

# NATIONAL EMERGENCY

## RESPONSE

Official Journal of the Australian Institute of Emergency Services



VOLUME 31 NO. 1 SUMMER 2017-2018  
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Summer 2017-2018 • National Emergency Response

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#### FRONT COVER

Members from the triumphant Port Macquarie SES Unit.

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# NEW MEMBERS

The Australian Institute of Emergency Services is pleased to announce the following emergency services people joined the AIES between October and December 2017.

NAME	ORGANISATION	DIVISION
Christopher Couldrey	Transurban	Vic
Ronald Green	NTES	Qld/NT
Brett Storey	RFS	NSW
Jesse Sherman	CFA	Vic
Shane Barnes	SEQUEST	Qld/NT

## KEY

**CFA** – Country Fire Authority

**RFS** – Rural Fire Service

**NTES** – NT Emergency Services

**SEQUEST** – South East Qld UHF Emergency Service Team



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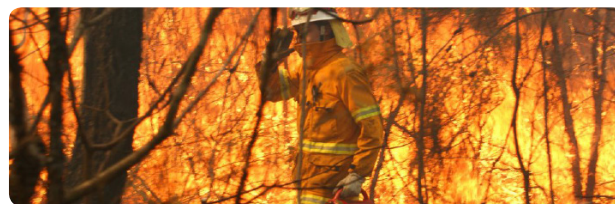


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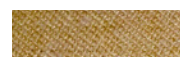
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# FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

Steve **Jenkins**, FAIES

*National President*

The Australian Institute of Emergency Services (AIES) Board recently granted South Australia member Barry Presgrave Life Membership of the Institute (LMAIES), and approved for New South Wales member, Glenn Jones, to be elevated to Fellow of the Institute (FAIES). On behalf of the Board, I have great pleasure in congratulating Barry and Glenn on their respective appointments which are very well deserved.

I recently attended a meeting of the Australian Emergency Management Volunteers Forum (AEMVF) – the AIES is a member agency of the AEMVF. The AEMVF, in conjunction with Volunteering Australia (VA), are organising a volunteering conference/summit, which is partly sponsored by the Australian Government. The event will be held on 20-22 June 2018 at the International Convention Centre, Sydney. The conference theme is **Ignite, Invigorate, Inspire**. Early bird registration closes 31 December 2017. Full details are available on the conference website: <http://nvc2018.com.au/>. I commend this conference/summit to all persons involved, or interested in, volunteering.

The AIES, as a member of the AEMVF, has one complimentary registration available for one of its members. The registration can only be provided to a volunteer (not a paid) member of a volunteer organisation. Any AIES member interested in utilising this complimentary registration please submit your expression of interest to [president@aies.net.au](mailto:president@aies.net.au) as soon as possible. Kindly note though that this offer is for the registration only (valued at \$900-\$1,000); travel and accommodation will be at the recipient's expense.

The AEMVF is also involved with facilitating delivery of the Volunteer Leadership Programs (VLPs) to enhance

skills in leadership and organisational management for volunteers. VLPs are coordinated through the Australian Institute of Disaster Resilience (AIDR). During 2018, VLPs will be conducted at various locations around Australia. Further details on the VLPs, including dates, locations and application forms, are available on the AIDR website at: <https://aidr.org.au/programs/volunteer-leadership-program/>. Kindly note that applications require endorsement by



*On behalf of the Board, I wish all AIES members and emergency services personnel and their families a happy and safe festive season. Hopefully, your services will not be required to any great extent so you too can spend time with your families.*

the applicant's organisation as part of the approval process. I commend the Volunteer Leadership Program to all volunteers.

For many years now, the AIES has proudly supported the Australia & New Zealand Disaster and Emergency Management Conference, and in 2018, the AIES will continue this support. Information about the ANZDEMC is provided on the back page of this edition of *National Emergency Response Journal* and on the conference website, <https://anzdmc.com.au/>

In 2018, the AIES will be holding the Annual General Meeting and annual board face-to-face meeting in Brisbane on the weekend prior to the ANZDEMC. The AGM and annual dinner will be held on the evening of Saturday 19 May 2018 – venue to be advised. This is to facilitate the opportunity for those members wishing to combine attending attend both the AGM and ANZDEMC to do so in the one trip.

The AIES is also proud to partner with organisers of other events and promote the interests of emergency services and related professions. Accordingly, the Board recently approved for AIES to support two events through partnership, details of which are also provided in this edition of the NER Journal. These events are: the Flood & Cyclone Mitigation & Response Conference, to be held in Brisbane (venue to be confirmed) on 22 and 23 February 2018 (<http://fcmr.aventedge.com/>) and the Mental Health for First Responders Conference, to be held in Melbourne (CQ Functions) on 29-30 March 2018 (<https://www.criterionconferences.com/event/mhs/>).

On behalf of the Board, I wish all AIES members and emergency services personnel and their families a happy and safe festive season. Hopefully, your services will not be required to any great extent so you too can spend time with your families. ●





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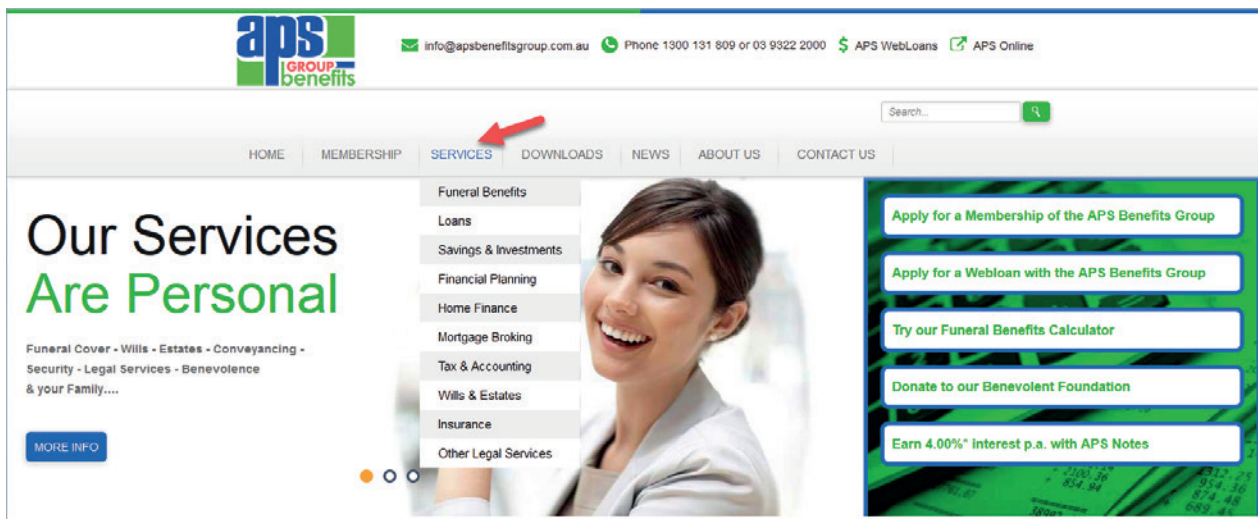
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# VIC PARAMEDICS CLIMB IN NUMBERS

Victorian paramedics showed heart, spirit, endurance and comradery as almost 160 participants from Ambulance Victoria took part in this year's Emergency Services Eureka Stair Climb.

*Photos by David Reinhard*

**A**LS Paramedic from Bayside Rain Histen, who has now climbed the 88 flights of stairs seven times, was instrumental in rallying her colleagues to pull on their gear and take part.

"I put up a little pin-up note on the wall of our hospitals, wrote letters to our colleagues in rural areas, sent some emails, made phone calls, and the word spread that we were looking to put together the highest represented emergency services team for this year's climb," she said.

One email went to the CEO of Ambulance Victoria, and got his attention. Tony Walker trained with Rain in the months leading up to the climb, and he finished alongside his team of paramedics, fitter and healthier than he had been in years.

"Tony came along, he is such a great CEO who really cares about people – both the general community who we look after, but also us – his team of paramedics," Rain said.

"We were so inspired by him and his commitment to his training over the year. It was great for morale and spoke volumes of the kind of person, and leader, he is."

Ambulance Victoria also supported the climb by sponsoring each participant's entry fees, and a team singlet to unify the paramedics.

"It was such a great thing for Ambulance Victoria and the paramedics who trained hard and turned up on the day, which had an electric vibe about it," Rain said.

"This event is so much more than just a stair climb. It is about comradery, increased mental and physical health and being a team.

