
Sunday, 7 February 2010

MORE IMPROVEMENTS TO BUSHFIRE SAFETY IN SA

On the anniversary of the tragic Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria, the SA Government has today announced a **\$9.4 million** funding boost for the State's volunteer-based Emergency Services.

Premier Rann said the Country Fire Service and the State Emergency Service would receive \$9.4 million of State Government funding for new technology, infrastructure upgrades, equipment and volunteer support.

“Volunteers are the lifeblood of local communities.

“Volunteers have a long and proud history of going above and beyond the call of duty to help South Australians, and this funding will further strengthen the outstanding work that they do.

“Devastating events such as the ‘Black Saturday’, Ash Wednesday and Eyre Peninsula bushfires show just how far our emergency service workers are prepared to go to put their lives on the line to help others.

“That’s why we are delivering nearly \$10 million in upgraded equipment and resources – to ensure they are trained and able to do their jobs in difficult and extreme circumstances.

The Government will spend:

- **\$5.6m** to roll out 1050 new computers for volunteers and broadband connectivity for to all CFS Group control centres and brigades and SES units.
- **\$3.55m** to accelerate building works and maintenance on CFS and SES facilities.
- **\$225 000** to purchase another 750 pagers for CFS and SES volunteers, and
- **\$50 000** to enable the SES Volunteers Association to prepare for increased membership of volunteers, while reducing red tape for SES volunteers joining the Association.

Mr Rann says a property status audit is underway that will determine priority upgrades and those that require upgrades down the track.

“Funds will also go towards fitting out every CFS and SES emergency service unit and brigade with new computers and broadband access. This will not only reduce the travelling and administrative burden on our volunteers but also allow them to undertake training on line.

“The State Government will introduce Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL) on emergency service vehicles when the State’s new Computer Aided Dispatch System is fully operational. AVL will increase the level of safety for emergency service workers, as well as improving command and control resources during an incident.

“And more than **\$200,000** will be provided for 750 additional pagers. These will complement the 650 already ordered,” Mr Rann said.

Emergency Services Minister, Michael Wright says the Government in recognising the great work of volunteers will also introduced other measures to help them.

“This includes amending the *Road Traffic Act* to introduce 25km speed limits for motorists passing all emergency vehicles with flashing lights.

“Reducing the speed of vehicles in these circumstances will improve the safety of not only our CFS and SES volunteers but of all emergency workers including police and MFS.

"We also intend to ensure volunteers are not unduly penalised from their paid employment when responding to emergencies. That is why we have provided exemptions for heavy vehicle driving regulations to CFS Volunteers travelling to and from an emergency and will consider further streamlining of the laws at a National level,” Minister Wright said.

“More than 2000 12-month free access passes to the State’s National Parks will be available to CFS and SES volunteers to thank them for protecting South Australians in all kinds of emergency.

“They also will get a 50 per cent concession on multi-park passes, such as the Kangaroo Island multi-park pass which gives access to the various National Parks on Kangaroo Island and the tours associated with them.”

“We have also begun a risk assessment across the CFS and SES to determine future resourcing needs of our emergency services, this will ensure members have all the tools they need to control and manage emergency situations. ”

Today’s new funding is **in addition to more than \$25 million** already provided this financial year to better prepare South Australia from the threat of bushfire including:

- \$12.4 million for a new emergency warning system
- \$4.5 million for ten extra DEH fire management officers and to increase burn-offs to reduce fuel hazard
- \$4.6 million for 8 additional community educators and a bushfire community awareness and education campaign
- \$2 million for a response and recovery emergency information and support call centre
- \$1 million for five additional bulk water carriers to ferry water to fire-fighting trucks on the fire ground
- \$380,000 towards enhancing the exposure of the CFS on the world wide web
- \$219,000 to assess and plan the development of proposed community fire refuges

More than \$180 million is also being spent upgrading information technology and communications for our emergency services. This includes:

- \$150 million upgrade of the Government Radio Network to a fully digital network
- \$36 million for a modern Computer Aided Dispatch for the State’s emergency services