

# FIREPOINT



IAAI JOURNAL



# Firepoint

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## **FIREPOINT: IF YOU HAVEN'T PAID YOUR FEES FOR THE CURRENT YEAR, PLEASE DO SO NOW.**

### **EDITORIAL**

There has been no more important issue for our members this year than the horrific and devastating story of the Victorian bushfires.

I would like to thank Victorian Vice President Brian Neal for co-coordinating a major discussion, along with his two co-writers, on this matter for this month's magazine.

The article combines facts and personal experiences, putting a very human face on some of the problems that arose.

We all need to search for lessons which can be learnt from this tragic occurrence.

*Wal Stern*

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## **Victorian Association of Fire Investigators Inc.**

**Website** [www.vicfire.com](http://www.vicfire.com)

### **VAFI Committee**

The committee has had a vacancy for a Victoria Police Representative vacancy for some time.

It is the committee's pleasure to welcome onto the committee Scott Barnes who is a Det.Sen.Constable with the Victoria Police Arson and Explosive Squad.

He has been a member of the VAFI for the past two years and has attended several VAFI training sessions. He comes with the enthusiasm and willingness to support the committee and members of the VAFI.

Although our President Andrew Kerr is currently involved in Operation Phoenix, most of the rest of the committee have returned to normal duties after the

Black Saturday fires and back in the swing of things.

### **VAFI Scholarship Closed for 09/10**

The 09/10 VAFI Scholarship closed as at the 1 June 08 and an announcement of the successful member will be in the next issue of Firepoint.

The VAFI Scholarship is a program where members can apply for a grant up to the value \$1,000 for education and training.

Written applications prior to the 1 June each year which are then considered by the committee and a selection made. Full details of the Scholarship are on the VAFI Website. Members should consider their options for the year 10/11.

### **Victorian Membership**

Victoria Chapters continues to maintain its membership with a currently 164 financial members. The Committee welcome the following new members: Greg Bawden, Travis

Johnson, Ted Clay, Brad Clarke, Rodney Smith, Peter Cecil, John Lindsay and Michael Walsh. There are two special new members Teuita Seru Tukai and Shamseer Ilyas Nabi from the Fiji Fire Service (know to us as David and Bill).

Remember that yearly fees for the Chapter are due as of 1 July 09 being \$55.00. Any member unsure of his/her membership status please contact Alex Conway Chapter Registrar at 03 94203883. Renewal notices will be forwarded to all members.

## TRAINING

### **The New Coroner's Act and its Effect on Fire Investigation**

The chapter held a training session on electrical fires at MFB Lecture Room at Richmond on Wednesday 25<sup>th</sup> March. It was estimated that 70 members attended the session with thanks going to Ms Catherine Dunlop ( Partner, Public Law, Maddocks Lawyers).

She presented an overview and discussed the reasons for the change in the Act. There had been some identified faults and weaknesses with the legislation and the major changes were that the objectives of the Act be focused on prevention, restructure of the Coroner's Court, investigative powers increased, access to documents and rules for inquests. Inquests – Coroner not bound by rules of evidence, Coroner

determines witnesses and decides the form of inquest that is comprehensible to family and parties, Parties have the right to procedural fairness and provide privilege against self incrimination.

With the findings of an inquest – Death Finding is to identify, cause of death and circumstances in which death occurred.

Where fire findings includes cause and origin of the fire and the circumstances of the fire. In both fire and death no findings regarding guilt permissible. These findings to be published on the internet.

If recommendations are made by the Coroner to any Minister, public statutory authority or entity, there is a requirement for these bodies to respond and responses published on the internet. The changes in the Act which may affect the Fire Investigator are access to information, avoiding unnecessary

duplication of inquiries, privilege against self-incrimination, submissions and responding to recommendations.

Catherine then gave a brief overview of the differences a Royal Commission over a Coroner's Inquest.

Her presentation was excellent and entertained those who were there. Her knowledge and experience in the law and how it works was appreciated and gave those in the audience a different view of the Coroner Court and Act.

The committee wishes to thank Catherine for her presentation and the MFB for the use of this facility.

For those who attended, the committee has changed the catering arrangements to healthy food from Safeways.( we think) this has proven to be a hit with both members and committee.

## **FUTURE TRAINING**

### **Gas & Electrical Training Session**

To assist our country members a session on Gas & Electrical fires will be held at CFA Huntly Training Ground (just outside Bendigo). This is planned as a full day session with some training and live burns of cars to be included on Friday 28<sup>th</sup> August.

Details will be available on the website when appropriate booking are made.

### **Training Session and AGM**

In October we are planning a training session entitled "Current Trends and Update of Fire Investigation Techniques".

Guest Speaker will be Jim Munday. The day will include the Chapter AGM.

## **NEXT TRAINING SESSION**

### **TOUR.**

### **VICPOL FORENSICS SERVICES MACLEOD**

The next training session will be held at the Victoria Police Forensics Services Laboratory at MacLeod on 17<sup>th</sup> June 09. Presentations will be made by the various members of the VPFSD on dealing with exhibits for fire scenes, packaging samples and outlining the Laboratory's capabilities.