"The stair climb is great for paramedics, you can go at own pace, take your time, and measure your improvement year-on-year."



*Almost 160 Victoria paramedics took part in the 2017 Emergency Services Eureka Stair Climb in Melbourne.*



*Ambulance Victoria paramedics getting ready to climb the world's 15<sup>th</sup> tallest building, Melbourne's Eureka Tower.*



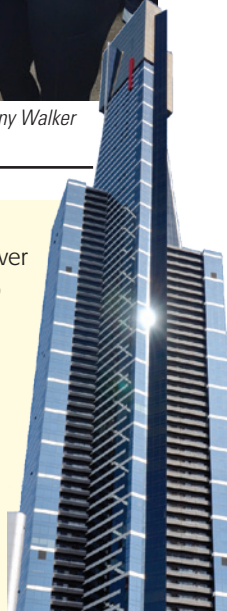
*(L-R) Ambulance Victoria CEO Tony Walker and Paramedic Rain Histen.*

Ambulance Victoria is looking for more paramedics to join the Eureka Stair Climb in 2018, and Rain is hoping to do her 8<sup>th</sup> stair climb as part of a 300-strong paramedic team.

"My goal is to have a national group of paramedics together in uniform doing the climb," she said.

"We do the same job, face the same challenges and it would be so great to see paramedics from all over Australia standing side-by-side at this great event." ●

Paramedics from all over Australia are invited to join the Eureka Stair Climb in 2018. For information about this year's climb, visit the Ambulance Victoria Eureka Stair Climb facebook page or email [rain.histen@ambulance.vic.gov.au](mailto:rain.histen@ambulance.vic.gov.au)







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## **A BREAKTHROUGH IN BURGLAR ALARM TECHNOLOGY DETERS BURGLARS BEFORE THEY ACTUALLY BREAK INTO A HOUSE**

Until now, burglar alarms, and every other security system have had a serious drawback -- before any type of burglar alarm could react, and issue a warning that the house was about to be burgled, the house would have to be broken into first. No home alarms, or any other type of burglar alarm for that matter, was able to give any pre-burglary warning. But now IntruderShield, a new type of radar operated home alarm is available in Australia and New Zealand to keep the house burglar free.

These alarms operate quite differently from all other traditional home alarm systems. The method by which these IntruderShield alarms keep the burglars away is that they simulate the loud bark of a large, angry guard dog. As the burglar approaches the front door he hears what sounds exactly like a large German Shepherd or Rottweiler starting to bark. The closer he moves to the front door, the more frequent and frenetic the barks. No burglar, even if drunk or drugged, would be stupid enough to break into a house with a fierce guard dog ready to attack him the moment he breaks in. The result is that burglars who approach houses with this alarm switched on and set to operate correctly, will leave that house well alone and look for one that is less likely to make the burglary a disaster for the burglar. IntruderShield alarms only cost \$159 with \$10 postage to any address in Australia, a very tiny price to keep a house burglar free!

Burglar alarms sold by IntruderShield operate with high-tech radar technology developed during World War II. The small-box format

of this house alarm means that it can be placed near the front door and hidden by a pot plant, family photo, or even be located in a cupboard. No professional installation is needed -- the alarm works immediately once it is plugged in to a normal Australian power point. The IntruderShield company selling these units also offers a wireless-operated remote control so that the alarm can be switched on and off without actually having to touch the alarm itself. IntruderShield also has many more special-purpose features which you can see on their website ([www.IntruderShield.com.au](http://www.IntruderShield.com.au)). On these home alarms, you find two small knobs on the back. One controls the volume of the bark, while the other controls the sensitivity, enabling this burglar alarm to be set to pick up the approaching intruder to approximately 21 feet -- 7m -- away from the home alarm unit, or alternately not start operating until the person approaching is only 1 or 2 meters away.

These house alarms from IntruderShield are the only ones specially made for Australian and New Zealand 240V conditions, have AU/NZ plugs and are so efficient and robust that there is also a full 12 months replacement warranty on these units if they develop a fault.

For more details look at the [IntruderShield website](http://www.IntruderShield.com.au) -- [www.IntruderShield.com.au](http://www.IntruderShield.com.au)

You will find video and audio demonstrations, full operating instructions and testimonials from happy Australian and New Zealand alarm owners by clicking the panels on the homepage.

# THE IMPORTANCE OF MULTI-AGENCY EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT EXERCISES – WHY HAVE THEM AND HOW TO CONDUCT THEM

AIES National Registrar, and past Secretary, Robert (Bob) Maul continues his well-researched article about the importance of multi-agency management exercises and how to plan them. Part I is available in the Spring edition of NER, available on the AIES website.

Robert **Maul** LFAIES

*NSW Vice President  
Past National Registrar/Secretary*

## PART II

It is not my intention to articulate in much detail what information is to be contained in previous from Part I of this article which relate to Exercise Instructions. This is because each exercise will be very different in terms of the Emergency Management Plan being exercised, the level of involvement of the various agencies having counter disaster or supporting roles, the locale of the exercise and the number of participants or material resources being utilised for the exercise.

However, to assist in the framing and writing of exercise instructions and as an aide memoire, I am providing below a synopsis of what ought to be included in the exercise instructions under the various headings described above.

The information is taken from one of a series of actual exercises I wrote many years ago in conjunction with other emergency services and supporting bodies. This exercise was a marine and land-based activity named 'Sailfish'.

The examples I have chosen are in no way meant to be totally prescriptive but may be useful for those who may have the task of organising and conducting an all-agency emergency management exercise.

The exercise for purposes of illustration was one conducted in the Sydney Inner Metropolitan Emergency Management District. I have provided text for a number of sub-sections of the Sailfish Exercise Instructions.

### 1. PREAMBLE (example text)

This annual field exercise is designed to exercise elements of various emergency services, participating and supporting agencies which have roles under the Port of Sydney Marine Disaster Plan. It is based on a land-based and marine emergency along the Port of Sydney foreshores.

### 2. AIM OF EXERCISE (example text)

To test the Port of Sydney Marine Disaster Plan (MARDAP) and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) of responding organisations.

### 3. OBJECTIVES OF THE EXERCISE (example text)

- To test the MARDAP Plan to ensure the plan is workable and effective, and that team/group and inter-organisational training is appropriate and effective in accordance with the provisions of the plan.
- To test emergency services and participating organisations' SOPs, which includes the ability of involved agencies to effectively respond resources to a major marine and land-based incident, as well as the setting up and operation of the Port of Sydney Emergency Operations Centre.
- To test the ability of the Local Emergency Operations Controller to control and co-ordinate a marine incident/land-based emergency in the Port of Sydney from the Local Emergency Management Operations Centre.

### 4. EXERCISE NARRATIVE

Attached as Appendix 'A'

### 5. TIMINGS (example text)

The exercise is timed to commence at XX:XX hrs and conclude at XX:XX hrs. All exercise activities are to be concluded by XX:XX hrs. Exercise personnel, umpires, directing staff, stage management staff and observers will need to arrive at the exercise marshalling area before XX:XX hrs. Exercise personnel, directing staff, umpires and stage management staff will need to arrive at the exercise marshalling area no later than XX:XX hrs for briefing, instructional and exercise staging purpose.

### 6. WEATHER CONDITIONS

Under this heading should be information as to whether the exercise will be held or not held in inclement weather, as well as other information relating to the wearing of weather gear. Additionally, advice should be included that in the event the exercise is cancelled, including the date on which the postponed activity is to be held.

### 7. LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

Included in this section should be a list of all the organisations participating in the exercise, the directing staff, umpires and safety officers, casualty simulation team, volunteer casualties and observers.





## 8. ASSESSMENT/CONTROL/UMPIRES (example text)

Umpires are to be nominated by each service and agency participating, and are to report on the performance of their agencies at the end of the exercise. Directing staff/umpires are to be provided with appropriate identification (vests/tabards) on the day of the exercise. The identification is to be worn at all times during the exercise.

A list should be included which details the names of the directing staff and umpires and their respective appointments. For example, Exercise Director 'Supt Joe Blow', Police Service; Chief Umpire Chief Supt 'John Doe', Metropolitan Fire Brigade.



## 9. DIRECTING STAFF AND UMPIRE INSTRUCTIONS

Issued separately; see Annex B attached.

## 10. LOCAL, REGIONAL, STATE EMERGENCY OPERATIONS CENTRE (example text)

The ... Emergency Operations Centre will be set up under the direction of the ... Emergency Operations Controller.

