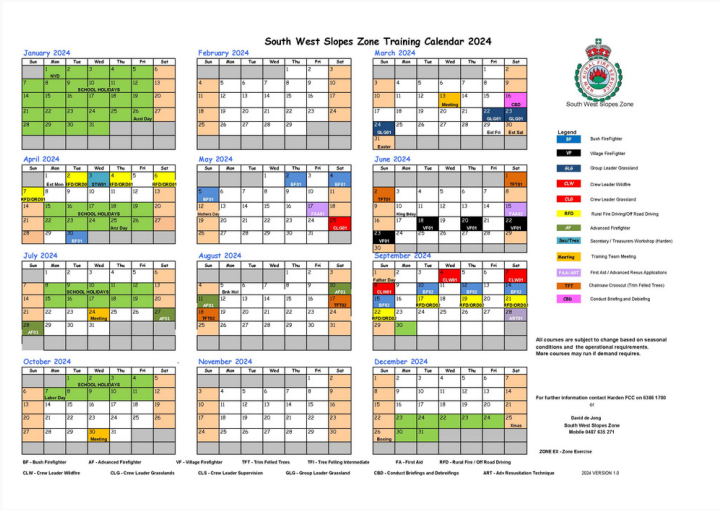
We have 117 tankers across the South West Slopes Zone



LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT TRAINING

We welcome our new Operational Officer DJ, who is looking after training in the zone and doing an excellent job getting his head around the 2024 training calendar. DJ has a passion for learning development and for helping others and is looking forward to meeting more of our volunteers.

The 2024 Training Calendar offers abundant learning opportunities within our own district! From Basic Firefighting to advanced courses and specialised workshops, there's something for everyone. Hurry, spots are filling up fast! Nominate yourself for a course through our volunteer portal at www.swsz.com.au (no logins or passwords needed). Remember to check the prerequisites before applying.



“This group of dedicated volunteers put in a huge of time and effort to ensure that our educational experiences are top-notch”

Operational Officer
David de Jong

Incidents involving Electrical Vehicles are fast becoming a very real risk. To share knowledge and encourage conversation around this important topic, we will be delivering a series of face-to-face evening workshops at the Young, Boorowa, and Gundagai stations. These workshops will include a presentation and practical demonstration on the emerging hazards and challenges faced by emergency services when dealing with Electrical Vehicles. Stay tuned for dates.

We would like to take a moment to express our appreciation for our amazing instructors and assessors. This group of dedicated volunteers put in huge amounts of time and effort to ensure that our educational experiences are top-notch. If you are interested in volunteering some of your time to help with any of the courses on our training calendar, please don't hesitate to get in touch with us. We would be thrilled to hear from you!



OP 1.2.21 OPERATIONAL PROTOCOL FOR INCIDENTS INVOLVING ELECTRIC AND HYBRID VEHICLES





FROM THE DESK OF...

SOUTH WEST SLOPES ZONE CHAPLAIN - NEIL PERCIVAL

The last six months have been tough for our Zone. We've had brigades attending some horrific incidents. We've lost members to accidents and suicide. These things bring home the importance of looking out for our psychological well-being.

Unless you are a psychopath with no sense of empathy or human connection, everyone experiences a stress response to traumatic events. A traumatic event is one that poses a threat either directly to us or to others around us. When that happens, an automatic defence system in the brain kicks in to keep us safe. The stress response is part of that system. It is completely normal.

90% of people will deal with trauma well most of the time. Either the effects are below the level of our awareness, or we have good coping mechanisms in place. I say most of the time because every now and then, an event does slip through that disrupts our normal equilibrium.

9% of people will experience disruption some of the time. This may take the form of sleep disruption, intrusive thoughts, difficulty concentrating, agitation, irritability, and an unexplained racing heart, to name just a few. These effects are usually short-term. It may be that people in this group are more empathetic, or they haven't yet built up their resilience through training and experience, or there are other things going on in life that make them that bit more susceptible. Again, this is completely normal. Usually, a chance to talk these things through and get some perspective and understanding of what is going on is all the support that is needed. This is the space where much of my work happens.