Members from different areas will give a guided tour of the facility. Bookings are essential.

## **Fire Investigation**

### **The Basics**

#### **Step 1**

What is fire? We all know it involves heat and flames, and that it may also involve smoke and noise. What is it?

To the scientist it is a chemical reaction. It is a very fast occurring chemical reaction. A very rapid reaction which gives out heat.

It is a rapid exothermic (giving out heat) chemical reaction.

And the type of reaction is an oxidation reaction (most commonly a reaction involving oxygen).

***Hence fire is a rapid exothermic chemical oxidation reaction.***

## BLACK SATURDAY - 7<sup>th</sup> February 2009 VICTORIA AUSTRALIA

Newspapers on the Sunday morning after the fires of Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> February 2009, could not adequately describe the horror and devastation of that day. It was only the start of the articles that were to be reported in the days that followed.

Headlines of "At Least 14 Dead in horror flames", "Owners flee as fires gut homes", "Six killed at Kinglake" did not even commence to explain the horrors to follow.

By Tuesday the toll had risen to 166 deaths and newspapers reported the complete destruction of the townships of Kinglake and Marysville with 13 fires still burning. Most Emergency agencies were still working flat out and stretched to the limit to suppress the fires still raging and there was even a call for a Royal Commission.

Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> Feb 2009 was one of Melbourne/Victoria's hottest days, reaching in Melbourne 46.4<sup>0</sup>C and on this day 10 major fires started: Vetis near Horsham 2,300ha, Colerine near Hamilton 770ha, Eaglehawk near Bendigo 330ha, Redesdale 9,400ha, Weerite 1280ha, East Kilmore extending into the Kilmore East –

Murrindindi Complex 255,417ha, Narre Warren 170ha, Bunyip 26,200ha and Churchill 24486ha with another 1,000 odd other smaller fires on the day.

The continuing drought conditions that had affected the whole of the State making all fuels ready to burn, the hot weather and the winds together made this day one of the worst seen in recorded history. As some one reported "when all the ducks are lined up anything can happen" (high temperature, low humidity, low fuel moisture, strong winds and drought conditions). It only needed a fire to start the process. The next part of this process was the SE wind change which is part of the weather for Victoria, where strong winds change the direction of fires turning the flanks into the head of the fire.

A report from a resident in Marysville who survived commented: "How do you stop a fireball coming at 120 kph towards your house" as he stood in a rain of embers. Or the description and photographs of the damage showing a street in Kinglake with all 31 houses destroyed.

Apart from the fire fighting agencies of the CFA, DSE, Parks Victoria and

MFB, most other agencies were activated including Victorian Ambulance Service, State Emergency Service, Salvation Army, Red Cross, St John Ambulance, Defence Forces and many other community based organisations. Wildlife Support, Hospitals, local councils etc had been stretched to their limits after the first few days after the fires. Red Cross organised 19 Relief Centres, major CFA staging areas were organised at Whittlesea and Yarra Glen, support from interstate fire services all rallied together.

The Defence Force JTF622 under command of Brigadier Michael Arnold had approximately 600 personnel formed into Engineer and Reserve Response Force Groups. They supplied emergency accommodation, vehicles and equipment in fire areas and at barracks ( bulldozers, trucks and APC's), and the logistics support to assist in fire line construction, communications, assisting police in searching and reporting.

In the days that followed the danger and the risk of fires increased due to the dry fuel and the mild days and this continued for the next two and a half weeks. Task Forces and Strike Teams of fire fighters and appliances were activated from all around the State to combat these and other fires and were deployed to the major fire areas where they were fighting the fires, back burning and mopping up, making

areas safe. The searching and checking of areas continued to confirm damage and losses. One of the good reports was the photo of the CFA fire fighter giving a koala (Sam) a drink from his water bottle. This showed compassion and a willingness to help everyone including the wildlife.

The Black Saturday firestorm and fires were unprecedented and the most destructive and devastating in the history of fires in Australia. To show the overall damage there were:

78 townships effected  
173 deaths  
7,000 persons displaced  
2029 homes destroyed  
6,200 insurance claims  
Estimated Cost \$ 800M  
Over an area of 400,000 ha

These fires have caused long term changes to the environment, due to the heat and intensity of the fires. Trees will not regenerate and landscapes will take years to recover. It was estimated that the energy expended by the fire was enough to run Melbourne for two years.

These types of fire disasters are a 30/40 year event and although modern technology and information improves over this time, the recognition and knowledge of the events becomes lost



in the memories of those who were there.

Another aspect of these fires was that within hours the local communities were donating clothing and food and then later organising fund raising activities for the Bushfire appeal. This shows the spirit of our communities spirit and that Australians rally together to help those who are in need.

The following is an article and comments from some of the Victoria Chapter Members on their experiences during the fires:

### **Fire Investigation**

#### **Article by Nicole Harvey, State Fire Investigation Co-Ordinator CFA and VAFI Committee member**

Following the major fires that occurred across the state of Victoria on 07 February 2009, a number of Fire Investigation Teams were established and attended the scenes to investigate the origin and cause of the fires. The fire investigations were jointly conducted by Fire Investigators from CFA, DSE, Forensic Science, Energy Safe Victoria, Victoria Police CIU and Arson & Explosives Squad.

