

Water On

Newsletter No. 4

April 2013

Mike's Mop Up

Firstly a big thanks to all those who have been fighting fires this summer. The past fire season (well we are actually still in it) was unusual with well above average rain falling in early January, quickly followed by an extended dry period and record low rainfalls in February and March.

When the Total Fire Ban came on in March, this was the latest a fire ban has been put in place for over 10 years. Although it has been a dry summer it has been reasonably quiet with only a handful of significant fires.



We had 12 people who were part of NZ wide firefighting deployments to Victoria in March. Thanks to all those people who raised their hands and offered to be part of this opportunity.

It is not easy sometimes making the final selection as many factors are part of the final decision, not least the requirements of the requesting agency around qualifications and experience.

Southern Rural Fire maintains a register of interested and suitably qualified personnel and it will be these people who are 1st cab off the rank. Second we try and put crews together with a range of experience and third to involve new people from different organisations who have the requisite qualifications and experience.

If you are interested in being part of our register please talk to Elton.

Awarua Bay fire -

19th November 2012 burnt 499ha in the Awarua Wetlands. Southern Rural Fire has allocated significant resources to better work with landowners on fire in the area surrounding the wetlands but sadly this fire was deliberately lit well inside the wetland boundary and was not in any way associated with any managed fire in the area.

Castledowns fire -

1st Feb 2013 burnt 3.5ha. Starting in pine slash on the edge of a 10,000 ha forestry block, with a prevailing northerly wind, this fire had the potential to be very large. Thanks to the quick response from many different agencies the fire was contained very quickly although crews maintained a vigil on-site for several days and nights.

Athol, Hedgehope and Garston -

were kept on their toes in early March with a spate of heaps and stubble fires that got out of control in windy conditions. We also experienced a higher number of tractor and harvester fires during the same period.



Mike's Mop Up cont.

Weather Station Upgrades

Southern Rural Fire completed the initial round of weather station upgrades. There are now eight stations providing weather and fire danger data on an hourly basis which is a great improvement on the once a day information obtained previously. You can access this information at: www.nrfa.harvest.com

Report of the Fire Review Panel

The Report of the Fire Review Panel was presented to the Minister in December. There are several recommendations in the report that, if implemented by Government, will strengthen the rural fire sector for the future. We understand that the Minister has still to make recommendations to Government on the report and implementation. You can access a copy of the report at the following link:

http://www.dia.govt.nz/diawebsite.nsf/wpg_URL/Resource-material-Our-Policy-Advice-Areas-Fire-Service-Review#1

We are now working with a company to develop a website that can be accessed by rural fire managers and the general public and will interpret and display fire danger information.

As soon as the website is available we will let you know.



Forest and Rural Fire Association of New Zealand Annual Conference

When: 30 July – 2 August 2013.

Where: Queenstown Millennium Hotel

Topics: Fire Fighter Safety and Community Fire Safety

Volunteer Rural Fire Force teams will be provided with one ticket per team for the 3 days. Let Sally know if you need more tickets.

Annual Awards

We are very keen to continue with the annual Awards evening that has been held for the past two years in late September.

More importantly we would like to hear from you on how we can make the evening better:

- ☞ Is the timing/date right, if not when would be better?
- ☞ What could we add?
- ☞ What could we drop off, etc?



Comments and suggestions to myself or Sally by the end of May.

Thanks for all your hard work and commitment throughout this extended fire season.

Peter Kenyon

Peter Kenyon is a social capitalist and community enthusiast who has worked with over 1000 communities in 53 countries, to get them to understand their power and what they can achieve, without handouts and without the backing of agencies.

This guy is inspirational and Southern Rural Fire wanted a piece of that, why? Because if we want to attend less fires we need to be part of creating a positive change in communities, regardless of what that change is.

Rural fire mangers from Northland and Marlborough came to Southern to hear what Peter had to say and the day was capped off with an evening event with the Athol and Garston communities where there was fun laughter and learning. We look forward to updating you on Athol and Garston's progress of enlightenment.

Peter believes healthy, caring, inclusive, sustainable and enterprising communities will not only allow small communities to continue but to thrive and prosper and this can only be done from within the community.

Peter uses dot democracy, asset mapping, cafe conversation, open space and bank of ideas to get people really thinking about their community, their role and what can be achieved. You will find it useful for your community and work. For more information go to:

http://www.bankofideas.com.au/profiles_frames.html

Southern Rural Fire is turning 10!

Southern Rural Fire was established on 7th August 2003.

You're all invited to the party, however we have yet to plan the 'when where and how'.

