

## **'Our CFA Black Saturday' Mitigating Factors Of Concern: For The Wellbeing Of Our Emergency Service CFA Volunteers**

To:

- 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission
- Local, State & Federal Government Ministers and Departments
- Emergency Service Volunteer Organisations.
- Radio and Telecommunication Networks.

Previous extreme fires highlighted the need for new education, training, equipment and procedures that no doubt has reduced injury and saved many CFA volunteers, thank goodness, but with all events more can be learnt and implemented.

February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2009 (Black Saturday) fires defied all the rules and left many Victorian's (Australians) with heartfelt and tragic outcomes.

Below is a list of what we believe to be mitigating factors of concern, to the injury of volunteer CFA personnel, Colin Clune, our family member. Our aim is to raise them as Occupational Health & Safety concerns with the intention that further prevention is better than cure.

**They have been compiled by his family which include Colin's brother Neil Clune who was extremely concerned when seeing his brother injured on the South Australian morning news report and aware his injuries could be life threatening. Neil is currently employed with South Australia Ambulance Service and is currently one of the leading educational officers in Health and Safety.**

1. Even though the crew with Colin was highly trained and experienced all crew members found themselves with very little warning that the fire was about to overtake them, the property owners and the property. Unfortunately Colin was caught in an unprotected area while he was traversing the line to maintain urgent communication with the crew as to why they had lost water pressure. Both crews at the tanker and hose end were able to maintain cover and were not injured while Colin, the exposed member, sustained significant burns that not only has created personal pain and suffering for him but also emotional suffering for his family and his volunteer CFA crew members. *(In this case Colin was eventually able to reach cover and the crew at the house, but if he sustained worse injuries both crews could have been unaware of his position for sometime, both assuming he was with the other crew. This would have created extreme physical and emotional trauma for Colin and his family but also for all crew members involved).*

1a) There appears to be the lack of individual, hand held radio's to communicate between the tanker unit and crew members on the hose extremity. This caused personal to run back from the hose end to the tanker in an uncontrolled environment to maintain lifesaving communications.



Our family is aware that hand held radios are mandatory for Australian Essential Services personnel and some other state throughout Australia emergency services which include the South Australian Country Fire Service units, but are not mandated in the emergency service for all CFA volunteers in Victoria. The main reason for this appears to be the cost to individual regions.

We would like investigation into why individual radios which help maintain urgent communication between the crew are not currently mandated and part of OH&S requirements and supplied as personal protection equipment to all emergency service CFA volunteers within Victoria and Australia.

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**1b)** As the predictions for Victoria's future is for increased extreme weather conditions which could increase extreme wildfire's we would also like to raise the OH&S concern that the current hoses did not sustain the extreme weather conditions experienced 'Black Saturday'. Hoses used burst or became pitted (like soaker hoses) leaking the water along the length of the hose which reduced water pressure, leaving the crew at the end vulnerable and unprotected. This created the high risk situation, along with not having individual radio's as to why Colin sustain significant burns. We would therefore like investigation into whether the current hoses need to be replaced with hoses that will withstand higher heat conditions.



**2.** As much of the emergency service volunteers within the CFA are in isolated areas where they can be many kilometres and hours from receiving medical attention, as Colin experienced (approx 1 hour that particular day) leaves them vulnerable to prolonged agony and deeper burns that therefore prolongs recovery time.

We understand that the bottled water used to cool the burns was the best choice Colin made at the time but we feel 'Black Saturday' highlighted the extremely important need for an additional First Aid Kit for all emergency service CFA volunteer appliances to carry.

The importance being that it is available to assist the crew for personal use or public use to reduce pain and suffering of significant burns especially when in isolated areas where professional medical treatment is unavailable immediately or for some time.

As another OH&S concern we therefore request for consideration and recommendation of a minimum standard, mandatory First Aid Kit be carried on all emergency service CFA volunteer appliances to cope with significant burns (as many smaller stations cannot afford much, and really should not have to spend tireless hours fundraising).

To complement the introduction of the mandatory First Aid Kit for significant burns we also would like to recommend the introduction of regular (Station level) training for significant burns be carried out and continually revised and up-graded. This would offer opportunity to reaffirm current and inform new emergency service CFA volunteers of current products and procedures required for significant burns as well as new products and new procedures which will help reduce pain, scarring or loss of life?

An informative and educational poster that could be displayed in all stations we feel would also be of great additional value to continually instil First Aid for significant burns.

