

# **FIRE AND EMERGENCY SERVICES - A SNAPSHOT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA.**

**Elizabeth Hides, Manager Information Resources**

**Fire & Emergency Services Authority of Western Australia**

## **Abstract.**

*The Fire & Emergency Services Authority of Western Australia was formed on 1 January 1999. It consists of an amalgamation of Fire & Rescue Services, Bush Fire Services, State Emergency Services, Emergency Management Service, Volunteer Marine Rescue Service, and the Unexploded Ordnance Unit.*

*The challenges in providing an information service to such a diverse group, spread geographically across a large area are enormous.*

*One major initiative was the implementation of a merged records and document management system. This system enables the management of not only paper-based records, but also electronic documents. This system also enables the access and tracking of all library material (books, annual reports and videos), Fire Investigation Reports, Subdivision files and photographs. It is planned to eventually incorporate all position history and personal files.*

*The system will also support decentralised access to information and encourage consistent management of all corporate records.*

*A major benefit from this initiative has been the ability to do one search across many different databases. It does not matter whether a report has been attached to a paper file, or placed in the library. Before librarians were limited to finding what information they were given for the library. By setting up the system in this way, it is possible to broaden the search for an item regardless of where it is stored.*

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## **Background**

The Fire and Emergency Services Authority was created as a Department on 1 January 1998, and formally proclaimed as Fire and Emergency Services Authority of Western Australia (FESA) on 1 January 1999. FESA was established following recommendations made by the Emergency Services Taskforce appointed by the State Government in 1997 to progress the implementation of a proposed new structure to improve coordination and planning across the Emergency Services portfolio in Western Australia.

The establishment of FESA brought together under one Chief Executive Officer and one Board of Management, the Fire and Rescue Service (FRS), the Bush Fire Service (BFS), the State Emergency Service (SES), Emergency Management Service (EMS), and Unexploded Ordnance (UXO). In addition the coordination services of Sea Search and Rescue (SSR) [which was renamed Volunteer Marine Rescue Service, VMRS] in Western Australia was incorporated into FESA from 1 July 1999.

It was recognised that the development of FESA would involve considerable change in all of the agencies to come under its corporate umbrella. However, the fact that all of the agencies shared FESA's vision for improving emergency services delivery in Western Australia, has helped to smooth the progress of transition.

## **Current Situation**

FESA has:

- Developed and consolidated its corporate and operational structure;
- Consulted on and explored appropriate opportunities for the coordination of delivery of operational emergency services;
- Amalgamated and streamlined management and administrative procedures and policies; and
- Consulted with government, staff, volunteers and stakeholders to formulate strategic intentions and future directions.

## **Fire Services**

The Fire and Rescue Service of Western Australia (FRS) comprises 850 career firefighters and 2,500 volunteer firefighters operating from more than 130 locations throughout Western Australia within fire districts in urban areas and the Christmas and Cocos Islands.

The work of the FRS involves combating fire emergencies and hazardous materials incidents, as well as undertaking road and other types of rescues.

The Bush Fire Service (BFS) is responsible for the administration of the Bush Fires Act in Western Australia. It provides the 700 Bush Fire Brigades operating within local government authorities around the State with training and advisory services in preventing and suppressing fires.

More than 16,000 BFS volunteer firefighters work to protect most rural areas of the State in providing an effective and efficient fire prevention and suppression service.

The Fire Services Division is also committed to delivering a range of community education programs targeting people of all ages. These include summer and winter fire safety preparedness, caring for seniors, schools education and smoke alarm initiatives. (Note: at the end of this paper there are three "snapshots" to illustrate the involvement by Fire Services in these activities. They include Collocation of Emergency Services, Best Practice in Community Involvement and Urban Bushland Planning.

### **Other FESA Divisions**

The role of the State Emergency Service (SES) is multi-faceted and primarily includes dealing with natural disasters such as storms, cyclones (hurricanes), floods, earthquakes and tsunamis. In addition, the SES carries out search, cliff and cave rescue, and vehicle rescue (in specific locations).

The 2,500 volunteers from the SES also provide support services to the Police and other emergency service organisations. These include radio communications, transport services, and catering for emergency service personnel involved in protracted incidents.

The Emergency Management Service (EMS) is responsible for providing a disaster management structure for Western Australia. The work of this division involves developing policies, plans and procedures, as well as monitoring their effectiveness.

Unexploded Ordnance (UXO) became part of the FESA structure in March 1999. Its role is to locate and make safe highly hazardous materials in the form of mortar shells, projectile, munitions and bombs, which failed to explode during past military exercises.

