

Safety actions for the fire season

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Chair

Craig will provide his presentation titled Planning Preparing and Practicing Like Your Life Depends on it. Fantastic title. Welcome Craig.

Craig

The key part is about you, your family and what you do as a team. It's interesting that Jamie just talked a little bit about team dynamics. And you'll know this in your family and you'll know it in your broader family or your friends. We're all different in that space. So the team is made up of someone that's a decision maker. Some people can make decisions quickly and they'll get it right. Others need time to think. And there's also people who are doers. All of those are important in your plan. It's not just about the physical parts of the plan. It's also about how we interact together. So the plan, your survival plan, is something that's really really important. One of the key things we've really focused on is about the plan. As was said before there's elements of the plan the preparedness phase of the plan and the fire event part of the plan. And I think that's a really good way to look at it. What have I got to do those months before in the preparedness and the prevention part? How do I get myself to a position that my property's right? Have that discussion its an ongoing discussion with the team.

Who's the team? Is there an eight year old, a nine year old on the team? And what role do they play and how are they going to play it? Is there older people in the team? Have we got the fitness and the physical capabilities to do what's there? All of those things are important about the final actions of what you're going to do. The other one we're really focused on is about practising the plan. BRI put out a survey prior to this webinar. About 200 people replied so it's not a big sample but it's a good indicator what people were looking to do. I'll just reflect now on a couple of them.

The intention to leave early was about 58%, 20% said they'd probably wait and see what happens on the day and 22% that said they were planning to stay and defend. They had a plan.

We've looked at who's going to practise. The importance of practising the plan and who's going to walk it through and do it. One of the things I spoke about during webinar 2 earlier this year that I really strongly believe is what Steve Pascoe said before - the afternoon turned to dark so at 4 o'clock in the afternoon in Strathewen in 2009 was like the middle of the night in every aspect. The animals changed. The birds left. The place was silent except there was a fire coming. The fire was the noise.

I often say have you thought about all those actions you're going to do? Did you plan? You sit there at 2 o'clock in the afternoon "We're going to do this and this." But actually have you done it at 9:30 at night when it's dark? Can you walk to the shed and thought "This is actually dark. I know my way around this shed but when there's smoke and there's a sense of urgency will I get it right?" And I think little things like that to practise your plan is really important. You know your property but

do you really know it? As your property changes in these environments they challenge you and all of a sudden you're injured because you've walked into a tow bar of a trailer.

Those little things will be the things that stump you. It'd be the fact that I broke my toe and I'm hobbling around. I can't do what I'm meant to do. So those sort of things are really important about the practise part of the plan.

I always talk about it. Time of day. What happens at 2 o'clock in the afternoon compared to a fire that comes through at 8 o'clock at night?

What happens the day of the week? What's the difference between a Wednesday and a Saturday? School day, recreation day. Kids at school. What am I going to do? People at work. We're all at home on a Saturday. Or are we because of sports and other activities?

Also the month of the year. What's December? The start of December, still at school. The other end of December school's stopped. What are we doing in January on holidays? Who's back at work? What happens in February?

When I was at CFA and also as Commissioner I relaxed when it got to February. And you know why I relaxed? Because I knew school was back and I knew the normality had come back into the family life. It was almost bizarre but I think I can almost play this out that 90% of the people are going to be at work and school. And you played it out different ways. January it was a bit of a mixed bag. Middle of December was a mixed bag full stop. So those sorts of things are really important. So play those scenarios out. Think about the circumstances but practise it, talk and do it. Now if that's all we've got to say tonight I reckon it's a pretty good message. However there's more.

The first one to me is absolutely fundamental. Monitor fire danger ratings. Look at the weather four days out. Get yourself into that four day cycle. The weather normally runs in a four or seven day cycle. Four days out there'll be a good prediction. It might not be as accurate but it will be a prediction and there'll be a fire danger rating attached to it. The website's designed to look four days out. That's really important the four days.

Know your weather. Know the environment you're in. Know how to read the weather and the risk of where you live. And then also talk about your capability matching those issues. Think about that to know the weather and the risk those days might be. That formula we've got the temperature of 30°C, wind of 30km/hr and the relative humidity of 30% is very basic. And the only reason it's probably there is it's 30 30 30. It's a really good point. Once you get over 30 in temperature the wind speeds get over 30 and the relative humidity drops below 30. So it's above 30 it's above 30 but below 30. And certainly when you get down into the 10s and the single figures in relative humidity they're the things. But if it's not in there as the day where the wind changes is even another complicating factor.