The ... EOC is located at ... (telephone no ... )"

Staff at the .....EOC will be required to call out Liaison Officers, maintain operations logs and prepare and transmit SITREPS, display operational information on display boards and maps, arrange for external support as appropriate.

## 11. WELFARE (example text)

The Welfare Disaster Services will provide appropriate counselling and other welfare services as applicable for victims of the emergency at the locations where the simulated casualties are placed.

## 12. TRANSPORTATION ARRANGEMENTS

This section of the instructions should mention that participating agencies need to provide resources to transport their staff to the appointed marshalling areas which may include vehicles and boats and back to the debriefing area at the end of the exercise.

## 13. IDENTIFICATION (example text)

All participants are required to wear exercise identification.

Type of Identification to be worn will be as follows:

- **Directing Staff** – vests and tabards
- **Casualties** –red ribbon tied to sleeve above left elbow
- **Observers** - yellow ribbon tied to sleeve above left elbow
- **Emergency services and participating agencies – normal uniform/protective dress with service identification**

## 14. SAFETY (example text)

Safety of exercise participants is of prime importance at the marshalling areas, embarkation and disembarkation points, aboard vessels and at other exercise locations. All instructions given by the directing staff/umpires concerning safety are to be obeyed. Persons failing comply will not be permitted to continue participating in the exercise.

The chief umpire will be responsible for all aspects of safety during the conduct of the exercise. The exercise umpires for site safety/environment will be responsible for safety and environmental aspects on property administered by the owners of the property and harbour authorities. Any breaches of safety are to be immediately reported to the chief umpire and site safety umpires, and all umpires are to check any practice they consider to be unsafe during the placement and handling of casualties. In all circumstances umpires will ensure that the safety and comfort of casualties are maintained and personnel are not exposed for any length of time to inclement conditions.

The exercise director or chief umpire may terminate the exercise for any safety reasons. The chief umpire at the end of the exercise will conduct a debriefing session of all umpires concerning safety and other aspects.

## 15-23. ROLES OF EMERGENCY SERVICES AND PARTICIPATING AUTHORITIES' ROLES/RESPONSIBILITIES

These paragraphs of the exercise instructions will, in synoptic form, detail the roles/function and responsibilities of the emergency services and participating/supporting agencies will perform during the conduct of the exercise. This will include logistical support. Ensure that they are the same as those contained in the emergency management plan being tested.

## 24. MEDIA

This section is to include organisations which will provide the necessary media resources which will operate during the conduct of the exercise. In most circumstances this resource will need to be provided by the emergency service entity which has overall control operations in the actual emergency being tested.

## 25. EXERCISE MESSAGES

(example text)

All exercise messages, either verbal or written, will begin with the words 'Exercise Sailfish Message'. Authentic messages are to be given priority in transmission on all exercise

*continued on page 10*

*continued from page 9*

communication links and will be preceded by the proword 'authentic' three times.

## 26. COMMUNICATIONS

Information to be provided under this heading needs to include such matters as what radio channels will be utilised for exercise purposes. Additionally, a separate radio network, (with an allocated channel), needs to be established for the exercise director, directing staff and umpires and appropriate mobile radios made available for this purpose by the exercise communications officer. It is also necessary to prepare a communications network diagram showing calls signs. Moreover, the requirement to test the radio systems before the commencement of the exercise needs also to be covered in this section of the instructions.

## 27. REAL CASUALTIES (example text)

Details of any real casualties, including nature of injuries, are to be passed on to the chief umpire as a matter of urgency. The proword 'authentic' is to be used at the beginning and end of all messages notifying real casualties.

On receipt of an 'authentic' message the exercise director may call the exercise to a halt until the situation has been assessed. The exercise director will determine, in consultation with the chief umpire, whether the exercise should be continued, suspended or cancelled. An ambulance is to be on standby in case required.

## 28. CASUALTY SIMULATION/ MOULAGE (example text)

Personnel from the emergency services organisations or volunteers from participating agencies will be 'made-up' by the moulage team. Casualties will be simulated suffering fractures, spine, eye and head and crush injuries. They will be placed at location as determined by the site safety umpire. Each casualty is to be identified by a label signifying the injury involved.

It is essential that all personnel/ observers taking part in the exercise are registered at the commencement of the exercise and deregistered following the conclusion of the exercise. A roll

call should take place. Emphasis has to be placed on the simulated casualties to ensure they are accounted for, and that they are not left out in the open when the exercise has been concluded. Casualties should wear old clothes that can be ripped, burned and stained with simulated blood, and bring along a change of clothing.

## 29. DRESS (example text)

Participants should bring along some warm clothing, and if necessary, appropriate wet weather gear in case of inclement weather on the day. Responding agency personnel should wear normal dress and protective clothing as required.

## 30. PARKING (example text)

Parking for Exercise Directing Staff, participants and observers is available at [insert location].

Parked vehicles are not to cause traffic congestion.

## 31. SITE SETUP/EXERCISE STAGING (example text)

Exercise Directing Staff/Umpires and other staff supporting the forgoing appointees will assist the Exercise Co-ordinator in casualty placement, site setup and staging of the exercise, and will provide props and other exercise staging equipment as required.

## 32. ENVIRONMENT (sample text)

All participants and observers will ensure they DO NOT damage property or environment whilst at the exercise sites. The areas utilised are to be kept clean and tidy and any foreign objects or litter brought into the exercise sites are either to be taken off the site or properly disposed of in receptacles provided by the council and water authorities.

## 33. HOSPITALITY (sample text)

A light lunch and non-alcoholic beverages will be provided to authorised exercise participants and observers only at [insert location] after the exercise. The [insert responsible personnel] will arrange this activity on behalf of the Exercise Co-ordinator. Hospitality arrangement will be provided by means of a lunch ticket to be given to the catering staff at the site. The Exercise Co-ordinator will arrange for the distribution

of meal tickets. Members of the Exercise Working Party are to inform the Exercise Co-ordinator of the number of authorised personnel and observers who will be attending the activity and he will arrange for tickets to be issued to the Working Party prior to the exercise.

## 34. OBSERVERS (sample text)

Observers are welcome. However, due to limited space at the exercise areas each participating authority will be limited to two observers. Additional observers will be at the discretion of the Exercise Co-ordinator. Observers will be identified by a yellow ribbon tied on the left arm above the elbow and they are to display their current identification insignia at all times. The names of the observers are to be advised to the Exercise Co-ordinator.

## 35. PRELIMINARY AND POST EXERCISE BRIEFINGS (sample text)

The Exercise Working Party and nominated exercise commanders/ umpires are to meet on [insert date] at [insert time] for a preliminary briefing to discuss staging issues and other procedural matters.

The Exercise post briefing for directing staff, umpires, observers, cas-sim team and other exercise commanders is to be held at [insert time] on [insert date].

## 36. DEBRIEFINGS (sample text)

A debrief for directing staff, umpires and observers will take place at the designated marshalling area after lunch.

A full exercise debrief will be held for all emergency management agencies, emergency management committee, commanders of services who participated in the exercise, chief and other umpires, working party and supporting agencies, and will be held a fortnight after the exercise at [insert time] on [insert date] at the State Emergency Management Head Office at [insert location].

## 37. ENQUIRIES (sample text)

Any enquiries relating to the exercise should be referred to the Exercise Co-ordinator [insert name] on [insert number].

## 38. SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

Include this information as an attached Annex.





### 39. DIRECTING STAFF COMMUNICATIONS NETWORK

Include this information as an attached Annex.

### 40. UMPIRE INSTRUCTIONS

Include this information as an attached Annex.

### 41. TIMETABLE

Include this information as an attached Annex.

### 42. MAP OF EXERCISE SITES

Include this information as an attached Annex.

### 43. EXERCISE MARSHALLING AREA AND COMFORT ARRANGEMENTS

This section of the instructions should give details of the marshalling area for the exercise and location of toilets.

### 44. MEDIA ARRANGEMENTS

(sample text)

The news media will be advised of the date, time and location of the activity.

Access to the impact sites of the day of the exercise is strictly limited because of safety considerations and other environmental aspects. The news media involvement on this occasion is to be controlled/co-ordinated by the Police Media Unit.

### ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTATION AND INSTRUCTIONS

The inclusion of the above recommended text in the exercise instructions may seem to be a very laborious task.

Many are, therefore, not anxious to conduct this type of activity, nor be willing to afford the time to write the instructions for a multi-agency emergency management exercise.

However, if an activity such as this is to be meaningful, instructional and professionally run by those responsible for responding to an actual emergency management incident or disaster, it is essential that all these considerations be included in the text of the exercise instructions.