The Volunteer Sea Search and Rescue or as it is now known, Volunteer Marine Rescue Service (VMRS) officially became part of FESA on 1 July 1999. More than 2,500 volunteers work in 34 Volunteer Marine Rescue groups located around the coast.

### **FESA in Action**

There are two divisions within FESA that became the basis for facilitating the effective operation of FESA as a whole entity. Those divisions are Human Services and Business Services. Both these divisions were merged fairly quickly. They were collocated, coordinated their service delivery, which in turn reduced duplication and this was followed by an integration of policies and procedures.

The Human Services division is responsible for all people-related policy, programs and services across FESA. Specialised services provided include personnel and payroll, employee relations, and health safety and welfare incorporating an employee assistance program, wellness activities and a chaplaincy service.

One aspect of the amalgamation was negotiating common Workplace and Enterprise Agreements from a quite disparate range of salaries and employment conditions. In reality, you were looking at 3 different Enterprise Bargaining awards (EBA) and 3 different Workplace Agreements for support staff. This affected the hours people worked; some BFS people had the choice of working 37.30 hours a week whereas FRS had a minimum working week of 38 hours. Some of the conditions within those agreements were slightly better in SES and BFS than the FRS. Even the pay frequency was different: BFS and SES were paid fortnightly whereas FRS were paid weekly. (As a note here, most government agency employees are paid on a fortnightly basis.)

The career FRS people were relatively unaffected by this change until their EBA was up for renewal and took into consideration a greater role in community prevention activities. In essence the first EBA sought an active involvement by firefighters in community safety. The second and current EBA continues the safety theme but from adopting standards of safety, such as safety crewing. There is greater emphasis on community safety initiatives being a normal part of the firefighter role. The current EBA is structured around prevention and making the community more aware of the hazards and trying to reduce the frequency of emergencies. However, there is a real problem with measuring this effect.

The Health Safety and Welfare Branch with its requirements to provide a duty of care service to volunteers as well as paid employees, was faced with the realisation that the services they had previously provided to approximately 2,500 volunteers would now need to be delivered to approximately 23,000 volunteers. A good outcome from this was access to a peer support and chaplaincy service.

Peer Supporters are specially trained staff who are able to assist their colleagues through the traumatic incidents attended by emergency workers. Specialised training is provided to team members twice a year. Also special training day was held in May 1999 for new members. This was primarily to establish a Peer Support Team for the Bush Fire Service. A team of peer supporters was sent to Exmouth and Onslow in June 1999, to provide support to those communities following the destruction caused by a category five cyclone (the Australian name for hurricane), Cyclone Vance. The team consisted of two counsellors, a Chaplain and 14 peer supporters from Fire Services, the State Emergency Services and Family Support.

Most of the work in the Human Services area concentrated on merging all the employment conditions to truly have the FESA identity and the implementation of a common FESA human resource automated system. The outcome of significant structural changes resulted in a considerable workload in terms of classification setting and recruitment activities. This was done, whilst "undertaking normal work", sound familiar?

The Business Services Division contributes to FESA's objectives by providing FESA's corporate financial, physical and information resources. Specific areas of responsibility involve financial reporting, contract services including purchasing, property services related to new buildings and maintenance of existing facilities, technical services for new and existing firefighting appliances and leased vehicles, information resources such as records and document management, and telecommunications and information technology requirements.

The Financial Service section has amalgamated three disparate sets of annual statements and performance indicators. The result is that FESA receives its funding from several sources to conduct and administer its functions. Contributions are derived from the State Government of Western Australia (20%), Local Government Authorities of Western Australia (9%), Insurance companies (70%) and from the Federal Government (1%). This amounts to an annual budget of approximately \$100 million.

The contribution of local communities to the financing and running of services in FESA is most significant. In terms of personal commitment the local community contribution is crucial to the maintenance of a viable emergency service in metropolitan and rural Western Australia.

Contract Services have worked to consolidate "whole of FESA" supply arrangements to eliminate duplication in equipment, goods and services across the operational divisions. Further gains have been made where fire appliances, equipment and protective clothing have been standardised.

Property Services manages FESA's building maintenance program and also is actively involved in the collocation of emergency service facilities.

Technical Services provides specialised maintenance, logistic support and technical advice to support FESA's vehicle and equipment fleet. The current FESA vehicle and equipment fleet totals 900 units. With the amalgamation of the Fire Services, FESA Technical Services has undertaken the responsibility for contract management for all Fire Service appliances under construction to ensure a high quality of workmanship and uniform standards are maintained throughout the fleet.