The days where the wind stays in one direction all day coming from the northeast for example with no wind change is a better day than a day that's got a wind change in it. In Victoria there has been more property lost and more lives lost after the south-west wind change than before. That's an historical fact. So those days that have got a wind change is absolutely another step up. And again the fire danger rating will give you the indicators but wind change is not calculated into the fire danger rating. It's important to understand that weather element of the danger ratings. And if you really want to get into it you can go beyond the fire danger ratings to what they call the fire danger

indexes which are numerical numbers which I won't get into tonight but I'm sure some people will understand and want to understand.

Your physical capability. How you deal with your family and pets in the house. All of those things. Know yourself. Know your family. Like I said before the team is important. To understand the team making decisions, behaviours their physical capacity. As Steve Pascoe said the really critical thing is to hydrate. Water water water. You need it to protect the property and yourselves but you also need it to make yourself function correctly. You will be fatigued - heat fatigue and smoke fatigue. It will test your body about how you do it. That's why we're saying why would you want to be there in these days when the fatigue levels are so high the trauma's so high? Know how to manage yourself.

Obviously access and egress is critical. How do you get out of there? What are you going to use to get out of there and so on. Steve's Pascoe's story told how scary it is - the noise, sometimes it'll be silent other times it'll be like a steam train coming past. Visibility will be lost. It's almost where it takes control away from you. And there's the fire behaviour issue. It challenges you to the point where you haven't got control. All the things you normally control are being controlled by something else and it's outside. It's the environment. It's taken control of us. And the difference of a fire that starts a long way back but you will see smoke and warnings to a fire that starts close and runs hard. So those things are there. So the plans have got to deal with those. You can only deal with the known knowns and plan your plan around the known knowns but be prepared for the known unknowns because we know those things will happen. Let alone the unknown unknowns which is really doomsday stuff.

Messaging. We say don't rely on messaging but be connected to where the messages are. Don't deny yourself the ability to get information. I always say better information will lead to better decisions. Timely information will lead to better decisions. So to stay tuned is important. But I think it was Jamie who said before technology could let us down. So power has gone off, internet's gone. What am I back to? The radio in the car maybe is an option. Have a battery radio to connect to radio stations. Because some of those other things might not be there. However the good thing about Victoria is there is one source one message. So when they put out a message on a fire or flood it goes to the website, the app, radio stations and the TV stations as a consistent message. So the message should be consistent. Timeliness is the critical part. Not always will be a message that is defined for your backyard. It can't be. So you've got to take that intelligence in and use it.

The other thing about we as individuals we as humans. It's well researched that we will look for a second source of information. So we'll hear something or be told something and then we'll talk to someone. We'll pick up the phone and ring someone. We'll talk to the neighbour. That's reality. We test. But think about who those trusted sources of information are? If you're a ABC Radio listener and it's not there who do you go to? If you rely on an app and the app doesn't work where do you go? Think about these contingencies about information. Good information and timely information is gold. It's absolutely gold about what the days are doing for four days how to prepare yourself and on the day. And even if you've left early you still need to stay tuned and I'm sure you will about what's happening in your backyard or other backyards across your interest area.

The issue about aircraft and fire trucks. There's not enough fire trucks. There's not enough aircraft. But they'll be out there. Can you get a fire truck onto your property? The size of it? Have you thought about it? Will they come up into your area if they're uncertain? Because there's nothing worse than a firefighter coming to dead ends where they can't turn the trucks around because

they're so big. All those things are important. I mentioned before about utilities about what you do. And not only that. What happens about the supply of the things you need?

Now the key things in the survey was about stay, leave or stay leave or wait and see. We looked at a number of things in the survey. In some categories a number of people in the 50/50 of wait and see. If you're one of those I think that's a takeaway from this webinar. How do you not be the person that's sitting on the fence? To me it's far better to know that you're leaving early and have the triggers to leave early and know all the things that's going to be doing practise it. And if you are going to stay and defend know it. To sit and wait I just find that will later in life when something goes wrong be a trigger point that you will probably regret. Because you've got control of this. Waiting and see is sitting on the barb wire fence and you're going to fall off. And when you do you're going to hurt yourself.

It's important that if we've seen in these survey's there is a number of people waiting to see on the day of the morning of whatever I think there's something more that we can all do to help that through. Hopefully the webinars have helped people secure up their plan of what they're going to do. I'm not going to say that you've got to leave but there's a lot of indicators that you should leave you should have a plan to leave particularly with young children. I'm very strong about that. Steve touched on it before. We've seen many examples where young children have been traumatized for their life because they've been in an experience that is so traumatic that they couldn't deal with and it takes over their life.

Because of those sort of things to me the action is to leave. Just leave. Then you've got elderly people. You have all those things but there's also a group of people and sometimes it's the male of the family that just wants to stay. And I'm not saying it's wrong but think it through. I'm not trying to over emphasize this but I would say if you're a part of this webinar and you have that discussion with a neighbour or a friend, a family member, whatever that's a good thing to come away from this to actually have that discussion about that absolute decision making.