During the major fires, the CFA Fire Investigation Section worked at the Integrated Emergency Coordination Centre (iECC) as part of the Situation

Unit on days of Total Fire Ban and on days of significant fire risk and activity.

The role of the State Fire Investigation Coordinator was to provide regular updates, reports and expert advice to the State Coordinator, State Duty Officer and Situation Unit Leader on the origin and cause of new fires that had occurred across the state, along with providing technical assistance and support to the Fire Investigators who were investigating the fires.

The Fire Investigation Section also worked closely on a day to day basis with the Victoria Police Arson & Explosives Squad and Victoria Police Forensic Services Centre – Fire & Explosion Investigation Unit to coordinate fire investigations across the state. This involved coordinating requests from Regions and Victoria Police for Fire Investigators to attend scenes, along with managing and supporting the various Fire Investigation Teams that had been deployed in the field.

In the days following the major fires, a number of additional Fire Investigation Teams were established. They consisted of Fire Investigators from a number of CFA Regions from across the State along with Fire Investigators from the MFB.

The Fire Investigation Teams worked in conjunction with the Victoria Police Forensic Services Centre – Fire & Explosion Investigation Unit, Victoria Police Disaster Victim Identification (DVI) Teams and members from the Victoria Police CIU and Arson &

Explosives Squad at a number of locations across the state.

The role of the Fire Investigation Teams was to work with the Victoria Police Teams to search properties, outbuildings, vehicles and surrounding areas that were affected by fire, and to locate missing persons. The Fire Investigation Teams also assisted by providing advice regarding fire behaviour along with the identification of possible fire protection and suppression systems that may have been installed at the property.

Additionally, a number of CFA Fire Investigators had the opportunity to work with the Bushfire CRC Teams who were conducting research in the area of fire behaviour. CFA Fire Investigators are currently preparing reports outlining their findings into the origin and cause of the fires.

#### **Comments from Andrew Kerr – VAFI President**

On Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> February 2009 (forever to be now referred to as "Black Saturday") I was on a secondment which took me away from my normal duties at the Arson and Explosive Squad. As the day unfolded, despite being at a new work group, I could not help but think of the conditions of the day and wonder what lay in store for my colleagues at the Arson Squad. Never in my wildest dreams could I have anticipated the horror that was to come. I found myself continually tuning into the ABC radio broadcasts and checking the

Incident Fact Sheet Database for reports of fires.

I continued monitoring throughout the evening as the situation went from bad to worse. First thing Sunday morning, I tuned into the radio and learnt that the death toll had risen dramatically overnight. I rang the squad and was quickly informed there was a lot worse to come. I immediately offered my services. I went straight into the Major Incident Room (MIR) at 412 St.Kilda Road (the building housing the Victoria Police Crime Department). For the next month it felt like I hardly left that room.

The Victoria Police emergency management response to the fires was a massive task and fully extended the forces capabilities. As any experienced detective will tell you, once the emergency management response phase starts to slow down the investigation phase is only just beginning. The Victoria Police investigative response was co-ordinated by the Crime Department from the MIR. Initially we were concerned with assisting in the search for victims and supporting the DVI process.

Through our initial inquiries we quickly established that this was not just a natural disaster. A number of these fires were caused by the hand of man. Shockingly, within days, two of the

major fires were being treated as suspicious and as a result we were now undertaking criminal investigations as well as coronial investigations. Later the Royal Commission was established to investigate more over arching issues surrounding the fires. It was important that from the outset we treated these fires as crime scenes, all be it they are the largest crime scenes ever established in Victoria.

Our primary focus was to investigate the fires where fatalities occurred. Investigative terms of reference were quickly established with the State Coroner. The fires were divided up into six geographically separated police operations. Each area was given a different operation name. Investigators were deployed forward to each of these areas and forward command posts were established. Local police stations/complexes were swamped.

A range of caravans, mobile communication units and semi trailer command post facilities were set up across the state. After hours, members were housed in local motels. Many did not get to see their families for the next 8 weeks as they worked in and around the fire affected areas.

Investigators combined with DVI Teams were assigned to each scene where a death occurred. That scene

was treated as a crime scene, recorded and forensically processed as thoroughly as possible. Events of such magnitude and confusion often lead to shortcuts being taken however very early on the principle of the bigger the job the more we need to stick to the basics was reinforced to all members.

Investigators were not only deployed forward to various fire scenes to examine the areas of origin in partnership with wild fire investigators but to speak to victims located at hospitals and clinics, to evacuation centres, to the family and friends of victims, to the State Coroners Office, to interview CFA/DSE/Parks Victoria fire fighters, to interview MFESB fire fighters, to interview MAS/RAS members and to interview property owners and witnesses.

Investigators deployed in the Churchill area quickly identified a suspect for the lighting of the fires in their area and within weeks they made an arrest. This person was charged in relation to causing the death of eleven people. Whilst investigators were pleased at making an arrest they were now confronted with significant time limits placed upon them. Investigators are required to serve upon the defence a copy of all the evidence obtained that will be relied upon to secure a conviction. This added yet another dimension, a dimension of urgency and priority for Operation Winston.