<b>FESA Vehicle Fleet and Equipment</b>	
Specialist appliance	9
Aerial appliance	3
Foam trailer	9
General purpose appliance (4x4) single cab	11
General purpose appliance (4x4) crew cab	8
Heavy pumper crew cab	9
Heavy tanker (4x4)	2
Light pumper crew cab	80
Light tanker (4x4) single cab	121
Light tanker (4x4) crew cab	5
Medium pumper single cab	5
Medium pumper crew cab	35
Medium tanker (4x4)	5
Museum - vintage appliances	22
Portable pump	10
Rescue trailer	75
SES trailer	144
SES vehicles	15
Leased vehicles	207
Rescue equipment	125
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>900</b>

## Information Resources

My area is responsible for Library, records and document management, mail services, switchboard, Freedom of Information and maintaining corporate information on the Intranet.

The background situation for those individual units merging to become FESA was:

Fire & Rescue Service (FRS)	automated records system, containing library information that provided basic facilities for registering and retrieving. However the system was not Y2K compliant.
Bush Fire Service (BFS)	manual records system, and had no library.
State Emergency Service (SES)	IBM mainframe records system connected to the Police Department. The Library was also maintained and supported by the Police Department.
Emergency Management Service (EMS)	operated as a subset of SES.

The situation prior to the development of FESA was that each unit was preparing to replace and / or upgrade their current information management system. The FESA umbrella being imposed on those units caused some dissension as it required that we get together as a team with representation from all FESA units to prepare a tender specification that took into account all our requirements. As you might imagine it was a lengthy process and somewhat frustrating for all involved. One major recommendation from the Taskforce was support for the development of a FESA records and document management system.

Realistically this had the effect of allowing us to obtain a "better system" from the point of view of having more money allocated to the project (that is, funding one system, rather than four separate systems). It also supported the FESA entity by coordinating an approach to service delivery, eliminating duplication and embracing the concept of FESA.

The evaluation team had representation from all FESA units and involved extensive consultation.

## Implementation

The implementation of the system commenced in April 1999, with the changeover of the records function. Under Western Australian State government legislation, agencies that are amalgamated must ensure that the integrity of their recorded information is maintained as evidence of their existence and accountable practices. Accordingly, what is regarded as Best Practice is:

- All old and current records from the subsumed agency should be closed,
- Some documents from records, which were current and active at the time of the amalgamation, may be incorporated into the new agency's records management system. For example, documents with a recent date range (perhaps the previous 3 months) may be removed from the closed records and attached to the newly created record to continue the function (eg. our FESA finance files).

New records should be created as required to continue current functions, using the file covers or pathways, logos, numbering and titling system of the new agency.

It was decided that as FESA began on 1 January 1999, all information from that date would be removed from the "old" files and placed on the new FESA files. Cross-references were placed on files to reflect the previous number (FRS, BFS and SES all had their own unique numbering system). For example, a file relating to aerial water bombing would have one file number, but it would also have the FRS and BFS file numbers in the notes field.

The implications and benefits of the new system would:

- Enable information to be managed from a comprehensive single source.
- Have standardised terminology for file titles using the FESA thesaurus.
- Encourage uniform records management practices throughout FESA.
- Continue the retention of decentralised filing systems.

### **Merged Information Source**

The initiative to implement a merged records and document management system enabled the management and tracking of not only paper-based records, but also all library material such as books, annual reports and videos.

A major benefit from this initiative has been the ability to do one search across many different databases. It does not matter now whether a report has been attached to a paper file, or placed in the library. Before librarians were limited to finding what information they were given for the library. By setting up our system in this way, it is possible to broaden the search for an item regardless of where it is stored, providing of course, you have the necessary authority.

One major consideration in the management of this system is the security of access. While it is important for an information manager to be able to see what information is held in that agency, it is not always desirable that all users of the system have that same level of access. In order to encourage custodians of information within FESA to utilise the automated system, it was essential that the security of access to this type of information could be guaranteed. For example, access to the Fire Investigation files was traditionally limited to two people. By including these files onto the system, as the Freedom of Information Coordinator, I am now able to check to see if such a file exists, then gather the relevant information and discuss it with the Fire Investigation Officer.

Most types of administrative files, including a number of files with access restrictions on them such as contracts, legal opinion, workers compensation, industrial relations and Freedom of Information are managed on the system. Other types of files: Fire Investigation, Subdivisions, Personnel and Position History files are also being included.

The files that relate specifically to Personnel (Personnel, Position History and Workers Compensation files) are able to be tracked (with an audit trail) and are stored in the Personnel area.



