

Fire Season 2008/2009 CFA North West Area

Disclaimer: Information provided in this document is based on data sourced from CFA systems and supplied by DSE. At the time of writing CFA Fire and Incident Reporting (FIRS) statistics remained incomplete. Incident data will change as brigades progressively complete incident reports. This document will be updated as required. For amendments and contributions please contact the North West Area Recovery Team on 03 5443 2622, or through your Region HQ. The latest version will be available on Brigades Online in the Reports Section of My Area / Region. Additional printed copies can be obtained via your Region HQ.

Introduction

The following information has been collated in order to provide an understanding of the environmental circumstances that were faced by North West Victorian communities during the 2008/2009 Fire Danger Period (08/09 FDP) and the details of the response to those circumstances by CFA North West Area personnel. The circumstances included weather patterns, long term drought conditions, and simultaneous, major, long duration incidents that required significant multi-agency resourcing.

The 08/09 FDP commenced with a major wildfire at Hattah on 30th October and continued with multiple wildfires and other incidents. On Black Saturday, 7th February 2009, the Area was requested to provide resources to combat incidents in two adjoining Areas before the major NWA incidents at Redesdale and Eaglehawk. The FDP in the NWA concluded well into April 2009.

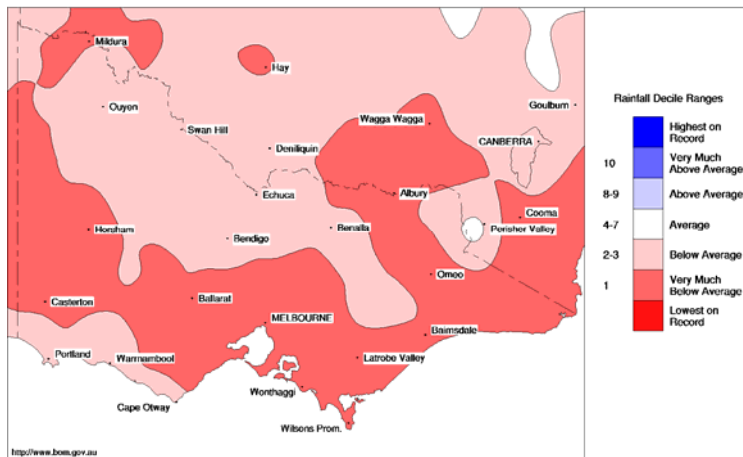
The document describes the environmental circumstances existing over the FDP and provides detailed information about CFA NWA activities and commitments under the headings of Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Recovery (PPRR).

You are invited to use the information provided in this document as a basis for increasing understanding within your brigade, informal discussions with members of your community, public and community group briefings if requested, or for your own interest. Please contact your Region HQ if you would like additional detail or material such as maps or photos to support your presentations or briefings.

Environmental Conditions

As a consequence of many years of low rainfall in many parts of Victoria the State's water storages were under 35% full in February. In comparison the storages in February 2005 were at about 60% capacity and in February 1997 the storages were over 90% full. At this time local storages were well under the State average with Dartmouth Dam at 22.22%, Hume Dam at 11.67% and Eildon Dam at 16.36%. The November 2008 Drought Update issued by the Murray Darling Commission Authority stated that monthly inflows for the Murray system had been below average for the last 37 consecutive months. The 2008-09 water year is currently tracking as the seventh driest in 117 years of records. Strict system operating rules were imposed on the Murray and Goulburn irrigation systems to minimise losses. Many irrigation districts were on minimal allocations of irrigation water right, dryland farming areas were parched and urban areas were on various stages of water restrictions which had been in place for some years. As a consequence the environment - urban, rural and bushland, was tinder dry.

Weather



Following a month of almost rainless weather many records were set across the State in late January and early February for high day and night maximum temperatures, as well as the duration of extreme heat.

On Black Saturday the maximum temperature difference from the 30 year average was in excess of 12°C with some parts of the State 18°C above.

The March 2008 to February 2009 Rainfall Decile Range was below average to very much below average for the entire State (lowest 10-30% of recorded totals).

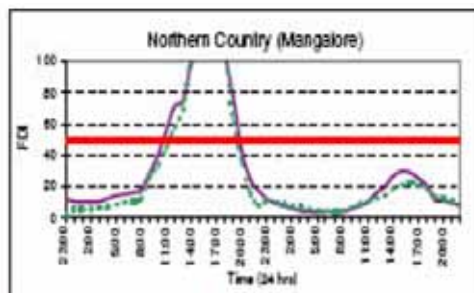
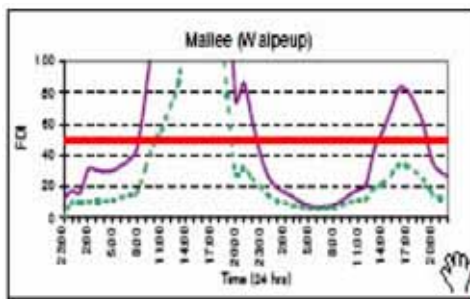
Drought Index

Date	Bendigo	Ouyen	Swan Hill
1 st February 2009	144	167	177
7 th February 2009	152	172	181
28 th February 2009	163	178	185

The Drought Index (DI) is a numerical value reflecting the dryness of soils, deep forest litter, logs and living vegetation, and is a factor in the calculation of the Fire Danger Index (FDI). At DI zero the ground is saturated and 100 represents normal summer conditions. At DI 125 trees begin to show drought effect, with some trees dying. The table shows that on the 7th February Bendigo needed 152mm of rain, Ouyen 172mm and Swan Hill 181mm to reach soil saturation. In imperial measure this is more than six inches of rain at Bendigo, almost seven inches of rain at Ouyen and almost seven and a half inches at Swan Hill for the ground to become saturated.