Each of the operations presented different scenarios and peculiar investigative problems. Whilst a number of the fires were not suspicious, the investigation into the cause and origin was required to be extremely thorough. Victoria Police have had to utilise expertise from a range of partner agencies particularly from the Country Fire Authority, the Department of Sustainability and Energy Safe Victoria. We have engaged outside consultants to examine powerlines and electrical transformers.

Whilst this was going on in Gippsland, investigators involved with Operation Groove in Marysville were also following significant lines of enquiry on a person believed responsible for causing the deaths of thirty nine people. At the time of writing these investigations are continuing.

One of my roles has been to cement relationships between agencies and to co-ordinate the gathering of evidence and information. CFA and DSE liaison officers were sought out and embedded into the Task Force.

A number of workgroups focusing on particular bodies of work were established. Investigations focused on DVI, crime scene examination and analysis, witness triage and interviews, fire mapping and geo-spatial analysis, GPS plotting of deceased and

damaged structures, event chronologies, interrogation and analysis of calls to 000, weather and lightning information, collection, interrogation and analysis of multi media and presentation of evidence in an electronic format.

In the first seven weeks of the investigation in excess of 332 investigators completed 42,373 hours of investigation. The magnitude of the investigation is unprecedented in our organisation's history. At the time of writing we have obtained approximately 2000 witness statements and anticipate more than 3000 still need to be obtained.

Early on it was identified that given the size of the task before us the traditional paper based briefs of evidence would be too problematic. The Phoenix Task Force will compile the briefs of evidence and information to service the Coronial, Criminal and Royal Commission's needs in an innovative multi layered electronic format the likes of which has not been attempted by Victoria Police before.

**Andrew Kerr**  
**Detective Senior Sergeant**  
**Victoria Police**  
**Phoenix Task Force**



## **Comments Brian Neal – VAFI Vice President**

Black Saturday and the weeks after has many parts. Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> February 2009 had been forecast as a day that was every fire-fighter's nightmare and been declared a Day of Total Fire Ban. The previous week had seen a 40°C heat wave for four days that had made conditions very unpleasant and had intensified the fire risk. Saturday started as a normal hot summer day, but as the day continued the temperature rose.

As a local CFA volunteer, I was at the station after a call for our tanker to go on a strike team to a Narre Warren fire and the wind was blowing hot. The brigade had a couple of calls, then at 3.45pm the Quarry Road fire started and everything went. I remained to man the last vehicle which went to three calls after that and also down to Quarry Road. During this time we were hearing horrific stories and radio transmissions regarding the fires in Kinglake. That night we attended a flat fire in Tecoma, where an elderly lady was injured (who later died from burns).

Sunday morning we received a call for the fire investigation into a flat fire which proved to be a candle knocked over in the flat due to no power. From there I went to the Quarry Road Fire for photos and a preliminary investigation into that fire. On return to

the fire station I was informed of the devastation of the other fires during Saturday. On the Monday returned to the Quarry Road fire to take more photos and ended up in a joint investigation with the police. My conclusion for this fire was that it was a roadside lit and the fire travelled down into the quarry.

Unfortunately brigades were not called early enough and a wind change blew it back out of the quarry and burnt out about 4 ha. The fire was stopped by a passing Helitak (Helicopter) which stopped the fire getting into the houses and onto the face of the National Park together with the local brigades (Dandenong Ranges) with minimal losses. Injury to one of the fire fighters was a branch falling off a tree without any indication and across the vehicle, hitting him. This caused neck and back injuries which he has recovered from.

My brigade was then organising Strike Team relief crews for our tanker which had been assigned to the Yarra Glen area, working between Kinglake and Healesville. On the Wednesday and Friday I was sent away as a crew leader for the day shift (7am – 7 pm) on the 3.4C Tanker, working on back burning in the area of Toolangi just north of Healesville.

On the way to these areas we travelled through the affected areas and it was noticeable the lack of green, birds and

animals and how it was so quiet and unsettling. This work secured the areas and did not allow break aways of the main fire. On the Thursday between these days we received a call for a fire investigation into a fatal fire in a neighbouring brigade area, which turned out to be one of their brigade members.

Apart from the circumstances of the fire and the damage was the tragic effect on the brigade members. After this week, the risk of fires was still prevalent and the other fires continued to cause havoc. One of these fires was at Belgrave on the Sunday night at which I was a crew leader on a Slip-on Strike team during the night, getting home about 3am. This was one of the fires that the Fire Investigation Teams attended and determined that it was deliberately lit.

Although during this next week relief crews were still being sent, I was busy with other fire investigations and other commitments. Another interest I have is that I am a member of the Army Reserve and was activated to assist in a limited capacity as members of my unit JMCO Melbourne were activated to support the 600 defence personnel supporting the emergency in Operation Vic Fire Assist. Our defence job was to organise the movement of personnel in and out of Melbourne during and at the end of the operation.

An office was established at Maygar Barracks at Broadmeadows to perform these duties. As this week came to a close most of the major fires were controlled and some scaling down of resources occurred and many of the brigades supporting were released and returned home.

On Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> February again a Day of Total Fire Ban, while attending a fire investigation at Boronia, a fire started at Upwey about 2.30pm. The Nixon Road fire was a major fire covering some 360 ha in size over the area of heavy bushland and grasslands known as Z-A Land / Birdland / Monbulk Creek Retarding Basin controlled by Parks Victoria, Melbourne Water and Shire of Yarra Ranges and private properties.

There are many tracks running through the area with some residences located within the boundary. As an estimate of size the fire was approx. 1.2 km x 1.3km with two spot fires close to the fire and one spot fire 5km away. The fire threatened the townships of Upwey, Tecoma, Belgrave South, Belgrave Heights and Lysterfield

Brigades responded to the call and due to the weather conditions and fuel an upgraded response was completed. Aerial support and 15 tankers were on first attendance at 1433hrs. From this point 18 Strike Teams (about 90 appliances) were arranged and

attended the fire. Aerial support was a heavy helicopter and two helitaks. There were some bulldozers responding, but there were mechanical problems initially. The fire was controlled by the next day but took three days till fully extinguished.

The weather was strong northerly winds which spread the fire significantly, together with the available dry fuel. There was a significant south westerly wind change during the fire at between 1630 and 1730 hrs turning the fire and endangering those residences on Glenfern Road Upwey. This also caused a spot fire in Muddy Creek road some 6.7 km from the point of origin and 5km from the fire edge. Apart from the loss of grass and scrub within the park lands there were the losses of: a Tractor, 4 Sheds, a Car, a Caravan and CFA Tanker. Injuries at the fire were sustained by three CFA volunteer fire fighters from Scoresby Fire Brigade suffering minor burns.

An investigation commenced during the fire and was a joint investigation with myself and Victoria Police CIU members. The investigation included interviews with witnesses and fire fighters and investigation of the fire scene. It was noted that fresh grass slashing had been undertaken on the day. The investigation concluded late at night and then was continued the following day due to some conflicting reports. On Tuesday, it was confirmed

