

MessageMatrix



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Planning and building

There has been lots of action in Victoria's bushfire regulation area recently.

Building Amendment (Bushfire Construction) Regulations 2011 have been released, replacing the interim regulations put in place following Black Saturday. The regulations provide for the Minister of Planning to designate Bushfire Prone Areas (BPAs); the Bushfire Attack Level (BAL) construction level is determined by the planning permit or the planning scheme; the construction level in areas designated as bushfire prone must be to a minimum of BAL 12.5.

The Building Commission is holding seminars about the new regulations. See their website for more information www.buildingcommission.com.au

The new Bushfire Prone Area maps were released, with almost 85% of Victoria designated as bushfire prone. The maps can be downloaded from www.dpcd.vic.gov.au

The joint working group tasked to consider the site assessment process for bushfire prone areas has agreed to the use of the site assessment methodology of AS-3959 for all planning and building permit applications. This change will be implemented at a date to be determined (likely to be before the end of the year).

As part of this working group, the Building Commission report that CFA have agreed to deemed-to-satisfy provisions for Flame Zone (FZ) construction where requirements for defendable space cannot be met. Previously the CFA would not consider BAL-FZ as an alternative solution.

There is still no news on the release date or implementation plan for the Bushfire Management Overlay.

Class action

The first class action following the Black Saturday bushfires has resulted in Powercor agreeing to pay \$40 million to victims of the fire in Horsham. This equates to 66% of the total cost of the bushfire damages. This is the first class action to be heard of a number initiated following the fires.



La Nina

2011-12 has officially been declared another La Nina year by the Bureau of Meteorology. This has led to concern about increased fuel loads due to increased plant growth, particularly in grassland areas. There is also concern about the possibility of another season of floods.

Community checklist

La Trobe University researchers Jim McClennan and Glenn Elliot have developed a booklet *Checklist Items for Researchers: Preparations for Bushfires*. The booklet can be downloaded at www.bushfirecrc.com

CFS App

The South Australian CFS have launched a new smartphone application to provide alerts about incidents, information on bushfire warnings and weather and general information about bushfires.

Awards awards awards

Professor Jim McClennan has been recognised with the Bushfire CRC presenting him with a Special Recognition award for his high quality research.

Karen Kissane won the Colin Roderick Award for Australian book of the year for *Worst of Days* about the Black Saturday bushfires.

Mike Taylor, a fire fighter from Mandurang won Bendigo's Innovator of the year for his 'fair air' facemask. His reusable mask is made from alpaca wool,

Racing

A bushfire caught a number of runners in the Kimberley Ultramarathon. Unfortunately runners were not warned of the fire, resulting in four contestants suffering very serious burns when they were trapped in a gorge by the fire.

This year's Solar Challenge, solar car race from Darwin to Adelaide, was halted for a day due to bushfires in the NT. The race was won by team Ashiya from Japan.

Floating fire station

Possibly Australia's first ever floating fire station was opened in Woronora, NSW in October.

Exhilarating moments in professional development

By Catherine Stephenson and Amalie Tibbits

The Bushfire CRC and AFAC annual conference, the Bushfire CRC Science Day, the Bushfire CRC Research Advisory Forum (RAF) and the Victorian National Parks Association (VNPA) Symposium on Fire and Biodiversity in Victoria have sparked much enthusiasm for us over the past couple of months. We thought we would share some of our highlights with you.

Risk Assessment Decision Support Toolbox

This large project led by Bob Cechet at Geoscience Australia aims to develop a risk assessment framework to use as a decision support tool for fire management planning. The project research and outputs will build upon work from the 2003-2010 Bushfire CRC on fire modelling and impact modelling with the aim of producing a product whereby fire scenarios can be simulated and alternative management approaches assessed. Various risk factors such as vegetation type and management, building construction, presence of fire services and human behaviour, will all be included to better understand each components impact on overall risk mitigation.

Extreme fire behaviour and weather

A number of presentations explained how meteorological conditions can induce extreme or unexpected fire behaviour. Nic Gellie gave a fascinating presentation on extreme fire behavior and weather processes during the Black Saturday fires. Of particular interest was his description of convection column development and dissipation repeatedly over a short time scale causing the fire to 'pulse' across the landscape, as seen during the Kilmore fire on Black Saturday. Mika Pearce presented her work on how the vertical and spatial atmospheric structure influences fire behaviour. Her research includes the investigation of two fire case studies (Kangaroo Island wildfire and Rocky River prescribed burn), where in both cases extreme fire behaviour occurred under (what was thought to be) relatively mild conditions.

GIS technology and applications

There were a number of GIS-related presentations during the AFAC conference that were very informative. It really hit home as to how integrated and essential GIS (and GPS) technology has become in both assessing the condition of the physical landscape and as analysis tools which feed into policies and long term planning. Of particular interest was a presentation that used GIS to map the understory vegetation of the Sugarloaf Catchment (north of Melbourne) and the development of the Phoenix Rapid-fire model, which incorporates GIS to predict a fire's behaviour across a landscape.

Fire and biodiversity symposium

Catherine recently attended the Fire & Biodiversity in Victoria Symposium hosted by the Victorian National Parks Association and The Royal Society of Victoria. The symposium brought together experts from a range of busfire related fields to present the current state of knowledge regarding the link between fire and biodiversity and explore future directions for managing, monitoring and researching the effects of fires (both planned and unplanned) on biodiversity values. The presentations were very diverse, covering animals' responses to fire (i.e. invertebrates and vertebrates) and vegetation community responses, beginning with the mallee right up to the alpine region. The second half of the symposium focused on how the information was being used by government agencies currently and how all the information that was presented in the symposium could be used to more efficiently and effectively manage fires in a way that helped improve biodiversity values in Victoria. The symposium produced numerous ideas for future directions that at times included very lively debates!

CSIRO

The Bushfire CRC Research Advisory Forum (RAF) included a visit to one of CSIRO's Canberra facilities, where the Pyrotron and Vertical Wind Tunnel live. It was pretty great to see both these instruments in action.



A visit to CSIRO's Pyrotron during the Bushfire CRC RAF in Canberra - AWESOME!!!