Fire Danger Index

The Bureau of Meteorology (BoM) forecast for Black Saturday, issued at 1645 hrs on Friday 6th February 2009, indicated expected Forest Fire Danger Index (FFDI) of 142 and 159 at Bendigo and Swan Hill respectively. The Grass Fire Danger Index (GFDI) was forecast to be 186 and 210 for Bendigo and Swan Hill respectively. The FFDI was expected to exceed 50 (extreme) by 0800 hrs in the Mallee and by 1100 hrs in the Northern Country, and to remain above 100 for several hours. At FDI 100 fire control is virtually impossible. The FDI is derived from weather variables such as temperature, wind speed, humidity and rainfall and physical variables such as fuel load and curing. These factors are calculated to estimate rate of fire spread and flame height.



— Forest FDI
 - - - Grassland FDI
 . . . Extreme FDI

**Fire Behaviour Estimates
 2 day Forest / Grassland FDI**
 Based on OCF data scaled by
 Day 0 / Day 1 fire weather
 estimates issued 0630 hrs
 EDT Sat 07 Feb 2009.

Prevention

During the period 14th September to 21st December 2009 the North West Area Community Safety team conducted 63 Fire Ready Victoria presentations reaching 2,048 people. Thirteen Community Fireguard meetings were held. Brigades in Schools sessions were conducted in 27 schools reaching 2,922 students in 107 sessions.

The 2008/2009 Zero Tolerance Program was successful with a noticeable reduction in the occurrence of illegal fires necessitating a brigade response. Relations with Victoria Police at local and Regional levels have been strongly enhanced as a result of this Program. A number of charges relating to illegal fires have been laid by Police across the North West Area.

Preparedness

Eighteen Total Fire Bans (TFB) were declared in the North Western Total Fire Ban District during the period 12th January to 3rd March 2009. Eleven of these occurred in the 20 days between 20th January and 8th February 2009. Operational preparedness by the Area, Regions, Groups and Brigades was heightened on days of TFB as well as on Code Red days in the NWA.

Preparedness planning for the 2008/2009 Fire Season included identification of pre-determined Strike Teams, identification of Levels 2 & 3 Incident Management Team (IMT) personnel and their allocation to roles, and the allocation of personnel to Regional Emergency Coordination Centre (RECC) roles. All of these Teams and Coordination Centres were activated and in place on every day of Total Fire Ban and also when local Code Red trigger points were reached. Teleconferences with Groups were regularly conducted to build a heightened level of preparedness due to the severity of the season. Leading up to Black Saturday this preparedness at Group level included manning of many Group HQ and the placing of crews on standby for Field Command Vehicles (FCV) from 0900 hrs. At brigade level crews were identified and placed on standby for Strike Team deployment. Response Tables were also regularly adjusted to increase the first response to any incidents occurring on days of heightened risk. Contingency planning arrangements were checked to mitigate the risk of systemic failures of internal and external infrastructure such as power, telephones, and other communications systems. In Region 2 this preparedness permitted the effective use of the Spectrum Pre-conferencing System for Strike Team alert and deployment when the CAD system became overloaded and both non-emergency and administrative pager messages were significantly delayed.

Twenty-five reconnaissance flights with volunteer Air Observers were flown out of Bendigo on 18 days during the FDP in order to detect any fire activity in the southern part of the North West Area. DSE arranged flights out of Mildura for the northern part of the Area.

RECCs in the North West were modified and upgraded to improve functionality for incident management. Facilities were tested in pre-season exercises.

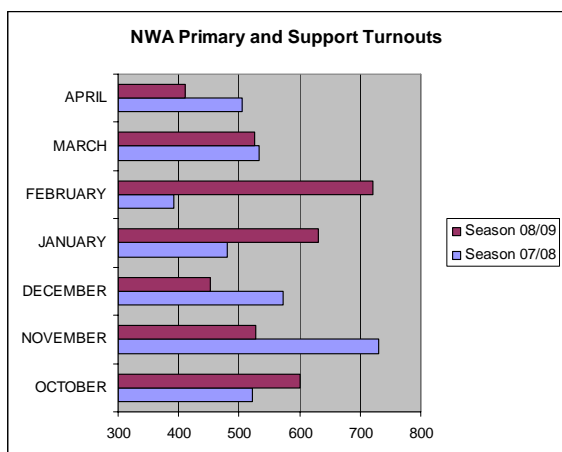
Two UHF links to Fire Ground Incident channels at Cohuna and Gunbower were installed at Region 20 HQ to connect to Operations Points that may have needed to be established in red gum timbered areas on Gunbower Island. The portable Field IT Kit based in Cohuna was upgraded and five volunteers were trained. Two floating collar tanks were commissioned for dispatch by Koondrook UFB and DSE crews in Cohuna.