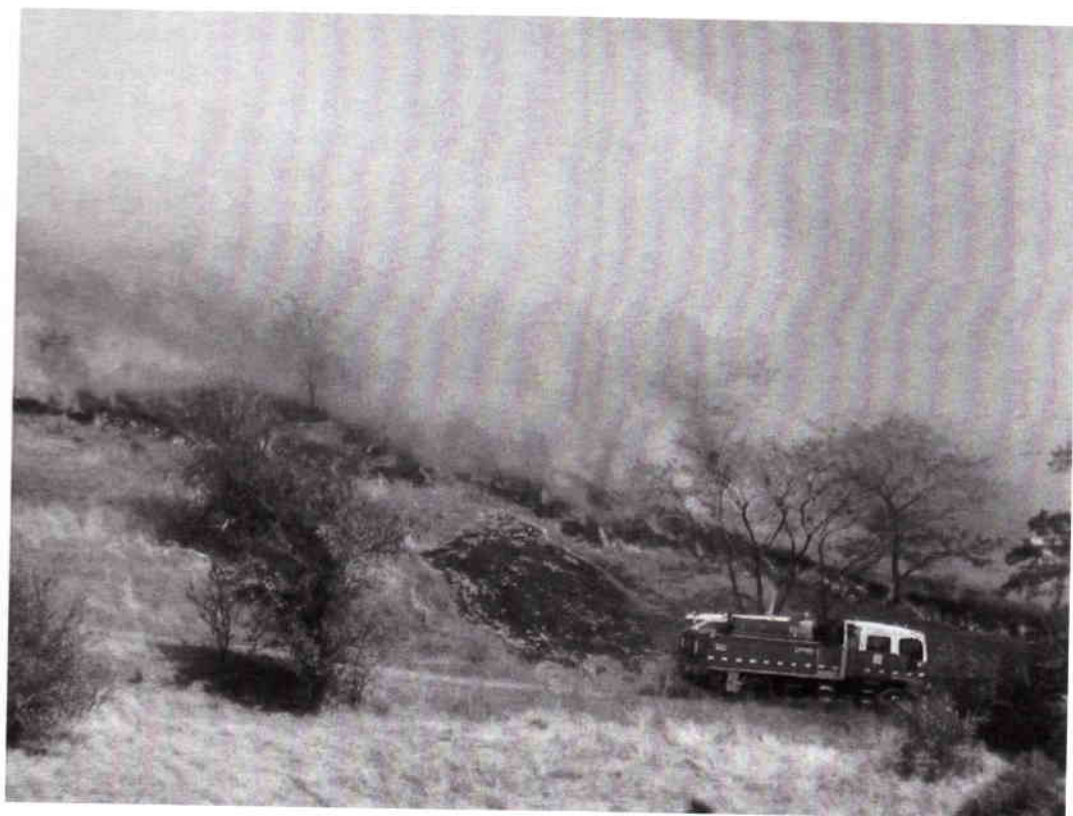
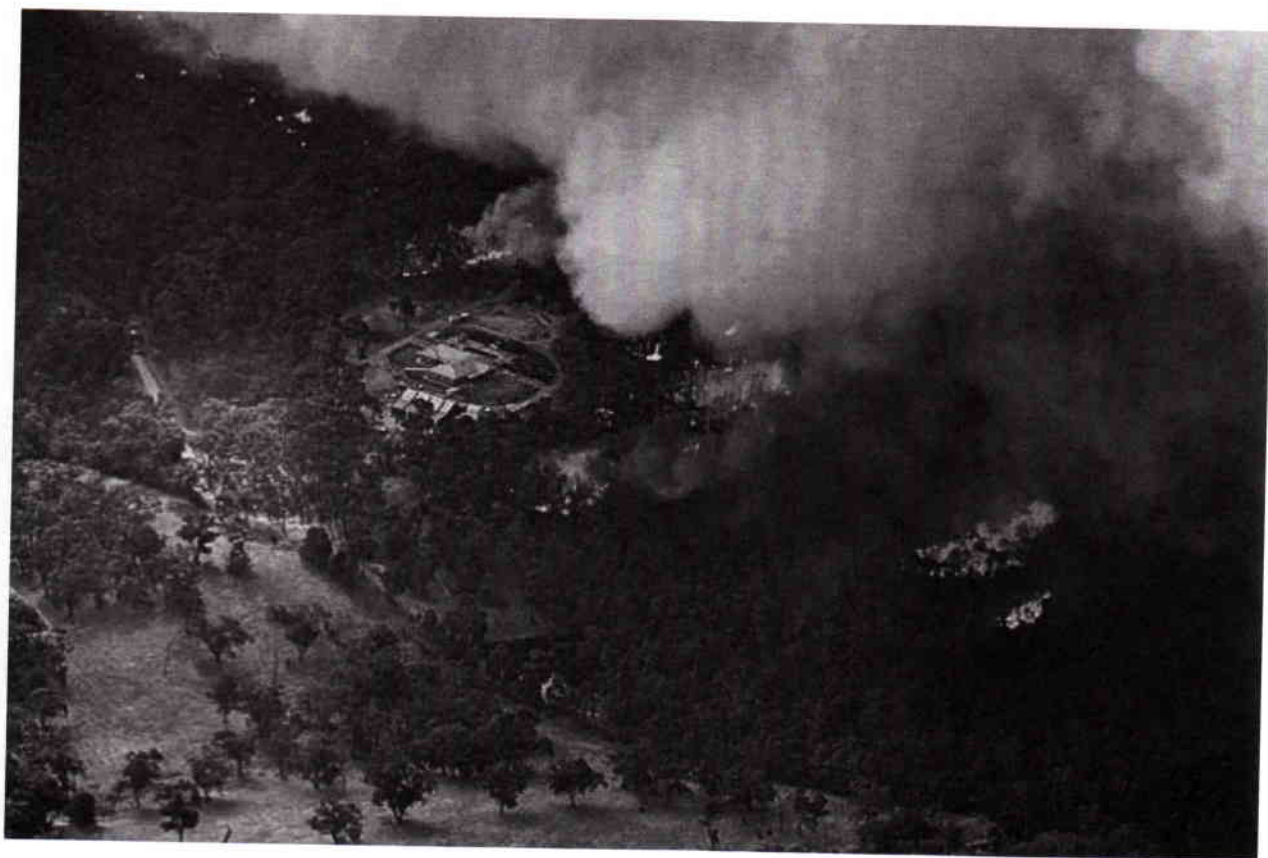
that a tractor slashing grass in a paddock had caused the fire. The investigation reports took sometime to prepare and submit due to the access and lack of information available. All my reports were submitted by the end of March.

This has been a brief overview of my activities for the Black Saturday and associated fires. Although Saturday was the beginning of this episode the fires and the story went on for about two and half weeks till the rain returned to Victoria. One sad event that happened was that a close and good colleague of mine in the Army Reserve, CPL Roz Freeman went to Kinglake on the Saturday to help a friend and on returning home was overcome by smoke, ran off the road and was killed.