As the size of the FESA library collection is quite small, it was decided that to implement yet another system would not be cost effective. In the original tender specification for the system, the ability to manage library material clause was included.

Currently, books, journal titles, annual reports, cd-roms and standards are being added onto the system. Unfortunately, time constraints haven't permitted registering individual journal issues.

The video collection is in the process of being added to the system, however often the videos need to be viewed so that their content can be confirmed. It has been useful having access to other fire libraries audiovisual catalogues, so that abstracts can be copied.

The system allows us the ability to print a catalogue of the audiovisual collection in alphabetical order by title. Multiple copies of the same video are deleted prior to the printed version. The subject listing will still need to be done manually or perhaps another system enhancement will come along. The ability to print a subject catalogue hasn't been a priority. What is a priority is the ability for our clients to read the notes description of the video; we never had this before.

Work has commenced on including the photographic collection, as photographs can be important documents as they relate to the memory of an agency. This is a useful way of locating specific information such as the opening of a new station or medal presentations. Where applicable, the photos are related to a FESA file.

## Standardised Terminology

It was determined to manage FESA's records according to an analysis of business processes. Business classification schemes are based on the analysis of the functions and activities of an organisation rather than on the organisational structure of the organisation. The reason is that the organisational structure changes, sometimes too frequently for our liking and also because the link such as Finance is quite diverse and may be linked to other areas.

Within FESA this was done using the information contained in Australian Standard AS 4390 on Records Management (this document was developed to support a systematic approach to records management and it is hoped that this will be accepted as an International Standard). Another key source used was the Keyword AAA thesaurus which "... has become Australia's most popular and successful records management thesaurus and is now used in more than a hundred and forty public sector organisations at the Federal, State and local government levels around Australia".

Keyword AAA: *Accuracy, Accessibility, Accountability* by providing more than vocabulary control, it allows:

- Accuracy** of titling and retrieval through classification by keywords
- Accessibility** through use of common terminology, and
- Accountability** through better control of records.

Keyword AAA is a hierarchical structure, with three levels of terms and has a functionally oriented approach to reflect the business activities documented by records. Keyword AAA also conforms to the conventions of the relevant International Standard: ISO 2788-1986(E), *Documentation - Guidelines for the establishment and development of monolingual thesauri*.

The Fire and Emergency Services thesaurus was based on Keyword AAA and on information gained from interviews with relevant FESA staff. The result was a single merged thesaurus of administrative and functional terms developed specifically for fire and emergency service agencies. The thesaurus contains:

- A classification guide using the model outlined by the Keyword AAA Thesaurus, with the inclusion of scope notes for each Keyword.
- Detailed definitions (scope notes) of each term used in the thesaurus as they pertain to the functions and activities of FESA.
- Fully developed hierarchical relationships between terms, with particular emphasis placed on related terms and non-preferred terms.

The thesaurus is not a stand-alone product. Rather it needs to be loaded onto an automated record and documents management system (such as TRIM, the system FESA has chosen).

The Fire and Emergency Services thesaurus was initially developed by Fire & Emergency Services Authority of Western Australia (FESA). FESA has provided a solid base upon which other fire and emergency services can use for their own thesaurus development. In some situations the thesaurus will require minimal changes to fit another organisation.

The thesaurus will be a dynamic document; to encourage consistency and cooperation with other fire and emergency services. Feedback will help determine modifications or additions to terms, interpretation of scope notes and future requirements. By using this approach, it broadens the depth of knowledge and understanding within the records management area of fire and emergency services.

The thesaurus has received endorsement from the Australasian Fire Authorities Council (AFAC). It is currently being used at FESA, New South Wales Fire Brigades Board, Metropolitan Fire Brigades Board (Melbourne, Victoria) and the Tasmanian Fire Service.

## **Examples**

### **KEYWORD**

#### **FIRE & EMERGENCY OPERATIONS**

Scope Note: The function of managing the response to fire & emergency incidents. Includes mobilising, attending, evaluating and reporting on incidents. Also includes operational planning and investigations.