To do otherwise may not achieve the aim or the objectives set for the exercise, and thereby result in a gross waste of time, effort, and funds for all those involved in conducting the exercise, as well as the participating and emergency services agencies.

After the Exercise Working Party and the sub group have completed the instructions, there are further Annexures to the instructions to be drafted. Some mention has already been made of these Annexures but it is useful to again re-iterate what content they should contain. ●

This special feature will be continued in the Autumn edition of *National Emergency Response*, which will include more about information to go in sections marked with 'include information in Annex'.

# Living with PTSD? We Can Help

Moving Beyond Trauma is a 5-day residential program at the Quest for Life Centre in Bundanoon, NSW designed to assist first responders with PTSD reclaim their lives.

The program draws on an understanding of trauma, its effect on the brain and teaches practical skills and tools which bring relief to the troubled body, mind and spirit.

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# PORT MACQUARIE SES TRIUMPHS IN NATIONAL DISASTER RESCUE COMPETITION

“I am exceptionally proud of the Port Macquarie team and the entire Port Macquarie SES Unit – we could not have achieved the result without the support of the entire unit.”

**Michael Ward**

*Local Controller*

**W**ith over 50 years' experience of saving lives and protecting the community the NSW SES Port Macquarie team showed they had all the right skills to defeat rescue crews from around Australia to score a first place victory at the prestigious National Disaster Rescue Competition over the weekend.

The NSW Port Macquarie team consisted of Michael Ward (Team Leader), Scott Witchard (Deputy Team Leader), Michael Brumby (Medic), Mark Anderson, Sereena Ward, and Alfred Portenschlager.

There was a great sense of camaraderie and respect amongst the teams, but also a sense of fierce competition.

Competitors were faced with eight realistic rescue scenarios designed to test their skills in areas such as navigation, casualty handling, steep slope recovery, vehicle recovery, sandbagging, protecting and preserving a scene, and storm damage. The challenge was based over two days with a focus on 'Back to Basics' skills, equipment, and rescue techniques.

The challenge was attended by teams from every State and Territory throughout Australia. The competition was hosted by Tasmania SES at Fort Direction (about 40 minutes drive South of Hobart) on the picturesque shores of the Derwent River. Teams were given one hour to complete each challenge and were judged on leadership, safety, first aid, tool use, rescue techniques, and overall teamwork.

Our team felt honoured to have won NSW state selection at Bathurst a month ago, and were looking





forward representing NSW at the National competition. The team rose to the challenge presented at each scenario and put our regular unit training to the test in sometimes tense, time-critical, and physically demanding activities. Securing first place in the competition after completion of the final challenge was the icing on the cake.

The best part of the competition, aside from the friendly rivalry between teams, was being able to use a broad

range of skills we use in regular training and apply these in the challenges presented. It was really rewarding to be able to pull all the various elements from our training together to meet the brief of each challenge and get the tasks completed within the allotted one hour time limit. Successfully completing each scenario before time ran out gave the team a real boost.

The team was challenged by the physicality of Saturday afternoon's scenarios starting with a vehicle

recovery requiring the team to manually winch a deeply bogged vehicle and boat trailer from off a beach onto a 4WD track. This was shortly followed by a race to complete a sandbag wall/bund to contain a 'toxic' spill from reaching a nest of penguin(?) eggs. The team literally dug deep to fill a mountain of sandbags and erect a sandbag wall to required specifications, finishing with only minutes to spare.

The weekend has helped the team bond even closer together, building a sense of trust and reliance on each other. Networking with the other teams was a great opportunity to share ideas and experiences from both the competition and the practices/equipment used in the other States and Territories. While the theme was 'back to basics', it certainly gave us some ideas that we can use to implement similar training scenarios back at our Port Macquarie unit to further develop the skills and expertise of our local volunteers enabling us to continue to save lives, and protect our communities. ●

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# FACTORS IMPEDING RESILIENCE RESEARCH WITH AUSTRALIAN FIRST RESPONDERS: WHAT IS KEEPING US FROM THE CUTTING EDGE?

Australians are proud to be on the cutting edge in both research and industry. Many of our first responders (police, firefighters and paramedics) work on programs of continuous improvement and development but can have a problem of 'reinventing the wheel', both around Australia and internationally.

Dr Petra **Skeffington**

*Senior Lecturer/Clinical Psychologist, School of Health Professions  
Murdoch University*

*This paper was presented at the Australian and New Zealand Disaster and Emergency Management Conference on the Gold Coast, 2017.*

**O**ur first responder agencies excel at 'doing'; time and effort are consumed in applications of innovation and trying new things, with little time left over for documenting these efforts to share them. Conversely, academics can be consumed with sharing knowledge and generating documentation, with arguably less 'doing'.

Relationships between industry and academics should be, and evidence shows, a positive impact of academic research on agency innovation and productivity (Muscio and Vallanti, 2014).

Somehow, we face various barriers that keep our first responder organisations back from the cutting edge or trying ideas that have already been attempted and our academics stuck in the ivory towers of university campuses.

As an academic, I first encountered this issue when writing my PhD. For example, in 2012, the Parliament of Western Australia (via the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee) released a white paper,

titled 'The Toll of Trauma on Western Australian Emergency Staff and Volunteers' (Community Development and Justice Standing Committee, 2012). This white paper clearly summarised research and expert contributions indicating the cumulative impact of trauma, highlighting the importance of caring for the mental health of our first responders, the potential of liability for work-related trauma issues and the need to pursue primary prevention and resilience building programs. As a researcher, who at that time was trying to build collaborations with first responder agencies in Western Australia (WA) for the trial of a PTSD prevention program designed specifically to protect against the cumulative toll of work-related trauma, I was highly encouraged by the release of this white paper. The paper opened with a statement of concern about the effectiveness of the processes used by emergency and first responder agencies to protect staff and volunteers who may be exposed to trauma. At that time no WA

first responder agencies followed the guidelines recommended by national experts, such as the Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health, now Phoenix Australia (ACPMH, 2007). Experts indicated that 10-30 per cent of staff were in danger of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as the result of work-related trauma (Jacobs, 2012).

It was following the release of this paper that first responder agencies withdrew support for the trial of a program designed to prevent post-trauma mental health issues, that was to be provided free of charge. To their credit, other agencies responded with gusto and proactively moved this program of research forward. I reflected on the motivation for some to actively reject research that, to me in my naivety, seemed would only be to their benefit.

## AGENCY FACTORS

The obvious first answer, from an agency point of view, is that our first responder agencies *are* innovating, but







these processes are not transparent and available to outsiders. A brief glance at the program for conferences such as the Australian & New Zealand Disaster and Emergency Management Conference (ANZDMC) is evidence of this.

We already apply thought, effort and innovation across a range of areas, such as resilience, technology, volunteers, risk management, the recovery process and psycho-social implications of disaster management.

First responder organisations have limited time and resources to direct toward innovation, and so choices must be made. It would be ludicrous to direct all efforts toward mental health and end up with under-skilled personnel!

There is a constant struggle to find the time to recruit training to fit in all of the essential skills, as well as the recommended mental health first aid training or resilience programs.

If an agency does decide to add to their basic training, then who designs it? Who runs it? We don't have people floating around with free time to develop and deliver new content.

Additionally, organisations want to direct time and effort toward innovations that are likely to work. Being part of a

new trial is a risk. You risk your time and resources, and the time of your personnel, in a gamble on something that might not work in the way it was intended. A third party may confidently sell a 'resilience' program, where an academic or researcher may be reserved about claiming potential benefits before seeing the data.

### ACADEMIC FACTORS

First responder agencies know how to collaborate and work across their industry, but academics often do not.

Working with academics involves a new set of rules and guidelines, which are not always clearly communicated (Bruneel et al., 2010). Academics may come from a setting in which they are often branded as 'the expert', and need to adjust this mindset when working in a real world setting in which they have no prior experience. Academics can apply advanced knowledge to problems, but we should integrate our expertise with hands-on experience of agency representatives.

A traditional academic interpretation of value and research outputs is that the academic will get some papers with their name on it and possibly

a promotion. This does not translate into value or benefit to a partner agency or the community! Academics looking for opportunities to collaborate may be experts in some areas but are novices in many other ways, and so flexibility, communication and good rapport is needed.

### WHY IS COLLABORATION IMPORTANT?

Universities function as producers and transmitters of knowledge. We have, sitting in our universities across Australia and around the world, a wealth of topic experts who are up-to-date and on the cutting edge in their field.

