

## Tuross Head Rural Fire Brigade



Sadly we are all becoming inured to tragedy and barely register when horror stories appear in the papers or are televised. But take your time and read the following items which appeared only last month and imagine if it happened to you or someone close to you ...

**“Heater sparks house fire, burns man.** A gas heater is believed to have started a fire in Melbourne's west in which a man was seriously burnt. Fire crews took nearly an hour to control the blaze as it tore through the unit in a new block on Harness Court, Truganina, about 2.30am (AEST) on Friday. The 35-year-year old resident had fled the home with burns to his hands, upper body and face. Intensive-care paramedics took the man to the Alfred Hospital. The fire was under control by 3.40am, with investigators pointing to a faulty gas heater as its possible cause, a CFA spokesman says. No damage estimate is known at this time but the home has been deemed uninhabitable, with serious structural damage.” AAP July 16, 2010, 7:13 am

Also in the Daily Telegraph on the same day ... “Firefighters issued a stark warning to home-owners after four fires in 10 hours in Sydney. Fire Brigade Superintendent Warwick Kidd said people should fix faulty heaters and dryers or face the prospect of watching their homes burn down. The first fire was at Granville, where a house was completely destroyed about 7pm on Wednesday. Three other blazes followed, with seven people being treated for smoke inhalation. Supt Kidd said a spike in the number of fires could be directly linked to faulty appliances. This year's winter season, with record low temperatures, had been particularly busy, he said.”

Remarkably, although the following statistics are now over 10 years old, it seems that not much has changed, and the figures are worth repeating. Each year there are over 10,000 house fires in Australia, causing more than 1,500 injuries and 70 deaths. [Australian Bureau of Statistics: Australian Social Trends 2000 - Housing - Housing Stock: Home fire safety]. Thankfully, these figures show that we are far from the worst. By comparison, the USA (whose mortality rate from fires ranks seventh among the 25 developed countries for which statistics are available) with a population about 15 times ours, averages about 400,000 house fires, resulting in nearly 3,000 deaths (including about 100 firefighters) and 15,000 injuries, each year - statistics that we'd prefer not to try to emulate!



**The tragedy is that most house fires are started by accident and could have been prevented.**

Causes of house fires:

- Information collected by the NSW Fire Brigades shows that fires identified as started by unattended heat sources caused 23% of accidental house fires in NSW in 1998, and increased by 86% between 1987 and 1998.
- Although fires known to be started by people falling asleep (4%) made up a relatively small proportion of all house fires in New South Wales in 1998, their

- number increased between 1987 and 1998 by 54%.
- However, the biggest increases belonged to the suspicious (136%) and incendiary (310%) categories. These fires, which may be deliberately set, usually cause more damage than do fires that are ignited accidentally.
- Whatever the main cause, many fires are triggered by some failure or malfunction in an appliance or a piece of equipment, whether unattended or not. In 1987, 73% of all house fires had equipment misuse or malfunction as the main contributing factor. This proportion had dropped to 62% in 1998.
- In the cooking equipment category (30% increase between 1987 and 1998), fires from ovens rose by 79% from 138 fires in 1987 to 247 fires in 1998. While not a major cause, fires from portable cooking and warming units also rose sharply by 119%, from 27 fires in 1987 to 59 fires in 1998.

Smoke alarms are essential to give you early warning of a fire in your home, especially at night. You can't smell smoke when you're asleep. And don't count on the kids reacting to an alarm; studies show 85% of children won't wake up if it goes off. In a fire, every second counts. Don't stop to gather possessions, pets or call the fire brigade. Your only priority is to get out. Call '000' (triple zero) from your neighbour's phone.

On a much happier note, a well-attended afternoon tea was held on Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> July to recognise Wilf Boehm's service to the Brigade and the community. Wilf was presented with a suitably inscribed RFS Plaque and a good time was had by all.

In other news from the Brigade, congratulations are in order for four members of the Tuross Head Rural Fire Brigade who recently completed training courses. Peter Cole and Daryl Smith eagerly await their well deserved BF (Bush Firefighter), and Judith Robertson and John Eglitis, their VF (Village Firefighter) badges and certificates. Brigade active membership is very strong at present and it has been gratifying to see the numbers attending call-outs and training sessions.

On another "note", the Brigade has also re-commenced exercising it's siren. So when you hear a loud, continuous screech on Wednesday evenings about 6pm it's not a call for an evacuation due to an approaching tsunami, but merely an opportunity to ensure that the siren will work when it is needed. You may also be aware that the VRA also has a siren, but theirs oscillates up and down.

Come and talk to us about joining the RFS and get an opportunity to set off our siren! We welcome more members. You'll find us in Drake Street, where training is underway every Wednesday evening from 5:30 to 7:30 and from 9am to noon on the first Saturday morning of each month.

**PREPARE . ACT . SURVIVE .**

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