The Adam Street Level 2 Incident Control Centre (L2 ICC), in Bendigo, was redesigned to improve workflow within and between IMT functions. Two new computers were installed with access to programs and internet sites to assist with incident management. A new

radio system was installed. These improvements provided a limited redundant capability for incident management in Bendigo. CFA and DSE included requirements for connectivity in the ICCs at Adam Street and Epsom to facilitate joint operations.

A joint CFA-DSE Level 3 IMT exercise was conducted at Epsom on 19th November. A joint exercise with DSE to test the Adam Street facility was conducted on 10th December. The exercises were conducted using the Vector program and involved personnel from VICPOL at both exercises and ABC radio at Adam Street. A major exercise was conducted at Walpeup on 18th – 19th October involving Region 18 Strike Teams, DSE crews and a joint Level 3 IMT working from DSE Mildura. SES personnel managed the Staging Area and Red Cross personnel provided catering. A successful seven hectare township protection burn was a major outcome of the exercise, with cross crewing of CFA tankers and DSE slip-ons.

Water Availability. Arrangements were made with municipalities in the NWA to place plant, such as water tankers and graders, on stand by for accelerated response to incidents on days with a predicted high FDI, or other triggers. Water Authorities across the Area were contacted to ensure there were adequate contingency plans in place should water supplies be compromised by low river levels or other factors. The requirement for adequate water supplies for firefighting purposes was raised at Divisional Emergency Response Committees across the Area.



Response to Major Incidents During the FDP

This graph shows a comparison of total Turnouts between FDP 07/08 and 08/09. It indicates the high level of response Brigades and Groups were required to meet in the North West Area during January and February 2009. The significant number of incidents in October 2008 also indicates the unusually early start to the local fire season due to the dryness across the Area as a result of many years of drought.

NWA FDP Operational Activity. Brigades in the NWA responded to 1,750 primary incidents in the period 30th October 2008 to 30th April 2009. These 1,750 primary incidents involved 3,291 primary and support brigades using 4,283 appliances and crewed by 22,399 personnel. There remain 295 fire reports incomplete for the period. Appliances and personnel for the incidents covered by these outstanding fire reports are yet to be included in the totals reported above. In addition to the above figures, three IMTs involving 38 personnel, three individual IMT personnel, eight fireground commanders and 25 Strike Teams with 637 personnel were also deployed to support significant incidents in other parts of the State.

Two large fires occurred in Region 18 on 30th October. The fire at Hattah was reported at 1130 hrs and the Patchewollock fire at 1418 hrs. Six Strike Teams from Regions 2, 18 & 20 involving 36 vehicles and 172 personnel responded to these fires caused by lightning strikes in Region 18. A Staging Area at Ouyen was managed by CFA and SES personnel and a joint IMT was run from the DSE offices in Mildura with 14 CFA members. DSE resources included twelve slip-ons, five dozers, one multi-terrain loader and aircraft. A team of Ground Observers from Region 2 responded on 31st October.

A fire was reported on 22nd January at 1310 hrs at Yaapeet in Region 18, near the Region 17 border. Ten appliances and 50 personnel responded. The fire was contained at 1401 hrs and mopping up completed by 1800 hrs. The temperature reached 35°C and a westerly wind gusted to 78 km/h.

Also on 22nd January a fire at Watchem in Region 20 was reported at 1408 hrs. Six tankers and 54 firefighters were assisted by a bulk water tanker and three slip-ons from DSE to have the fire mopped up by 1757 hrs. Weather conditions were difficult with a westerly wind gusting to 61 km/h and temperatures above 33°C. Visibility was very poor due to raised dust.

Five Strike Teams from Region 2, with five Strike Teams from Region 15 and resources from Regions 14 and 16, responded to a fire known as Belltopper at Zigzag Road, Drummond North in Region 15 on 22nd January. This fire started in forest and was reported at 1515 hrs and was contained at 2200 hrs with all edges tracked. The fire was controlled at 1700 hrs on 23rd January. A joint IMT was established at DSE Epsom to manage the fire with OO Mark Gilmore as Deputy Incident Controller. The cause of the fire was established as clashing powerlines. There were three flare ups over the next two weeks.

Major structural fires occurred during the fire season at the Mildura Fruit Juice Company, Swan Hill TankWorld, Gilbert Club Hotel Kerang, Junortoun Hotel, Barkers Creek School and Kangaroo Flat Anglican Church. The Bronto Aerial appliance, from Bendigo Fire Station, responded to four of these incidents and assisted with fire investigation at another.