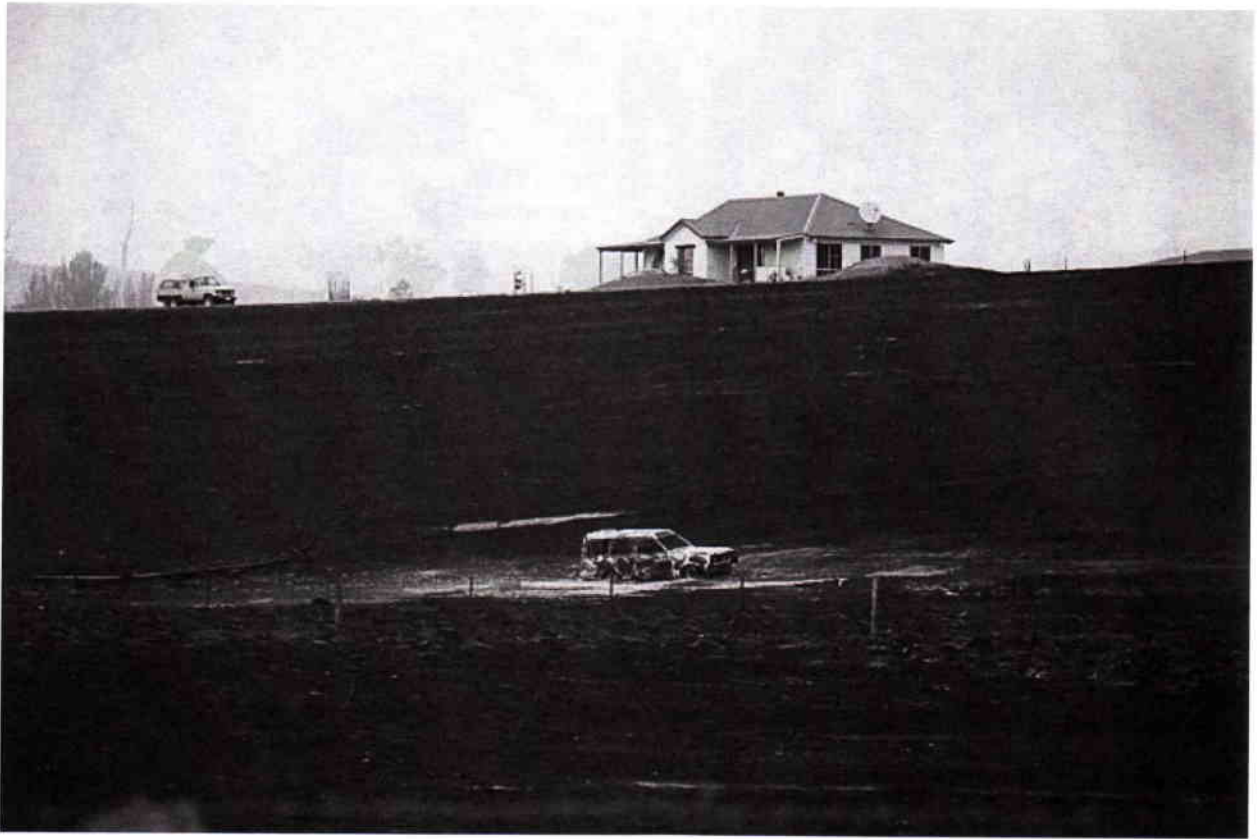
I hope that through the Royal Commission, that has now commenced, some good can come out of this disaster to help others in the future.

**Brian Neal**  
**Vice President**  
**VAFI**

This article has been put together by **Brian Neal** Victorian Editor of the Firepoint to highlight and report the Black Saturday fires. Thanks to Nicole and Andrew for their articles. I hope that this gives the reader an insight into what happened on the day and the following two weeks.







## Queensland Chapter Report

### **Old. Presidents report:**

Brian Richardson.

The 2009 annual general meeting has been and gone, the 2009 committee is:

President	Brian Richardson
Secretary	Rowley Ahern
Treasurer	Gary Nash

Committee members:

Bernie Nunn, Andrew Lundy, Des Ede	
Honorary solicitor	Quentin Lanyon-Owen

Changes proposed to the constitution on who was able to become a committee member were accepted at the meeting with the intention being that committee could propose persons with less than 2 years membership experience to join the committee, but at the same time not limit the right of any member to nominate themselves for a position on the committee, and details have been lodged with Department of Fair Trading as required by laws covering associations such as ours.

The February breakfast function was held with the annual general meeting and was well received. It was an interesting discussion by Joseph Box of Grant Thornton, on the forensic accounting perspective of fire fraud. Joseph pointed out that even if the fire

victim claims all their records have been lost in the fire (but the investigator has concerns about possible motives for a fire) there may still be avenues to obtain data to see if there were financial issues with the business – such as off site computer back ups, Accountants records, tax records, clients / supplier records, bank records – all possible sources of information that may be useful in following through the investigation.

Once again thanks to Joseph Box - Director – Litigation & Forensic Consulting, Grant Thornton (QLD) Pty Ltd

The QAFI committee considered an appropriate way to give something back to the community was to make a donation to Royal Brisbane Women's Hospital (RBWH), children's burns unit. Andrew Lundy initiated contact with the RBWH who have close links with the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS).

The committee felt, as a way of acknowledging the important assistance of the QFRS, that even a small donation to assist in research to help fire victims would be a valuable contribution in these economic times. Bernie Nunn took up the mantle from Andrew and organised for senior fire officers to be present with the RBWH foundation when the cheque was handed over.



QAFI donation to RBWH with thanks to QFRS assistance  
 Pictured from left: Superintendent Graeme Thom (QFRS), Assistance Commissioner Mark Roche (QFRS), Nina Mullins (RBWH), Brian Richardson (QAFI President), Inspector Bernard Nunn (QFRS & QAFI committee member)

The QAFI would also like to promote the 2009 Fireball that is being held to raise funds for the RBWH burns unit. It is to be held on 4 July in Brisbane City Hall with live entertainment, charity auction, 3 course gourmet dinner and drinks with special guest entertainers (who will be revealed on the night). For details of the event go to [www.fireball09.com.au](http://www.fireball09.com.au) or email Kellie-Ann Ashton on [kellie@newfangledfunctions.com.au](mailto:kellie@newfangledfunctions.com.au)

QAFI would like to welcome new members to the Queensland chapter:- Neville Rappell of LKA Group and Kris Evans of Suncorp Insurance

## UPCOMING EVENTS

**16 July 2009** - The QAFI proposes to hold a training session revisiting "Operation BrightSpark" a successful seminar held several years ago by the QAFI. The video made of that seminar

has been transposed to DVD and it seems an opportune time to have a movie session and a discussion on possible electrical causes of fire.