Where our first responder agencies have no time to read, design, interpret and develop, academics can fill the gap. Successful collaborations between industry and academia show demonstrated increases in productivity and innovation (Muscio and Vallanti, 2014).

Research collaborations should be more than something that looks good on an academic CV; they should create economic, social and environment value for the research partners.

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Academics often need to work on a timeline. In some cases this creates pressure. However, it also prevents projects from being pushed back, and then pushed back again, due to lack of time and resources within an agency. It provides an external motivator for moving toward a set goal.

The government has also identified the benefits of industry collaboration for research, with a big drive for collaborative projects and the first ARC Linkage grants (up to \$300,000 per year, for three to five years) announced in January 2017. This government initiative is a big incentive for us to identify and move past barriers to collaboration, to ease the financial burden of large projects for exciting industry innovation.

### THE WAY FORWARD: A CASE EXAMPLE

The key to forming successful research collaboration is communication. The value of the research and benefits to the organisation must be clear. Most often, problems arise due to differences in organisational culture, unclear or

inappropriate incentives and poor project management.

The first thing to look for in a potential collaborator is a good match for goals, valued outcomes and clear role definition. Trust between partners can diminish all other barriers to success (Muscio and Vallanti, 2014).

When I initially attempted forming collaborations for my PhD research, I fell into some traps.

1. I assumed that what was most important to me would also be most important to collaborators.
2. I assumed that it was best to avoid 'death by meetings' and that phone calls or even emails would be sufficient for communication and the development of trusting relationships.
3. I thought the project had inherent value, which would be apparent to the organisations I approached.

Apparently, my plan needed some adjustment. After a year-long false start with my flawed approach, I reworked the research proposal, into a brief research prospectus, only a couple of pages long. This document outlined the basics of the project, what I needed my collaborator to provide and what

I would provide in return. It described roles and responsibilities, time frames, and the value of the project. I speculated that busy first responders do not have a chance to read a lengthy document, dense with citations and technical jargon. They just needed to know what I was doing, when I wanted to do it, how it would get done and what they would get out of it.

I made it clear that I expected to do the bulk of the work, that all of my time in consultation, development and delivery of my intervention was to be free-of-charge, and that the organisation would continue to have access to materials we developed after the project had finished. There were offers to train agency staff to deliver my intervention, also at no cost to the organisation. This agreement was later developed into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), outlining tasks, roles, timelines, commitments and benefits.

My currency, as an academic, was to have a place to trial my program in the 'real world', to collect data and to be able to share my results with both academic and first responder communities. The currency for the agency, as I understand it, was free labour in the





development of a customised program, ongoing access to the program and (potentially) improved coping and wellbeing for personnel.

This approach was well received, and led to phone calls, coffee and face-to-face meetings with the manager of the Wellness Branch at the WA Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES), allowing me to build trust and relationships. The Wellness Branch was critical to moving this project forward. They saw value in the program, contributed a proactive attitude and ensured the right authorisations and approvals were acquired. I was blind to organisational factors and did not know the key people to include or seek approval from. Without support from the Wellness Branch, I could never have navigated these challenges.

During our discussions, I did not pretend to know about the agency and the practical elements of working as a first responder. I left gaps in my program for customisation through collaboration and asked for feedback or relevant examples. I explained that I knew a lot about Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), mental health and resilience, but I had never worked in fire and emergency and needed help to fill the gaps in my knowledge.

I presented DFES with a 'program shell'. It had all the nuts and bolts that were psychologically important to the program but needed to be shaped to fit the available time, the audience and the organisation. We tailored examples to illustrate experiences that recruits would

face, and language use was adjusted to match with standard terminology and phrasing.

The draft program went back and forth to academic experts, clinical experts and on-the-ground experts, to ensure it all gelled.

We trialled the program within the DFES recruit school and sought feedback. Members of the Wellness Branch, District Officers and instructors from the recruit school sat in on the training sessions, providing comments about what may be working well and what could be improved. Data was collected to back up these observations and comments. More information about the program we developed (Mental Agility and Psychological Strength [MAPS] program), including preliminary evaluation data, is freely available online (Skeffington et al., 2016).

Importantly, the work didn't end when my PhD ended. I did not disappear into the distance with my degree and some stories about my work with firefighters. I continued to follow up with recruits who had been a part of the program. I handed over all of the custom-built materials and trained a member of the Wellness Branch to deliver the program, with my ongoing support. Where workloads meant that in-house staff were not available, I came back and gave the program myself.

Five years on, we are still not finished! We have had conversations about additional reviews of the program, opportunities for improvement and change. We are planning a five-year follow-up with the first recruits, to see

if this addition to their basic training has made a difference. This ongoing relationship is driven by the working relationship we have formed, as well as the enthusiasm for innovation within the Wellness Branch (special credit goes to their manager).

## CONCLUSIONS

The barriers to successful collaboration between academics and industry can derail projects before they have even started; however, the incentives to get it right are growing. The first step towards improving our capacity to collaborate is an acknowledgement of the difficulty and frank conversations around how to make it work. It could be the first step toward world-class innovation for Australian first responders. ●

## CRITICAL FACTORS

1. Relationship between academics and industry collaborators
2. Clearly defined goals, roles, key tasks and outcomes
3. Value – to the academic and the agency
4. Realistic timelines
5. MOU – devise a written agreement covering all of the above

To find out more, please email Dr Skeffington at [p.skeffington@ Murdoch.edu.au](mailto:p.skeffington@ Murdoch.edu.au)

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# FROM VOLUNTEER TO CAREER

Erika Lind

*Board Member Women and Firefighting Australasia  
District Burn Controller, Department of Environment, Land, Water and  
Planning (DELWP)*



It had been 18 months since I was deployed to Tasmania, camping out on the Mole Creek footy oval while working on forest fires in the state's northern region. This time the trip was to Launceston to speak about Women in Emergency Services at the Tasmanian Fire Service's Annual State Conference. This is what I shared:

I know my title page says 'Women in Emergency Services' but the reality is I cannot speak for all women and certainly would not want to. What I want to share with you today is my journey from volunteer to career, what I have learnt along the way and what I see as important things we can do to continue to improve our services particularly in our diversity so we can be a strong, adaptive sector going forward.

A few of my anecdotes go beyond the fire ground as I think it is important to reflect on the fact that our role in the community goes well beyond the incident scene. We all have the privilege to be respected as fire and emergency personnel and I believe we should not take that for granted. The opportunity we have, to not only improve the lives of the people we respond to, but also improve the lives of our colleagues, paid and volunteer, via mentoring and valuing the talent that everyone brings with them when they join our agencies.

For me I have grown up in and around the fire service and it has had a significant role in shaping the person I am today. I decided to join the Country Fire Authority as a volunteer like my dad. In 1999 I joined up as an 11-year old junior volunteer and never looked back; completing my training to become a senior firefighter at the age of 16. By this time, I was itching to be out on the fire line.

Over the years I learnt about fire in the local landscape and my captain would take the time to point out the fire behaviour and how it linked into the conditions on the day. A memory that stays with me was from one of our big campaign fires in Victoria where I first met forest fire sector commanders from another agency. They made an impression on me because of their presence; they had such a calm demeanour and a respect for all firefighters irrespective of rank. It was during the third year of my science degree that these individuals returned to my mind as I began to consider making my passion for fire management into my career and aspire to one day have enough experience to take on such a role myself.

Just after the findings of the Royal Commission into Black Saturday fires were released I joined the fire management ranks with the Victorian State Government as a keen Graduate Recruit. I joined as the agencies started one of the biggest reforms the Victorian emergency management sector had seen in more than 30 years. Two weeks after my last university exam I left Melbourne and started my first of three eight-month work rotations. Moving back out to a small rural town was a bit of a shock to the system so I decided to transfer to the local volunteer brigade as well. This became my first of three parallel volunteering rotations, joining each of the local brigades as I moved with my job.

I finished back in my home town as somewhat of an adult! Three years at university and two years touring the state with two agencies had left quite the impression and plenty to think about. A forest fire management officer role came up at the end of this program and, despite the remote location, I was keen to apply because I knew I wanted good mentors and this team had been through some significant fire campaigns. I put my hat in the ring and got the job on one condition; in the interview I had bolstered enough confidence to ensure that if I took the job my fire role in operations would continue – they agreed. To get this job I drew heavily on the life experiences from all the CFA and departmental people I'd worked with over the previous years. Back then and certainly now I am a sum of their time, effort and support.