7th February Operational Commitments. The NWA supplied a Strike Team from Region 20 to Horsham at 1600 hrs and was in the process of responding, at 1457 hrs, to a request to deploy Region 2 Strike Teams, involving ten appliances to the Kilmore East Complex fire. CFA Regions 12, 13 and 14, adjoining Region 2, had already committed a significant number of resources to the Kilmore East Complex. When the Redesdale fire started the Region 2 Strike teams were diverted to that incident at 1525 hrs.

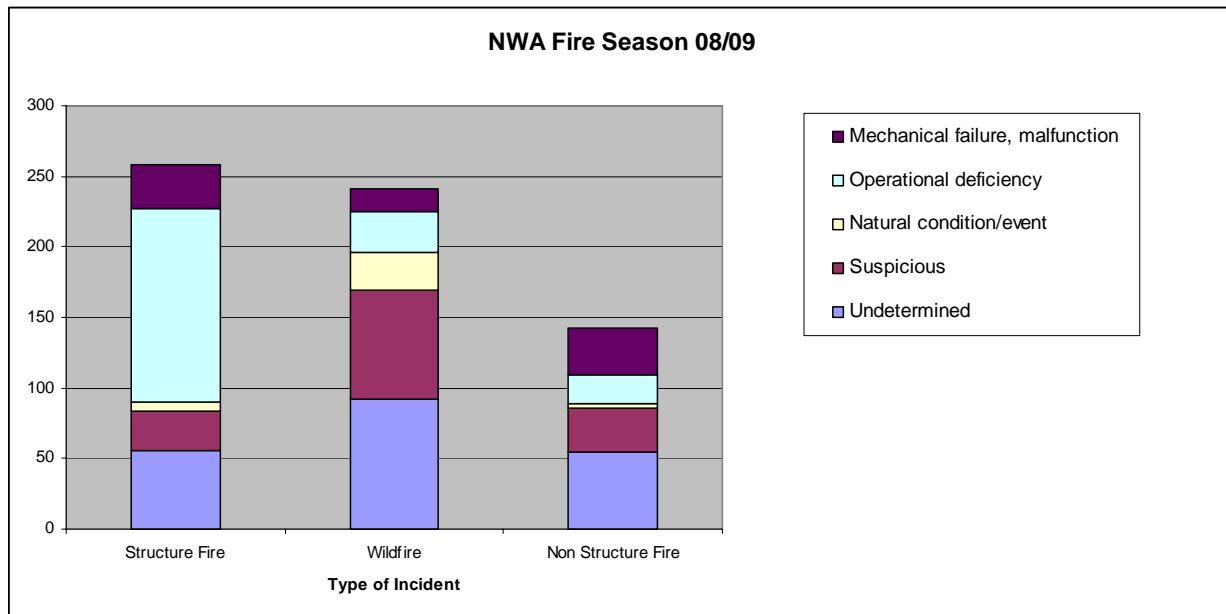
The Redesdale fire was reported at 1511 hrs. It was fought by a total of 55 CFA tankers from Regions 2, 12, 15 and 16, six CFA slip-ons, one Big Fill, ten FCVs, 11 DSE slip-ons, three DSE tankers and plant involving dozers, graders and water tankers. Additional support was provided on the fireground by VICPOL, SES, and Red Cross. The incident was managed by a Joint Incident Management Team led by OM John Deering and based at the DSE offices at Epsom. Regional Coordination was conducted by the Region 2 RECC. The fire was contained at 0956 hrs on 10th February. Control of the fire was passed from the ICC at Epsom to the Metcalfe Group on 14th February. Fire operations concluded on 15th February.

The Bracewell Street fire was reported at 1634 hrs. It was fought by 75 CFA pumpers, tankers and other operational vehicles, 26 DSE slip-ons and four dozers. Support on the fireground was provided by four Strike Teams from Regions 18 and 20, which were en route to the Redesdale fire and were diverted to Bendigo, three Strike Teams from Regions 15 and 16 (ST1526, 1540, 1612), VICPOL, SES, the Macedon MCV, St John's Ambulance, DHS and Red Cross. The incident was managed by a CFA Incident Management Team led by GO Peter Rogasch and based at the CFA Level 2 ICC at Adam Street. Regional Coordination was conducted by the Region 2 RECC. The City of Greater Bendigo MECC was activated on the night of 7th February and began Recovery activities on the 8th. The fire was contained at 1930 hrs on 7th February. Control of the fire was

passed to Eaglehawk UFB on Wednesday 11th February and fire operations concluded on Friday 13th February.

After 7th February a significant portion of DSE North West Area resources – appliances, firefighters and Incident Management personnel – were tasked to major fires in other parts of the State. This continued until early March when many resources were then allocated to burning programs, both locally and in other parts of the State. Consistent with previous practice and the CFA-DSE Local Mutual Aid Plan (LMAP), CFA NWA accepted responsibility to maintain sufficient resources to provide timely response to the suppression and management of fires in the North West Area, on both public and private land, during that time.