Keep the date free, once finalised, details of the session will be forwarded to QAFI members and other interested parties.

**10 SEPTEMBER 2009** – the QAFI will hold a one day conference focusing on legal aspects of fire investigation. Issues such as arson and fraud, burden of proof and rules of evidence will be presented, along with case studies to highlight the legal process involved with fire investigations.

Put the date in your diary, further details will be supplied in coming months.



**NSW ASSOCIATION OF FIRE  
INVESTIGATORS INC**  
(IAAI CHAPTER No.47)

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**President's Report from Greg Kelly**

Well it appears that planning is well underway for the National Conference to be held in 2010. I have been receiving feedback from our representatives in relation to the ongoing communication between the various States and in particular, the representatives from the Victorian Chapter. It appears that the National Conference is going to be a great event and is something that we should already be talking about and promoting to both members and people outside of our Association, for them to become involved and actively pursue next year.

It is quite apparent however that the area of fire investigation is one that has also impacted upon in times of economic crisis. I was at a seminar this week where an economist with one of our housing associations spoke about the changes in the market place. I can support from personal experience, the current economic climate impact and seeing the disproportionate amount of fires as arson. The forecast for the future doesn't look great for either business or individuals. That thereby brings on extra pressure for police, fire brigades and private investigators to carefully examine evidence in relation to fire scene examination and investigation.

The drop in housing prices along with tightened money lending criteria from financiers has created an environment where people might become desperate. In that environment as the old adage says, desperate people do desperate things. It is no more highlighted than from my own experience in more recent times, a number of determinations surrounding deliberately lit fires.

Although the GEC might be indicative of a motive which could be part of the reasoning behind any fire which may be considered to be deliberate, we are required to also remain open minded enough, to identify that although people may have debt, it doesn't necessarily mean they are involved in a deliberate fire attempt.

From time to time, I identify circumstances where it appears that investigation is undertaken into a fire before the scene is actually examined. That in itself creates a problem where it appears that a very wide net is being cast to try and capture information which may implicate someone in the fire, before the determination of the cause is made.

On a more positive note the education nights in Sydney and more particularly the repeat



of that education night for the first time in Canberra, proved to be a success. In discussing with members after the meeting their opinion with regard to the education being taken to them, it is apparent that all members were overwhelmingly positive in their response. One of the members commented to me that they felt more like they were part of the Association and really appreciated the information being taken to them as in the past, all they received for their membership in his opinion, was basically the issuing of the Firepoint magazine and membership with no other benefit. I formed the opinion that taking the information to members which may also extend to other regional areas such as the Central Coast or Newcastle is a great benefit well received by people in those areas. The Canberra matter was attended to by Australian Federal Police, staff, along with members of the Forensic Services Group from Queanbeyan. The ACT Fire Brigades along with inspectors from the Energy Authority and other representatives all made up the group who were highly attentive and posed various questions following the presentation. I am sure that this new development augers well for the future of the Association and the involvement of members who are not able to attend regular education nights in Sydney alone.

At the time of writing this report, the International Liaison Officer Ross Brogan is in the United States for the Annual General Meeting. Ross has again travelled to the United States where he also has been given the responsibility of voting on various issues in regard to the International Association on behalf of us here in Australia. We look forward to his feedback upon his return.

On a more concerned note, we have recently been advised that a member and former member of the Fire Investigation Unit Don Walsh has been ill, recently suffering a

stroke. We wish Don all the best for his successful recovery and keep him in our thoughts and prayers as time moves forwards.

I have recently learned that another member and former President of the Association Paul Bailey has successfully been promoted to a Superintendents position within the New South Wales Fire Brigade. To Paul we pass on our congratulations to him on being elevated to that rank, dealing with issues of safety of Fire Officers in the New South Wales Fire Brigade.

I am sure that in the current economic environment, those of us who are involved in the practical examination of fire and the investigation of the circumstances surrounding them can be assured that as in the past with the cyclic behaviour of the economy, that we again will be busy with the workload at hand. It is extremely important during these times that extra attention is paid to the detail in these matters due to the affects that the results can have on all those people concerned. I look forward to seeing you at the next education meeting and in particular our Annual General Meeting which will be held on 30 July. I would encourage you to become involved in the Association and the running of the Association. I would also encourage you to invite people along to the Annual General Meeting which will be a dinner where you partner is also invited, should that be your choice, with some subsidy for members being paid by the Association itself. Not only will that be a great night for those of us to get together for dinner following the AGM, but it will also be an environment where we have the Director of the Burns Unit of Concord Hospital also addressing us at that time. I look forward to seeing you at that event. In the meantime, make sure you stay safe.