Before I go on to lessons I have learnt I feel I should share what my role entails. One element is the planning for future fire, interpreting analysis, field reces and mapping. I am part of a team that develops a three-year rolling bank of burns that have a variety of risk and environmental objectives. These burns stretch from the coastal fringe to the Southern Alps and cover approximately 30,000ha per year. We have a small spring burning program that rolls into summer suppression. Deployments have taken me across the country, including to Tasmania last year, Western Australia and New South Wales.







My current role is on the fire ground as an Operations Officer coordinating plant, aircraft and crews, which is such an awesome challenge that I love.

As the high country cools slightly a high intensity coupe burning program kicks off as part of the Government's silviculture program. This then transitions into ecological and risk reduction burns, an intricate blend of science and a practical trade in one operation; a very challenging space to work in. Engaging with community goes all year around because as we know fire affects everyone. Two events you may be interested in are the following:

- Burn walk-throughs where we take the community for a walk through the site before and after the burn to see what we have done and how we have met our objectives. This aims to build trust and knowledge between locals and agency staff.
- Pre-season multi-agency briefing whereby we get all emergency services and key community people together at a local venue to talk about the upcoming summer and most importantly build networks and trust well before a fire breaks out.

I really enjoy what I do but after staying still for a few years I needed a new adventure and there are plenty in our sector, you've just got to be creative and find them. This is what I did. I discovered the benefits of our sector being international. In 2015 my local Rotary district sponsored four young professionals from Gippsland to travel to Turkey as part of a vocational and cultural exchange in line with the centenary of the Gallipoli landing. I did not really consider myself a professional; what drew me to this opportunity was the excitement of learning about fire management and fire fighting in a different country. Equally I wanted to understand a culture and community

I thought I had no connection to. We spent seven weeks traveling across Turkey staying with the most hospitable host families. I won't go into all that I learnt from them as that would be a speech in itself but to say that their country is more modern than you may think and we have much more in common than we do differences. They are such generous people and provided me with some unbelievable experiences. Vocationally there were two standout experiences:

### MINISTRY OF FORESTRY

I was introduced to a government official from the Ministry of Forestry via my Rotarian translator. We chatted away over chai about our respective services in a style that is best described like speaking on a radio with limited reception, succinct questions and statements to make it easier for the translator. This was hard as I was bursting with questions but held back for fear of turning it into an interrogation. It did get to a point where the gentlemen kindly suggested that once I had finished my chai we could go in for the briefing. My reaction was 'briefing'? What briefing? I thought this was the extent of the visit. He took me to the Ministry of Forestry's national operations room where I had the great honour of meeting the Chief Fire Officer for Turkey. My mind was struggling to comprehend what was going on, I felt much too subordinate to be in their presence and given their time. The Chief had one of his advisors translate his presentation as he spoke. What struck me most about this unbelievable situation was the shared passion myself as a frontline planner and he as a Chief both apparently had for our jobs in fire management. To share the same passion for fire management despite not having the

same words to describe it made me realise we are part of a much bigger knowledge hub and perhaps it was a profession after all.

### GAZIANTEP INDUSTRIAL FIRE BRIGADE

The second visit that stood out was to a fire station in the east of Turkey. Only one hour from the Syrian border I visited the Gaziantep industrial fire brigade. This brigade was sponsored by the industrial zone companies to bolster response in addition to the standard municipal fire service. I obviously had endless questions again and we had a great time going over all their equipment including hooking up a portable induction system they had designed to supply to factories to help companies with early fire intervention. At lunchtime they invited me to eat with their crew. We shared blended English, Turkish and sign language to be able to have a laugh. These men certainly made me feel very welcome. Heading back into the Chief's office the bell went; he turned to me and asked via my Rotarian translator, who happened to be a lawyer, would I like to come along. It took two seconds to answer – one to think my travel insurance probably does not cover this, and two to say – yes! It is a strangely familiar feeling to be in an appliance with the radio chattering in the same pattern as back home except I had no idea what the job was or where we were going as it was in Turkish. The incident was only a small compressor fire but what struck me was their professionalism and pride they had in the work they did.

My first take-home advice is look at how you can expand experiences personally. I have found by using fire

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as the common ground I have been able to learn so much more than tricks of the trade.

When I returned from Turkey I had developed enough self-belief to really step up, I wanted to sustain a large network of professional peers, especially working from such a remote location. Google helped me a bit as I found Women and Firefighting Australasia (WAFA). This association aims to 'Promote equity across the sector to empower all women to embrace their strengths.' I took a gamble and turned up at their Annual General Meeting. Here I found a great group of super passionate individuals that I felt I could learn so much from. Stepping on to the Board of WAFA was not driven by a feeling of adversity, as you have probably picked up from my volunteer to career journey. Deep down I just wanted see more women have the same opportunities I had. It was not until I took on this role with WAFA that I started to have conversations about inclusion and diversity, conversations I had avoided in the past because honestly I just wanted to blend in and get the job done. However, people felt they could share their stories of frustration and disheartenment. It made me start to tune into the talent that was drifting away from our organisations. I began to realise there were hurdles and obstacles for some that not all had to clamber over. Blending in was not going to change this.

Stuart Ellis, CEO of AFAC, made these comments during International Women's Day this year and they challenge the identity some hold for their service: He wrote, 'Are we committed to gender diversity? Are we prepared to talk about what can be done to improve gender diversity and inclusion across

fire and emergency services? The more we put this off the more isolated we will become from the communities we serve.'

I believe diversity, whether it be gender, personality, race or thought, brings a bigger toolkit to the table. However, unless we have made the right culture, one that is inclusive of differences, not exclusive, then we will not get this advantage.

To retain and grow diversity there are some things I've learnt in retrospect. I see it in others now, the act of covering. I think we have all covered our true personality at some point to some extent to blend in. For example, the first day on the job you may dress to blend in, stay with the crowd, perhaps don't advocate for your passion too early in the piece like you go for Collingwood. This is all good for a little while but you would hope that over time you don't need to worry about this, just be yourself and focus on the job at hand. I reflect on all the things I thought as I started work. Don't rock the boat, just blend in, dress down, I want people to see I'm practical not girly, once I'm in with the field guys that's when I know I'll get respect on the fire line, don't stuff up you'll lose all that credibility and be back to square one with no operational opportunity. I have no evidence to say these are all gendered thoughts but these are all the pressures running around in someone's head when they feel like they don't fit in but desperately want to be accepted to do the job. These were all fears of being excluded – not the result of an inclusive culture.

My second take-home, how do we fast track this covering behaviour so it does not impede our colleagues' professional development?

What got me through this insecurity were my champions. I'm here now still in the industry doing what I love

because there were people that put me on courses despite my reservations and self-doubt, pushed me forward based on my abilities not my years' service, pointed out my strengths rather than the weaknesses I was already fixated on. They told me, and even last week continue to tell me, to back myself. These people saw what I could not see or did not believe. After one big job I found myself mulling on a tactical decision I'd made during rolling asset protect with regards to what assets to save and what were lost. We'd had the after-action review and I didn't think it was worth talking about these reflections. Concurrently there was a lot of negative local press on the overall fire which kept my feelings front of mind. It felt stupid that something nowhere near as traumatic as other events I'd faced bothered me so much. I didn't want to be seen as weak and feared it would reflect on being chosen as a leader again but at the same time the thought that maybe I'm not tough enough sat in the background. Emotion won over and I broke down one day in a meeting. I caved and went to my boss the next day; I was disappointed in myself not being able to handle this. I offloaded my frustrations of not getting past this one fire. Rather than seeing this as a weakness my boss shared how he'd managed his stresses and how others had rationalised theirs. He also helped me transparently pulling apart the days' events and weighing up the overall impact of the decision in a rational manner. The release and relief was immediate. It was so important to me that I knew someone still had faith in what I did.

Another element that has helped me move forward in the sector is seeing people like myself working in fire. Sometimes we get so caught up



in the doing we can forget about the impact we can have on those around us. This came full circle for me last year when a grade 3 and 4 class came to our work centre. We had been talking about fire in the high country and I was losing their attention so I decided to show them some hand tools and personal protective clothing. I pulled on my fire coat and helmet and continued with the rest of my presentation, not thinking anything more than well at least they're listening again. I had not truly appreciated the day from their perspective until I was approached by one of the grade three's grandmothers. She retold the exciting news her granddaughter had told her when she got home from school that day. With delight and excitement she'd learnt that girls can be firefighters too! Not once had I explicitly said that but this is what she had taken home from the day. To see the impact of such a simple action was my take-home; this was one of the best days on the job so far.