FIRE CAUSATION



SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANT INCIDENTS

HATTAH – GRASS & SCRUB FIRE

When	30 th October 2008 1140 hrs
Where	Sunset Trinita Road Ouyen Region 18
Area Burnt	9180 ha public land, less than 100 ha private land
CFA Resources	34 Brigades, 31 appliances, 205 firefighters – 8 reports incomplete Support to Region 18 provided by Strike Teams from Regions 2 & 20.
Assets at Risk	Ouyen and Hattah townships

A lightning strike started a fire in the Murray Sunset National Park. The fire burnt in a southerly direction before a strong westerly wind change caused the east flank of the fire to spread rapidly in an easterly direction. The fire jumped the Mildura / Melbourne rail line and the Calder Hwy and spread into the Hattah-Kulkyne National Park. The highway and railway line were closed for 19 hours. Current to the high voltage power line to Mildura was also disconnected. A small area of private cropping land was also burnt before the fire was brought under control by CFA and DSE crews. DSE resources included 12 slip-ons, four dozers, three fixed wing aircraft, two helicopters and a multi terrain loader.

PATCHEWOLLOCK – GRASS & SCRUB FIRE

When	30 th October 2008 1418 hrs
Where	Baring North Road, Patchewollock Region 18
Area Burnt	724 ha public land, 4 ha private land
CFA Resources	10 Brigades, 12 vehicles, 62 firefighters Support to Region 18 provided by a Strike Team from Region 20
Assets at Risk	Private broadacre farming property

A lightning strike at Patchewollock burnt 724 ha of public land and four ha of private land. ST1804 was on route to the Hattah fire and after extinguishing a fire at Turriff West then responded to a fast moving fire at Baring Road. Private firefighting appliances also attended. Sixty ha of crop was ploughed in and the fire was held at the break, retardant control lines and the Baring North Road. Three kms of fence was burnt. ST2001 was redeployed from Hattah on 31st October to complete mopping up. DSE resources included four slip-ons, one dozer and one fixed wing aircraft.

KANGAROO FLAT – STRUCTURE FIRE

When	11 th December 2008 0659 hrs
Where	St Mary's Anglican Church, High Street, Kangaroo Flat
CFA Resources	5 Brigades, 13 appliances, 58 firefighters

The church was ignited by an arson attack. The building was virtually gutted and investigations are continuing. The Church Office and records area at the rear containing donations and cheques for the local parish were saved. Memorable sights at this fire were the two Bronto aerial appliances from Bendigo and Ballarat working each side of the church to dismantle the roof, and a firefighter carrying the cross from inside the church to safety.

BARKERS CREEK – STRUCTURE FIRE

When	28 th December 2008 1101 hrs
Where	Barkers Creek Primary School, School Road, Barkers Creek
CFA Resources	5 Brigades, 12 appliances, 46 firefighters

The fire was caused by an electrical fault in the roof cavity of the building. The structure was approximately 100 years old and was constructed of brick on a granite / bluestone base with a timber ceiling, timber batten roof and timber shingles covered by corrugated iron. The ceiling collapsed a short time after the fire fight commenced. Red Cross provided catering. The scene was preserved until the arrival of an Energy Safe Victoria investigator.

YAAPEET / RAINBOW – GRASS & SCRUB FIRE

When	22 nd January 2009 1313 hrs – <i>TFB whole state of Victoria</i>
Where	Rainbow Hopetoun Road, Rainbow
Area Burnt	11 ha
CFA Resources	10 Brigades, 10 appliances, 50 firefighters
Assets at Risk	Private broadacre farming property

The fire was caused by a timber power pole in a paddock snapping at its base and live power lines making contact with wheat stubble. Weather conditions on the day, high fuel loads on the roadside near the point of origin and the lack of fallow paddocks in the district indicated significant potential to develop into a major fire. The fire burnt along the roadside

for 195 metres with flame height over 10 metres. The intensity of the fire led to total burning of all ground fuels and defoliation of trees. A local private trailer mounted fire fighting unit and a tractor drawn disc plough assisted firefighters and the fire was contained within one hour.

WATCHEM – GRASS & SCRUB FIRE

When	22 nd January 2009 1408 hrs – <i>TFB whole state of Victoria</i>
Where	Sunraysia Highway, Massey
Area Burnt	250 ha
CFA Resources	5 Brigades, 6 appliances, 54 firefighters
Assets at Risk	Lake Buloke Reserve, private broadacre farming property

The fire started on the eastern side of the Sunraysia Hwy and burnt in an easterly direction for 2.3 km, crossing the railway line between Donald and Watchem. The fire was stopped on Single Tree Road using direct attack with tankers. One DSE tanker and three slip-ons attended due to the risk to the Lake Buloke Reserve. The cause was suspicious.