And then there is the final 1% for whom a traumatic event results in significant impairment - the effects are ongoing and impact on their ability to get on with life. This is the time to access the well-being services that the RFS provides. You can make an appointment to see our Western Area Psychologist (mental.wellbeing@rfs.nsw.gov.au) or ring the Member Assistance Program helpline - 1300 360 364. The Member Assistance Program is a confidential counselling, coaching and wellbeing service free for all NSW RFS staff and volunteers, and immediate family members, provided by an independent organisation called Benestar. Alternatively, you can see your GP and get a referral to a local psychologist or counselling service. Get in touch with me and I can point you in the right direction.

What else can we do? First, we need to take care of ourselves. Know what is normal for you and be alert to changes – physical, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual. Make an agreement with your partner or someone close to speak up if they notice that things have changed. If there are changes and things don't resolve quickly, ask for help. Second, we need to watch each other's backs. If you observe that someone in your brigade is not acting like themselves, check in with them. Ask if they are ok. If they are not, and with their permission, reach out for help. That is why I am here.

Neil Percival
Southwest Slopes Zone Chaplain
neilpercival-vol@rfs.nsw.gov.au
0412 352 937

FOCUS ON...

Work Health & Safety

A recent Safety Information Update addressed the following –

Radiant Heat

the impact of radiant heat and the need to wear appropriate PPC/PPE. There have been reports of PPC failures. Investigations as to why the failures have occurred have been hampered by members attempting repairs to the damage caused. If you have a PPC failure, maintain it in the state that it was in at the time of the failure, i.e., do not wash it or in any way alter its state. Keeping the failed PPC in an unaltered state will greatly facilitate investigations into the cause of the failure. Contact the FCC to report the failure and to receive replacement PPC FCC.

Heat/Hydration

In the last quarter of 2023, there were at least 19 reported incidents relating to heat/hydration, and among other things, recommended to stay well and minimise the risk:

- Stay hydrated by regularly drinking water in small amounts.
- Eat regular meals and snacks to replace salt and electrolytes lost through sweating.
- Rotate crews, take regular breaks in shaded areas, and adopt a comfortable conservative pace on the fire line.
- Recognize early signs of heat illness in yourself and others and report any symptoms promptly. Early recognition of the symptoms of heat illness and its treatment is vital to reduce the potential for a more serious heat illness. The Officer in Charge should be alerted immediately.

Use a Guide When Reversing

In 2023, at least 117 reported vehicle incidents relating to vehicle reversing have been reported. As you may not be driving an RFS appliance every day like your normal vehicle, it is recommended that the driver:

- Use a guide to assist when reversing.
- Physically dismount and check the surrounding area and proposed path prior to moving.

For more information, refer to the Safe Driving Operating Procedures.

“Firefighting is inherently dangerous, and we all need to be certain of our fitness for the task before setting out in response to a call”



FOCUS ON...

Work Health & Safety

Comparing 2023 with 2022

Across the state, all incident reports increased by 62% (Western Area Command increase was 56 to 114 [49%]). The types of incidents reported include;

- Injury 846
- Property damage 465
- Near miss 275
- Exposure 122
- Illness 103
- Cancer 27
- **Fatalities 5**

The fatalities should be a wake-up call to all of us.

Firefighting is inherently dangerous, and we all need to be certain of our fitness for the task before setting out in response to a call. Remember to use the self-checklist IMSAFER and be honest in your assessment. In 2022, SafeWork Australia reported 195 Australian workplace fatalities, representing 1.4 fatalities per 100,000 workers. With 5 fatalities across the RFS in 2023, we are way over this average.

Stay Safe



IM SAFER

I - ILLNESS
M - MEDICATION
S - STRESS
A - ALCOHOL /
DRUGS
F - FATIGUE
E - EXPERTISE
R - REVIEW

**SWSZ Health and
Safety Representative**
Phillip Baer

PhillipBaer-vol@rfs.nsw.gov.au

PHOTO GALLERY