There is work happening across the country to improve diversity and inclusion which is pretty exciting. There is the Male Champions of Change initiative, various recruitment strategies, Diversity Action Plans, and informal and formal networks like WAFA to discuss challenges and connect the isolated.

### OUR ROLE AS LEADERS, FORMAL AND INFORMAL, AT ALL LEVELS, IS TO:

- Ensure our personnel do not feel they need to cover up who they are when they wear our badges
- Try and put ourselves in someone else's shoes more often – the more diverse the better
- Share stories, not so much war stories, but lessons learnt
- Provide all our new recruits and emerging leaders with a diverse mix of role models and mentors
- Work out how either you or your mentees are going to get out there and see what this sector has to offer.

Saying this though, action needs to be taken locally. I know what it is like to just want to blend in but there comes a time when we need to step up and make a positive change in our services, as scary as that is sometimes. What frustrates me is the gold that doesn't get to shine! I see the brilliance of, particularly young women, coming into the industry. Yet it is not until well after the fact I hear their great ideas, their concerns with aspects of how a job was done or innovative contributions they have not felt empowered to share with the group. I feel there is just a desire to fit in and sometimes a fear to stand out. Unless individuals are feeling empowered to speak up we are missing opportunity to improve and modernise our services. ●

### ABOUT ERIKA LIND

Erika grew up in a family with a long history of volunteer firefighting. She began her service at the age of 11 with her local Country Fire Authority brigade, competing in rural championships. In 2004 she became a senior member of the brigade and has continued to build her skill sets in both bushfire and structural firefighting.

Erika now works in the Fire and Land Division of the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) as a District Burn Planner based in East Gippsland, Victoria.

## TASSIE NEWS

### TASMANIA AIES AGM

**Date:** 24 February 2018

**Venue:** Claremont RSL Bilton Street, Claremont

**Time:** 6.30pm

**Dinner:** 7pm arrival for 7.30pm start  
*Tasmania Awards presentation to follow*

Do you know a member who has made a blooper during service who deserves to be nominated for the Murphy Award? Please send your nomination to [secretary.tas@aies.net.au](mailto:secretary.tas@aies.net.au)

The Tasmanian Board is looking for Board Members, particularly ones with IT skills. 2018 will see the Tasmanian Division AIES celebrate 40 years in May, and we look forward to celebrating this milestone with current and past members.

Merry Christmas and a happy, safe New Year to our members and their families.

**Ron Jones LFAIES**  
Tasmanian President



# POSTCARDS FROM THE UNITED KINGDOM AND SPAIN

Bill Hoyles is back with a new series of adventures from his recent trip to the United Kingdom and Spain. He visited the sites of some of London's latest tragedies such as the terrorist explosion on the London tube at Parsons Green and the remnants of the Grenfell Tower inferno, and witnessed protests over a referendum that could have seen Catalonia become independent from Spain.

**Bill Hoyles, LFAIES**

*SES Canada Bay, NSW*



Landing at London Heathrow at 5.55am on Saturday 16 September 2017, we were waiting in the plane to disembark when a fellow passenger commented on the likely increased security at Terminal 2 as a result of the terrorist explosion that had occurred the previous day on London Tube's District Line on a train approaching Parsons Green station.

Parsons Green is in Fulham and its name is derived from the original village green and the nearby former home of the rectors of Fulham Parish.

The London tabloids carried extensive coverage of the incident and so I decided to take the Tube to the station the following Monday and suss it out.

I travelled in the same type of new commuter train as had been targeted in the attack – described as having a walk-through design with no distinct carriages and therefore increased commuter capacity.

Much of the tabloid discussion had focussed on whether this design had added to the casualty list by allowing the uninhibited movement of blast and flames along the train, or had minimised the serious injury toll by not containing the blast in a confined space.

Another theory canvassed for the absence of any deaths from the peak hour explosion in this packed commuter train was that there had been an incomplete detonation of the 'bucket and fairy lights' IED – a bomb-design that the tabloids identified as being freely available on the Internet.

Arriving at Parsons Green I was struck by how completely unremarkable the station was – just an ordinary above-ground platform in the middle of a largely residential suburban London area just like dozens of others. Speculation in the tabloids was that the bomb had been planned to explode later, underground in Central London, but had detonated prematurely.

I was in England to attend my niece's wedding, and talking to the groom a few days later I realised how close to home this explosion was.

He is a mixed martial arts practitioner but was banned from practicing leading up to the nuptials by my niece who did not want a black-eyed husband to feature in the wedding photos!



His normal sparring partner lives and trains in Parsons Green and he regularly catches that train at that time when a sparring session is organised. There but for the grace of God.

---

**Footnote:** *My return journey to my accommodation in Gillingham, Kent, required me to catch the train from London to Dover Priory. The alleged Parsons Green bomber was arrested at Dover.*



We landed in Barcelona in the week leading up to the referendum that might see the autonomous region of Catalonia vote to separate from Spain. This was a constitutional crisis that had been bubbling for many years, advocated strongly by the Catalan Regional Parliament, but already rejected as unconstitutional by the Spanish High Court and by the national government in Madrid.

Being the capital of Catalonia, Barcelona was abuzz with speculation as to what would happen on referendum day, and support for the referendum was highly visible – with





red and yellow striped Catalan flags, 'Si' banners and independence slogans draped on apartment balcony railings throughout the city.

Police were much in evidence – both the regional Catalan Police Force (Mossos d'Esquadra) and the local Barcelona City Police Force (Guardia Urbana) being widely deployed and especially visible in tourist areas.

It seemed highly likely that the referendum would be supportive of Catalonia becoming independent – but what was the great unknown was the likely reaction of the federal government and its national police corps (Cuerpo Nacional de Policia).

Peaceful street protests were in evidence throughout our stay – with gatherings of Catalonians marching through the streets of Barcelona carrying Catalan flags and independence banners. On the eve of the referendum we went for the obligatory late evening tapas meal, and the sounds of bells ringing, car horns blaring and pots and pans clashing on every street corner as we walked home was quite extraordinary.

We had an early morning train departure from Barcelona to Madrid on 1 October – the actual day of the referendum – otherwise we would no

doubt have been out-and-about on the streets to witness what has been widely condemned as a brutal response to democracy by the national police.

Eight hundred voters injured by national police with batons and rubber bullets, polling station glass doors smashed in, polling boxes forcibly confiscated, and utter chaos on the streets of Barcelona.

Women being pulled down staircases by their hair, elderly residents with blood streaming from head wounds – gripping evening television from the safety of our apartment in Madrid.

However in a remarkable act of solidarity with their fellow Catalonians, both the Catalan regional police and the Barcelona police refused to support the national police in their actions – and were shown on television being hugged by their fellow Catalonians as heroes.

In the following days there were strikes, mass demonstrations, extensive disruption to services and many tourist sites were closed in Barcelona, while in Madrid where we were staying it was business as usual.

## 'Gotta pick a pocket or two, girls'

My first encounter with a pickpocket was in Chatuchak Market in Bangkok some years ago – an attempt to lift a cloth pouch containing my passport and credit cards carried in my jeans pocket – tied to my waist with string so an unsuccessful attempt, but certainly a near miss.

My second encounter involved my daughter's bag being opened, and her passport and purse stolen, from underneath a table that she was seated at in a London pub having a drink with three friends.

However my recent travels in Spain reinforced its reputation as the pickpocket capital of Europe.

It all started in Barcelona on the metro train. We were a group of five, so safety in numbers? As we boarded the train, a very large man jumped the queue and seemed to be quite disruptive, bumping



into people and unintentionally blocking a female member of our group standing behind him from joining the others.

As the next station approached he moved next to, and then leaned against, a small young woman who, probably scared, made no complaint. They exited the train together. I learned afterwards that the small young woman had earlier been jostled by the man and had accidentally fallen against our blocked-in friend.

On exiting the train a few stations later our blocked-in friend discovered her handbag, which she had held in front of her throughout the train journey, had been unzipped and her wallet was missing. Thinking back we were left in no doubt that they were a team – with him as the diversion and her as the pickpocket.

Fast forward a few days to Madrid and our group of five was walking through the gardens next to the palace.

As I ducked under a low hanging tree I felt my shirt being moved – possibly snagged by a tree branch. I turned and noticed three young girls walking close behind me and chatting.