DRUMMOND NORTH aka Belltopper Fire – GRASS AND SCRUB FIRE

When	22 nd January 2009 1515 hrs – <i>TFB whole state of Victoria</i>
Where	Zig Zag Road, Drummond North (Region 15)
Area Burnt	480 ha
CFA Resources	60 Brigades, 78 appliances, 520 firefighters – 28 reports incomplete
Assets at Risk	Malmsbury township

The fire built quickly in the dry fuel with westerly winds gusting to 100 kph. Investigations suggest the fire started from a branch which fell across power lines. The fire was attended by 31 Region 2 brigades, 29 brigades from other Areas, and DSE resources. The fire was managed from the ICC at Epsom. This fire illustrated the positive effect of a fuel reduction burn which halted the initial headfire in the forest and greatly lessened the intensity and spotting. Good work by crews stopped the fire on the outskirts of the historic township of Malmsbury. Three flare ups of this fire occurred on 26th January, 29th January and 6th February with resources from Malmsbury and Taradale responding on each occasion.

MILDURA – STRUCTURE FIRE

When	26 th January 2009 1848 hrs
Where	Mildura Fruit Co., The Crescent, Mildura
CFA Resources	7 Brigades, 15 appliances, 64 firefighters
Assets at Risk	Adjoining factories

The processing area of the factory was well alight on arrival with flames visible through the roof of the building. The Bronto aerial appliance and a heavy pumper were deployed from Bendigo; arriving at 2300 hrs. The fire was contained to the processing area and a chemical store. Spilt chemical material was contained in oversize drums. Extra BA capacity was provided from Ouyen, Robinvale and Swan Hill as well as the PE Van from Bendigo. Fire investigation traced the source of the fire to a faulty switchboard inside the factory.

JUNORTOUN – STRUCTURE FIRE

When	3 rd February 2009 0200 hrs
Where	Farmers Arms Hotel, Popes Road & Mclvor Highway, Junortoun
CFA Resources	8 Brigades, 15 appliances, 95 firefighters
Assets at Risk	Bottleshop, adjoining residence

The fire was deliberately lit after a robbery. The hotel had exploded and was fully involved on arrival of the brigades. The Bronto aerial appliance was used to assist with fire investigation.

QUARRY HILL – GRASS & SCRUB FIRE

When	7 th February 2009 1337 hrs – <i>TFB whole state of Victoria</i>
Where	Houston Street, Quarry Hill
Area Burnt	< 1 ha
CFA Resources	4 Brigades, 7 appliances, 68 firefighters
Assets at Risk	Adjoining residences

The grass fire quickly built in intensity and burnt two houses before firefighters could bring it under control. 12 DSE appliances attended with CFA brigades. This was an indicator of the severe conditions firefighters were to face later in the day as the weather worsened. Three appliances responded to a flare up of this fire at 1818 hrs.

REDESDALE – GRASS & SCRUB FIRE

When	7 th February 2009 1511 hrs – <i>TFB whole state of Victoria</i>
Where	Coliban Park Road, Redesdale
Area Burnt	7,500 ha
CFA Resources	71 Brigades, 83 appliances, 915 firefighters – 3 reports incomplete This includes Strike Teams from Regions 12,15 and 16
Assets at Risk	Redesdale and Mia Mia townships

The fire was large and going when crews first arrived and had probably been burning for some time on this hazy day. The Metcalfe Group quickly passed control to the Level 3 IMT at Epsom. The fire burnt to the south west for approximately 19 kms and burnt 12 houses and several rural industries, including an olive processing plant worth about \$2M. Community infrastructure including a church and a bridge were also destroyed. Sadly, four volunteers lost their homes in the blaze, and all Redesdale Brigade records were lost in the home of the Secretary. Earthmoving equipment and about 20 DSE appliances assisted the firefight. The Golden Square MCV and the radio repeater were deployed to the incident. DMOs also attended. Positive aspects of the fire were the lack of injuries to firefighters in difficult terrain full of rocks and gorges, the communications between the field and the IMT, and the concentrated effort of the deployed resources to hold the eastern flank when the wind changed, which without a doubt saved the townships of Redesdale and Mia Mia.

BRACEWELL STREET – GRASS & SCRUB FIRE

When	7 th February 2009 1634 hrs – <i>TFB whole state of Victoria</i>
Where	26 Bracewell Street, Maiden Gully
Area Burnt	354 ha (179 ha public land)
CFA Resources	70 Brigades, 75 appliances, 599 firefighters – 5 reports incomplete. This includes six Strike Teams from Regions 15, 16, 18 & 20
Assets at Risk	Bendigo CBD, Eaglehawk

The cause of this fire is regarded as suspicious and investigations are continuing. The fire burnt 61 houses and 125 sheds. One civilian tragically lost his life during the blaze. The fire was not contained for five hours. The incident was characterised by poor visibility and radio communications problems caused by raised dust and a huge smoke plume between the fireground and the ICC. Some crews experienced community panic when they were assisting people in the path of the fire to safety. Aircraft use was not possible during the run of this fire due to the extreme wind conditions. The Adam Street Group HQ controlled this very significant incident. Crews maintained a high level of personal safety in extremely risky circumstances. Twenty-six DSE slip-ons and four dozers supported the fire fight. Victoria Police worked alongside appliances and with Strike Team Leaders to maintain control and public order on a fireground where many members of the community remained in place to defend their homes. The fire front was reduced by about 40% due to a fuel reduction burn in Dai Gum San area four months earlier. Hundreds of homes may have been lost if not for this work as fire had the potential to cross Eaglehawk Rd in its initial run.