We would like your input on what the party should include.

Let us know your thoughts, what's a good time of year and day. What events, guests, speakers or activities should be included?

Training

This year's training season is underway with a slightly different format.

To make better use of our time and yours we have provided a number of dates for each unit standard. We hope this also provides an opportunity to get to know your fellow fire fighters as well.

Courses are quickly filling up, so make sure you book onto a course that you are targeted you for. If you have any questions give Sally a ring.

NZQA Number	Course Name	Course Details	Prerequisite Courses
3285	Protect personal safety at vegetation fires	Thur 14 March - Completed Mon 17 June - Still room available	None
3286	Control vegetation fire using dry fire fighting techniques	Fri 10 March - Completed Mon 6 May - Full Tue 16 July - Still room available Tue 13 August - Still room available	Must hold 3285
3287	Suppress vegetation fire with water and additives	Thur 13 June - Still room available Thur 11 July - Full Mon 5 August - Still room available	Must hold 3286
21417	Operate light portable pumps in a vegetation fire environment	Mon11 - Tue 12 March - Completed Tue 19 - Wed 20 March - Completed Mon 8 - Tue 9 April - Completed Tue 16 - Wed 17 April - Full	Should hold 3285 - but not essential
20386	Operate portable pumps for fire fighting	Mon16 - Tue 17 September - Still room available	
17279	Demonstrate knowledge of the co-ordinated incident management system (CIMS)	Tue 11 June - Fri 26 July - Still room available	None
3278	Demonstrate knowledge of command and control structure of an emergency service provider		

Pumps Training at Sandy Point with Elton



Simulated Exercise - Borland

Each year Southern Rural Fire runs a simulated exercise to put Fire Mangers through their paces in the event of a large scale fire. It is also an opportunity to work with other emergency organisations, without the pressure of a real event.

The value of simulated exercises came to light this year when a potentially large and costly fire started at the northern end of Castledowns in a 10,000ha forestry block. As luck would have it, the fire had been modelled previously, just a few gullies over, under similar weather conditions on the day of the real fire in 2013.

The exercise provided an incite for fire mangers on the potential difficulty this fire could pose and the knowledge ensured effective and efficient control occurred. What could have been a 3 week long mop up exercise was only a 3 day event.

The Otatara Exercise

In November 2012 Otatara was used to simulate a fire exercise. With 1800 houses and limited access to water (no reticulated water) there is a very real risk of a fire occurring in this area.

The scenario was based on a fire originating from a shed in the suburb of Otatara during a warm dry summer with a total fire ban.

By 6pm, 42 ha of Otatara bush and grass land had been burnt with the loss of 35 homes and one life. Numerous resources had been deployed in an effort to control the fire including ten fire trucks, eight water tankers, three bulldozers seven helicopters and a number of rural and urban fire teams working on the ground.

Wind conditions made fighting the fire difficult and along with controlling the fire, managers had to evacuate people from their homes, establish a welfare centre for displaced people and provide public information on the event.

The exercise involved 30 to 40 emergency managers from Emergency Management Southland, Army, Police, Fire Service and Rural Fire staff from Southland, Otago and South Canterbury.

What is Southern Rural Fire doing to reduce the risk in Otatara?

As part of Sally's role she is working with the Otatara community (and other similar high risk communities) to highlight the level of risk there is in living in a heavily vegetated and populated area.

With the support of the Otatara Community Group Sally has organised a series of meetings, and carried out FireSmart home assessments to bring to people's attention the fire risk around them.

Intertwined in these events myth busting occurs. People often think that emergency services are going to 'rescue' them. They underestimate the scale of a fire and that emergency resources may be quickly overwhelmed.

Through the FireSmart program they are taught how to reduce their fire risk and to be self reliant in the event of a fire.



Incident Managers meet during the Otatara Simulated Exercise to discuss developments

What did we learn?

We don't want a fire in Otatara - Managing fire is one thing, managing a fire with 1800 houses and 2500 residents is a lot more complicated.

People are the complicating factor in a fire and managing their needs and expectations can be difficult.

In Southland emergency services work well together and each organisation understood their role in order to bring the fire under control and manage residents who were affected by the fire.

Health and Safety Reminder

If you experience any accident, incident or near miss when working for rural fire please ensure you report as soon as possible to your crew leader or Incident Management Team personnel.

While you are working or training with Southern Rural Fire, we have a responsibility to ensure your safety. It's important we know what occurs on the fire ground so we can manage accidents, incidents and near misses appropriately and prevent them from reoccurring.