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**3.** We also would like to raise concern of maintaining the optimum safety for our emergency service CFA volunteers regarding protective equipment (clothing) and its maintenance. As a wife and mother I would be horrified if I personally overlooked special laundering requirements that could reduce fire protective retardants on emergency service personal protective equipment (clothing). I feel I would share this concern with many others and that increased OH&S awareness should be given to this important aspect of personal protective equipment (clothing) general maintenance procedures for our emergency service CFA volunteers' wellbeing.

**3a)** How many times can emergency service CFA volunteer personal protective equipment (clothing) be laundered, is it appropriate that it be laundered at the emergency service CFA volunteer's home?

**3b)** Why is there not a second set of emergency service CFA volunteer personal protective equipment (clothing) issued to individual active volunteers for OH&S requirements eg: contamination, wet or requiring general cleaning and maintenance?

**3c)** Colin was lucky NOT to have breathed the intense heat through his mouth and down his throat. Now with the awareness that I have that if he had he could have suffered so much more and been intubated or paid the ultimate price and lost his life. I am therefore concerned that had he not kept his mouth closed would a dust mask be thick enough to withstand the extreme heat and protect the throats of emergency service volunteer's within the CFA if they face the extreme heat of wild fires?

**3e)** I realise the day was super extreme heat but Colin also suffered burns to his elbows and knees. His elbows have taken the longest to heal and he now has to endure pressure bandages to limit his scaring for several months or maybe even years. He doesn't remember touching the heat of the ground and believes that he only crouched as the fire went over him. As Colin is a volunteer, and not a permanent staff member of the CFA, like many they put the protective clothing over there clothing which often is a shirt that is short sleeved. Therefore should there be extra padding on the protective clothing around the areas of elbows and knees that would add further burn protection while not limiting their movement ability?



**3f)** Colin's fingers also burnt which gave him the most pain at the time. He is currently unable to explain why but we assume it was from either, touching the ground while supporting himself to move from a crouching position and to cover or, if it was from the heat of the water tank which he was finding protective cover from the fire.

It clearly showed that the current emergency service CFA volunteers protective gloves did not withstand the wildfire conditions and we ask that it be investigated if a higher heat standard may be available for OH&S personal protective needs for our volunteers.

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**4 "Are our emergency service CFA volunteers receiving the emergency service equipment and personal protective equipment that meets there environment requirements for wildfires?"**

Our own personal family investigation has given us insight that increased mandatory equipment is required to further protect our loved ones. This is an OH&S concern for all emergency service CFA volunteers and their families and we believe this to be a Government Duty of Care requirement.

We realise that lack of funding is therefore creating open and high risk situations that can, and we believe has, caused personal injury and near loss of life.

With the current funding system for emergency services which include CFA volunteer units, upgrading is a long time commitment and for some small volunteer emergency units it is almost impossible for the small communities to achieve.

This is why we ask that there be an investigation into increased OH&S mandatory equipment and personal protective equipment for CFA volunteers that is vital for an emergency service CFA volunteer to receive to protect their personal wellbeing and that it is received at all Victorian units and stations. We believe this is also vital for the sustainability of our communities and the environment.

**To help sustain increased mandatory emergency service CFA volunteer equipment and personal protective equipment costs we would like to raise the following questions and put forward a suggestion for increasing revenue.**

Currently on all Insurance Policies throughout Victoria we pay a Fire Levy.  
Is an appropriate % of this Fire Levy reaching the emergency service CFA and volunteer communities at Station Level to assist necessary funding? Could the current % be increased?

To help sustain the costs of mandatory training, education, personal protective equipment and maintenance for all emergency service CFA volunteers we would like to have investigated what some states throughout Australia currently have in place which has apparently been very effective.

Removal of the current Fire Levy from Insurance Policies and including the Fire Levy or an Emergency Service Levy to fund CFA and SES volunteers on all property rates?  
We suggest that levy be attached to all rate notices so that all land and property owners pay, as extreme weather is now not just affecting the fringe metropolitan and country areas.  
We suggest this Fire Levy or Emergency Service Levy on all rate notices to become mandatory throughout all of Australia to create continuity and respect for the mandatory training, education, personal protective equipment and maintenance for all emergency services and the wellbeing of there volunteers.

***It is time to move forward with substantial, continuous funding for this state's emergency service Volunteer Fire Authority, and a system for this must be investigated before the next fire season.***

Yours sincerely

Pamela Clune  
35 Boundary Rd Wollert VIC 3750  
Ph 0400091440  
Ph/Fax 03 9408 1409  
Email: cluney35@bigpond.com  
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