Several fires occurred on the afternoon and evening of 7th February, adjacent to but outside the fire control lines of Bracewell Street, and are attributed to spotting from the fire.

SWAN HILL – STRUCTURE FIRE

When	23 rd February 2009 1312 hrs – <i>TFB whole state of Victoria</i>
Where	Tankworld, 135 Karinie Street, Swan Hill
CFA Resources	6 Brigades, 10 appliances, 66 firefighters
Assets at Risk	Adjoining factories, smoke plume posed some problems for public safety

A malfunction in the catalyst used to manufacture fibreglass tanks caused the blaze. A large column of black smoke was visible as the alert page was received. Factory employees had evacuated and an aggressive internal attack on the fire was conducted on the arrival of support BA crews. The office area was protected by charged hose lines and the fire was confined to the front factory. The rear factory had been destroyed 11 months earlier in a similar incident.

KERANG – STRUCTURE FIRE

When	14 th March 2009 1219 hrs
Where	Gilbert Club Hotel, Wellington Street, Kerang
CFA Resources	11 Brigades, 18 appliances, 69 firefighters
Assets at Risk	Ford dealership, office complex

An electrical fault has been confirmed as the cause of the fire. Kerang FB responded quickly and found the hotel burning fiercely on the ground and first floors and adjoining structures under ember attack and severe radiant heat. The Brigade called for the Bendigo Bronto aerial appliance, Protective Equipment Van for BA Support and local tankers to respond.

Five suspicious house fires occurred in the Kerang district in March 2009. One house was destroyed early in the evening of 17th March on a property about 15 km south of Kerang, another two destroyed in the early hours of 18th March near the Murray Valley Highway, about six km north of Kerang and while firefighters were still on scene another house was destroyed at Teal Point about 15 km east of Kerang. Another house was destroyed in Kerang township on 20th March. CFA and DSE firefighters also extinguished a number of suspicious bush, scrub and grass fires around the district in February and March.

CFA TEAM DEPLOYMENT – Fire Season 2008/09

Team	Shift	Vehicles	Crew	Deployed to
ST1801	30-31 October	4	15	Hattah
ST1802	30-31 October	6	18	Hattah
ST1803	30-31 October	5	19	Hattah
ST1804	30-31 October	5	23	Patchewollock
ST1803D2	31 October		13	Hattah
ST1803N2	31 October	1	24	Hattah / Patchewollock
ST2001	30-31 October	5	23	Hattah
TF0201	30-31 October	10	37	Hattah
IMT	30 October		8	Hattah / Patchewollock
IMT	30 October Night		4	Hattah / Patchewollock
IMT	31 October		8	Hattah / Patchewollock
IMT	31 October Night		2	Hattah / Patchewollock
R2 Grd Obs	31 October – 1 November	1	3	Hattah
Div Comd	22 January	1	3	Drummond North
ST0201	22 January	4	20	Drummond North
ST0202	22 January	6	28	Drummond North
ST0203	22 January	7	33	Drummond North
ST0204	22 January	6	28	Drummond North
ST0208	22 January	6	22	Drummond North
ST2040	7 February Day	5	23	Horsham
ST2040	7 February Night		23	Horsham
ST0201	7 February	6	35	Redesdale
TF0208	7 February	6	22	Redesdale
ST0210	7 February	5	23	Redesdale
ST0203	8 February	7	33	Redesdale
ST0204	8 February	6	28	Redesdale
ST0209	8 February	5	25	Redesdale
IMT	7 February		20	Epsom – DSE / CFA
IMT	8 February		7	Epsom – DSE / CFA
ST1801	7-8 February Night	5	21	Bracewell Street
ST1804	7-8 February Night	5	16	Bracewell Street
ST2095	7-8 February Night	5	23	Bracewell Street
ST2096	7-8 February Night	5	19	Bracewell Street
IMT	7 February		30	Adam Street
ST2040N	8 February Day		23	Horsham
ST2097	9-11 February Day		28	Alexandra
ST1851N	9-11 February Night		27	Alexandra
IMT	9-11 February Night	5	17	Kangaroo Ground
Fire Investigator	9-14 February	1	1	Kinglake, Marysville,