It leads to risk. I suppose we can all say yeah she'll be right. It won't be right. It's too critical to be just right. I'm quite passionate about this too because I think this is quite fundamental about our overall safety. Now this one here is a lot about how serious we take things. What do we have to do to be that contributor in our family for those absolutely catastrophic days? There may be other days extreme or catastrophic that you've got to make some decisions about in your plan. Which are the days that are going to matter? And I think that four day plan helps you do that because you'll be able to see the dryness the overnight temperatures how hot it's been. And on the third or fourth day of a three day plan you go "Yeah that third day is looking pretty terrible. I need to start thinking about that now." That's really important.

How you communicate and manage yourself is critical. And where you get the information from. There's many places. I think there's lots of places from where you can get really good information. I have not used Willie Weather but I had a look at the other day, very good. Some others that someone else will tell you about. Take advice and make a decision yourself about what are the few tools, because you can't use all of them. You've got to come back to a handful that will help you do what you need to do in the circumstances you're done.

The last bit of this is what do I do before the bad day? How do I get everything right? I've done all the preparedness 6-8 weeks out. But how do I just make it right the days before? Before that bad weather day? I've looked at the four day forecast. I go "Yeah Thursday's the day. That's the day that I'm concerned. What am I going to do on Tuesday not Wednesday. What am I going to do the

night before? What am I going to do on the day? What am I going to do when the fire the smoke's in the sky?" And if you've got the Steve Pascoe story and you're still at home and the fires come right up to you onto your property what are you going to do? Now hopefully your plan is giving you some good options about what you're going to protect and the systems that you're going to activate to do so - sprinklers and all those things.

I also believe the shed separate from the house is quite fundamental to put those things. Steve Pascoe said it before. Don't park the cars at the front door. Push them back into the shed. Let the shed be the buffer for those things that are away from the house. That's where the fuel is. That's where the other things that are likely to burn. And we've done some work in another project that's looked at the design of houses and the shed becomes the hazardous area. Get those hazards away from the home. But know they're over there in the shed. And there could be two sheds on properties that enables you to separate it even better.

This year is what we call the 6 Ps. So I'll just dwell on this for a moment. Up the top to me very simple. Be prepared. Have a plan. Be perceptive. You need your perception. You need that brain to be working about what's happening around you and to set priorities. Now Steve Pascoe gave an example before about the 15 dot points, the 10 dot points, the five dot points, the three dot points. How do you prompt yourself to set priorities when you're under pressure? I'm not saying the Ps are perfect but the 6 Ps have been pretty good in any emergency including fire. People and pets first. Goes back to the life issue.

But think about just when you think through the issues behind that. The dynamics of a family where the friends are. Neighbours. Age profiles. Mobility. People. What are they doing? Then you come to the pets we love. Companion pets. We know that grandma's not going to leave without budgerigar. That's going to be the decision. And we've seen historically that a lot of people wait and see based on the animals. And Steve said before and I think he's dead right farm animals are hard. Livestock. If you're a dairy farmer that herd is your factory. That's your income and you know them all by name. So they're family. So it comes in that it's got to be dealt with together. People and pets the animal side of it fit all in one. And they need to be considered that way because they are that way.

When it comes down to those things that are important. Identification. We've seen in major emergencies anywhere in the globe that the next step is how do you get identification. And it's an absolute stressful period if you don't have documents to identify yourself. Get money out of banks talk to insurance companies all those things. How do you have those key documents with you including phones. A few years ago I could remember every number possible, I used to rattle off numbers. I've got no idea of any numbers now it's just in the phone. So your phone's important but have you got the critical numbers written down somewhere in a little book? My Mum passed away a couple of years ago and in the aftermath I found a little book which was all the people she was dealing with which helped me so much in the post death period.

Personal computers for business and personal use. The plastics we've all got them. Your license your health cards all that. And as critical is prescriptions. If you've got a prescription that you need glasses you need a hearing aid, any sort of prescription daily or over a period of time, you need to take it with you. And then obviously petrol and packing is the other one. I think the message that we have been very strong about through the webinars and Max in designing this has been extremely strong it's about planning preparing and practising like your life depends on it. And you know what? Because it does. It absolutely does.

So that's our message. Hopefully that's informative. Hopefully we've been able to pull what Steve and Jamie and myself have been able to put together that gives you something that ensures that you're in a better position. Take time to talk about. And we can't get to everyone but I'm sure you can. This is a great set of webinars and I think it's of huge value so hopefully you can use it in a way that's super positive. So thank you.

Malcolm

Thanks Craig