Perhaps I had imagined it? A little later I had reached the top of the stairs out of the gardens when I heard one of our group behind me shout

*continued on page 24*

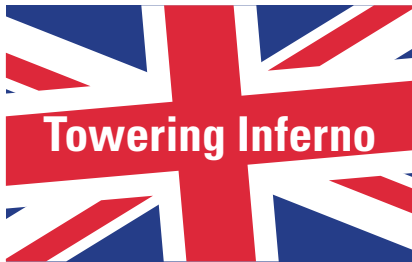
*continued from page 23*

'Excuse me!'. I turned and saw that she was confronting the same three girls – having felt an arm reaching from behind for the handbag she was holding in front of her, and then found her handbag partially unzipped.

Hearing the commotion, and seeing the cause, two tourists at the top of the stairs told me that the same three girls had tried to pickpocket them earlier in the gardens. While the other three in our group verbally confronted the girls as they sat laughing on the garden's wall, I noticed two mounted female police officers nearby.

I went and communicated the situation to them in a mixture of English and gestures – and their immediate response was 'Are they Croatian?'. I had no idea of their nationality but convinced them that the three girls were still in the garden – with which they trotted on horseback to the garden's main entrance.

**Footnote:** *Without any knowledge of the first incident having occurred, my son, a criminal defence lawyer by profession, texted that afternoon to remind me that Barcelona is the pickpocket capital of Europe and to tell everyone to be vigilant. Talk about shutting the stable door after the horses have trotted.*



What comes to mind when you think of tower blocks on fire?

Do you remember that movie with Steve McQueen and Paul Newman or the TV images of 9/11 or perhaps cladding burning on tower blocks in the Middle East?

Personally, I recall the still photographs of people jumping from the Twin Towers on display in the Museum at Ground Zero in New York, and attending a National Conference of the Institution of Fire Engineers Australia in Manly as a volunteer with the NSW SES.

I had never heard of the profession Fire Engineer. However it was the opportunity to listen to the retired



Commissioner of London Fire Brigade speaking at the 2017 AFAC Exhibition that reminded me of London's recent devastating Grenfell Tower fire – and gave rise to the thought that I might visit it while in England.

Researching the topic I discovered that an inquiry into Britain's worst ever tower-block fire was scheduled to commence two days before my arrival in England – presenting an ideal opportunity to attend and learn more. Or so I thought.

As is not uncommon the Grenfell inquiry began with controversy over the selection of the Inquiry Head and the location of the hearings.

Grenfell Tower is a public housing tower block in North Kensington, housing some of the poorest tenants in one of the wealthiest London boroughs. The chairman selected was Sir Martin Moore-Bick and a decision was made to hold hearings in the posh Grand Connaught Rooms in Covent Garden.

The criticism of having a Knight of the Realm investigate a public housing fire was debateable given that Moore-Bick is a former Court of Appeal Judge who was recommended to chair the inquiry by the Lord Chief Justice.

The logic behind the choice of such an opulent venue was not disclosed but was countered to some extent by Moore-Bick's opening statement being live-streamed to a church near the Grenfell Tower site so that locals could watch.

The Terms of Reference for the Inquiry were broad, but Moore-Bick's decision to split the inquiry into two phases and address the 'design and construction issues' first was controversial. His argument was that this first phase of the



investigation might save lives in other similarly constructed buildings.

The second phase would look at how the building became so exposed to the risk of a major fire and was likely to be more complicated.

I travelled by tube to Covent Garden Station and walked a few hundred metres to the Grand Connaught Rooms with a view to sitting in on the inquiry. Poor planning on my part as the inquiry had immediately adjourned after its official launch two days previously until a date to be determined.

Not to have a wasted journey I travelled to Latimer Road Station to have a look at the tower itself. Its surroundings were all too familiar – evoking memories of my visits to the Boston Marathon bombing site and Ground Zero.

There were the moving memorials on railings at the local church and at a nearby apartment complex – messages of hope, missing person photos, children's toys and other moving tributes.

Overshadowing it all was the tower itself – a blackened shell clearly visible from the tube station platform and from surrounding streets. The white cladding was unburnt at some of the lower levels on one side of the building – but the rest was just totally destroyed.

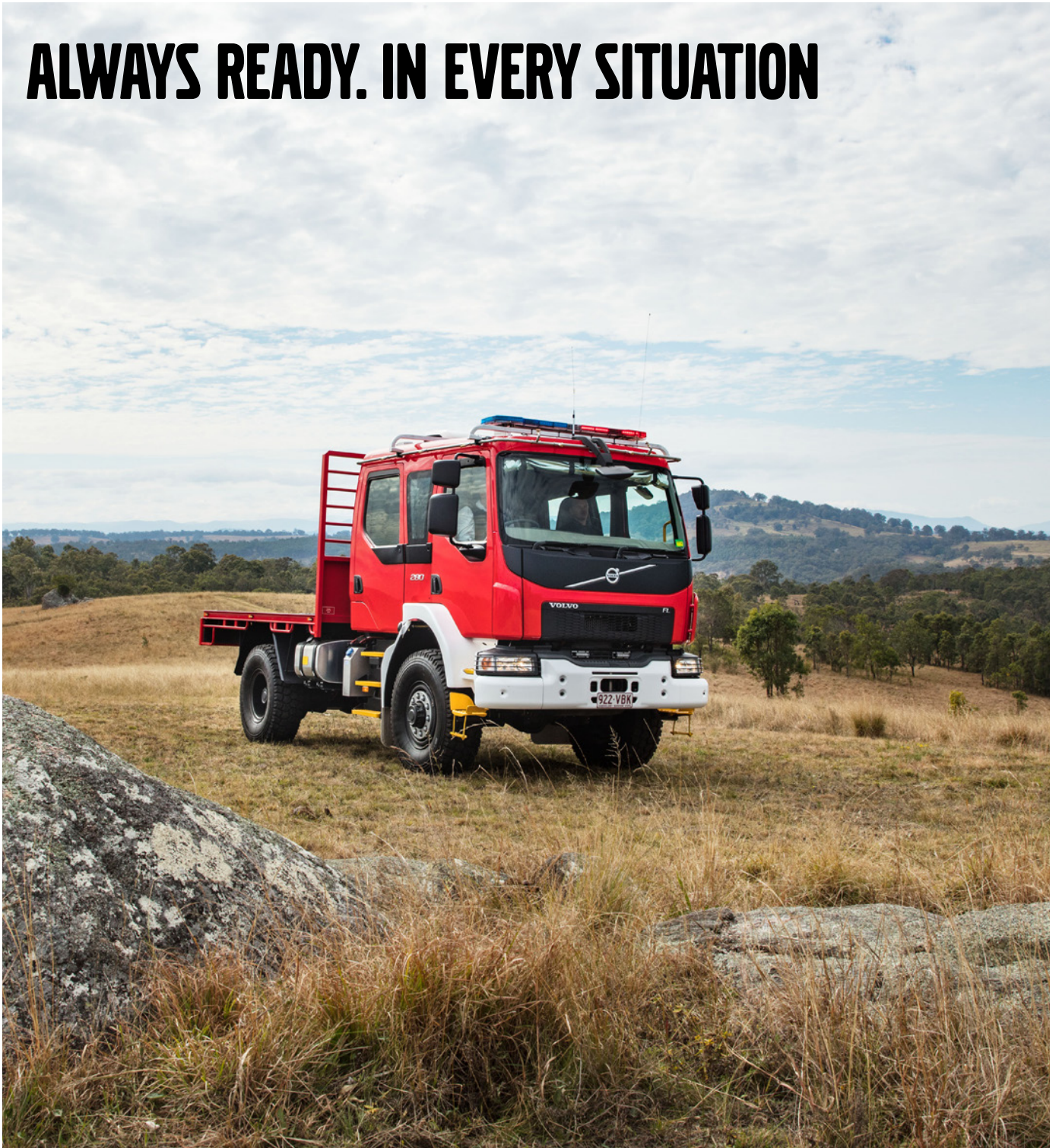
I followed the signs to the Grenfell Assistance Centre established to provide support for survivors but did not enter out of respect for their privacy.

The inquiry will be ongoing and I will follow it with greater interest having seen for myself the human face and aftermath of this tragedy. It remains to be seen what impact it will have on Australian building codes – but it is to be hoped that lessons will be learned. ●





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To provide a professional body for the study of the roles and functions of Emergency Services and Emergency Management Organisations throughout Australia, and the promotion and advancement of professional standards in these and associated services.

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- To raise the status and advance the interests of the profession of emergency management and counter disaster services administration.
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- To provide opportunities for association among members and students to promote and protect their mutual interest.
- To facilitate full interchange of concepts and techniques amongst members.
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