Team	Shift	Vehicles	Crew	Deployed to
				Strathewen
TIC Crew	10 February	1	2	Redesdale
L2 IC	11 February	1	1	Kilmore
ST02 R24D	11-12 February Day		22	Tangambalanga
ST02 R24N	11-12 February Night		24	Tangambalanga
ST2098	10-12 February Day		28	Ovens
ST1811N	11-13 February Night		28	Tangambalanga
ST1861N	11-13 February Night		23	Ovens
Dep Planning	12-14 February Night	1	1	Woori Yallock
ST02 1530	14-15 February Day	3	30	Whittlesea
R20 GrdObs	14-15 February Day	1	3	Alexandra
R2 Grd Obs	14-17 February Day	1	3	Whittlesea
ST2090N	15-17 February Night		28	Healesville
ST2099N	15-17 February Night		28	Healesville
R20 SecComm	15-17 February Night	2	6	Healesville
R2 DivComm	15-19 February Swing	1	3	Yarra Valley
R2 SecComm	15-19 February Swing	1	4	Yarra Valley
R2 DivComm	15-19 February Night	1	3	Yarra Valley
R2 SecComm	15-19 February Night	1	3	Yarra Valley
IMT	17-21 February Night		12	Woori Yallock
ST1802N	19-22 February Night		23	Alexandra
ST2093N	22-24 February Night		28	Alexandra
ST1803N	22-25 February Night		23	Alexandra
TF0209	23 February	5	23	Daylesford
ST1815N	23-24 February	6	27	Daylesford
ST2095N	23-24 February Night	6	24	Daylesford
ST2095	24 February Day		23	Daylesford
Medical Unit Ldr	23-27 February		1	Kangaroo Ground
IMT	24-27 February Night	3	9	Alexandra
R2 Div Comd	27-28 February Night	1	3	Kangaroo Ground

RECOVERY

Forty-nine presentations relating to recovery after Black Saturday were conducted from 9th February to 1st May. A dramatic rise in calls from the community seeking information was experienced in the fortnight following Black Saturday. The calls related to recovery after the major fires and opportunities for community education sessions.

Insurance Claims

Elphinstone and Bendigo FCVs have been replaced, and the Castlemaine tanker and the Rochester pumper have been repaired, all as a result of damage on the fireground. Damage to the Redesdale Hall has been repaired.

OHS Incidents / Hazards Reported in the North West Area in the 2008/09 Fire Season

Treatment	Number of Reports
Near Miss	2
Doctor only	10
Hospital Inpatient	5
Taken to Hospital but not admitted	5
First Aid	20
Nil Injury	6

Major Incident Debriefs

Debriefs for all significant fires in the Area have been undertaken. A total of 450 individual issues were raised in local, Regional, Area and inter-agency meetings. These issues have been assessed and duplications aggregated. In all, 127 separate issues have been grouped into ten major themes:

- Leadership,
- RECC / ICC,
- Emergency Management,
- Incident Management,
- Community Safety,
- Communications,
- Information Technology,
- Safety,
- Staging Areas, and
- Training.

Action is underway to prioritise and address the issues raised. In some instances solutions have been implemented already. In other cases, research needs to be undertaken to examine options and determine the most viable solution. Resolution of all issues may not be within the Area's current resources and will depend on availability of funding. All Brigades and Groups will be advised of the progress of this project.

Earthworking contractors were tasked to complete trackwork rehabilitation at the Redesdale fireground and assisted with distribution of pasture and grass seed as required. This was planned in conjunction with DSE.

North West Area staff are part of local municipal recovery committees, and are involved in planning and building issues at a local and State-wide level.

Welfare Support Provided During and After the Major Fires

All Strike Teams returning from deployments to significant fires were met by either a senior CIS Peer or an Operations Officer and advised of support available. They were also mailed an information pack. The Welfare Plan update was included in the Nor' Wester edition of March 2009.

The Brigade Captains who had brigade members deployed to the February 2009 fires were contacted by Senior CIS Peers to provide opportunity for feedback on volunteer issues and concerns.

Food and other necessary items were provided to volunteers in need through the ongoing NWA Drought Support Project as required and as funds permitted. The Drought Strategy is being revised to incorporate requirements arising from the major fires.

All staff and volunteers who experienced losses as a result of the fires were provided with a welfare support information pack and followed up with contact by a peer or a staff member as appropriate. Psychological counselling support for volunteers and staff is also available if required.

All NWA Peers who deployed to the major fires attended a CIS Peer Debrief on 21st March 2009 at Fiskville. This was also an opportunity for the work of Peers to be acknowledged. CIS Awareness sessions for volunteers and spouses have been conducted. Priority was

given to those Brigades which were either impacted by drought or economic downturn, or Brigades with members deployed to respond to major fires.

All Volunteers, Brigades and Groups were recognised for their contribution to the major fires and maintaining capacity to respond to local incidents. Volunteers and staff members who may be called upon to give evidence at the Royal Commission are being provided with advice on CFA processes. Personal and legal support is being provided to them.

Managing Now, Planning Ahead This “fire shed” model of facilitating community functions was commenced in the Buloke Shire and has been taken up by the Loddon and Gannawarra Shires. The program was developed to sustain, strengthen and support rural communities, providing them with information and support to get through today and to plan for the future. The program is supported by Centrelink, Rural Financial Counsellors, local Health Services, CFA staff and Peers, Department of Primary Industry, Jobs Connect, Wimmera Uniting Care, Salvation Army, and Shire Representatives.

NWA Recovery Team

Funding was approved in May for a team of seven to be employed in the Area to undertake recovery activities until the end of October 2009. The team's charter is to ensure that all activities required to rebuild capacity in areas directly impacted by the major fires are coordinated and effective, and the welfare needs of staff and volunteers are met.

C. A. Peacock
(NWA Recovery Coordinator)
Assisted by the NWA Recovery Team