### **ACTIVITY DESCRIPTORS**

Accidents	Investigations
Advice	Joint Ventures
Agreements	Liaison
Arrangements	Meetings
Committees	Planning
Compliance	Policy
Conferences	Procedures
Education	Reporting
Evaluation	Reviewing
Incidents	

### **File Title**

KEYWORD:	FIRE & EMERGENCY OPERATIONS
ACTIVITY DESCRIPTOR:	INCIDENTS
FREE TEXT:	Kwinana Chemical Spill

### **OR**

KEYWORD:	FIRE & EMERGENCY OPERATIONS
ACTIVITY DESCRIPTOR:	COMMITTEES
SUBJECT DESCRIPTOR:	Minutes
FREE TEXT:	HAZMAT Coordinating Committee

## **Uniform Practices**

The process of classifying or file creation involves categorising them in a consistent manner to facilitate their capture, retrieval, maintenance and disposal. It includes the determination of naming conventions, user permissions and security restrictions on records. Within FESA, file creation is maintained centrally so as to ensure quality control and feedback to the FESA thesaurus. It also enables decentralised support officers to create a local file from the preferred file tiles listed across FESA.

It is important that if a file is deemed restricted for whatever reason, then it is treated the same across FESA. That is, not every user can view the contents of the file and also that the physical file is kept in appropriate storage.

The registration for each individual document is the same across FESA. Primarily, to provide evidence that a record has been created or captured in the system. Some fields are mandatory, which means that some records cannot be created unless those fields are completed. For example, there must be an author of the document and also who the document is addressed to, a date of creation, container record and the security level of the document (such as an Industrial Relations or Freedom of Information document).

Under Western Australian State government legislation, agencies are not permitted to dispose of any "public record" unless they have an approved Retention and Disposal Authority. Currently two General Disposal Authorities exist across government: Human Resources Management Records and Financial and Accounting Records. All other records fall into the agency specific category, which is why the business classification process is useful as it links what we keep and how long we should keep it for. For example, Board Minutes are vital to the accountability of an agency and therefore need to be kept forever. Other information such as children's educational activities may only need to be kept for three years. It is important that FESA has a uniform practice to ensure that records are kept appropriately.

While seven fields are captured for records type information, a similar number are captured for recording books. The hardest field to capture was the Dewey Decimal Classification number (DDC). This is because it is not static, it can have just three digits, or ten and includes full stops. The system preferred controlled numbering and when saving a "record" it liked to know that only one number per item was used. After many trials, it was decided to make the accession number the unique number for all library material. A prefix code of LIB followed by a backslash and then the five digit accession number. At least then each book would be unique even though there might be three copies of one book in the collection. This number was also used to generate the barcode label. The main fields such as author, title, DDC, accession number, subject fields (only two), publisher and a notes field are captured.

Similar information is captured for video items and they include the title of the video, an "author", publisher, subject headings (again, only two), and the duration. More importantly with this type of material, the notes field is used for a brief description of the video. A unique numbering system is also used for videos, up to 3 digits. Adding extra copies of a video is made easier by using the file part numbering system that allows each video to be tracked. For example, a video with the number 438 has two copies. All the other fields remain the same, except the video numbers become, 438-01 and 438-02. Extra copies of the videos can be added into the system at any time. The barcode label accepts this and loans can be made against each copy.

Information captured for the photographic collection include: title, notes, date taken, which section took the photo (Fire Services, Volunteer Marine), photo size, folder number, number of photos and retention schedule.

### **Decentralised Filing**

It is necessary to support a decentralised management system. The new system supports decentralised management by enabling them to register items from their own desktop. However, this required the implementation of suitable technology to better support the expanded business functions of FESA. In reality this meant installing a network server in each region which took longer than anticipated. The system will access the local server for information in the first instance, thus enabling a faster retrieval time and then, if required a global search of the entire database can be conducted.

It was determined to have a consistent file numbering sequence across FESA, using a running five-digit number. For example, the file on aerial water bombing would have the same number in FESA House, at the Fremantle office (in the metropolitan area) and in the Bunbury office (a large country town south of Perth). Therefore, when any correspondence is generated, it can be easily attached to a file anywhere across FESA. Each region also has a unique identifier before the five-digit file number. For example, Bunbury is prefixed by BY, Perth South by PS.

### **Training**

One of the most important elements of an implementation plan is training. During the implementation of the new system at FESA two types of training were conducted. The systems side of training related to registering and retrieving information on the new system and using the pull down menus. This affected not only the staff in the Information Resources section, but also the other "expert users", the decentralised support officers. This training supported their ability to register and retrieve items from their desktop.

The other type of training or awareness raising was directed at users of the system. Initially this presentation was given to the FESA Board members who needed to be reassured that the resources committed to this project (in dollars and people) had fulfilled the Taskforce recommendation and had "embraced the FESA entity".

The sessions were modified and tailored to address the individual requirements of units within FESA, such as Community Safety. The sessions included information on the:

- Value of records,
- Risks of poor recording keeping
- Legislative requirements
- FESA records system
- FESA thesaurus

Also, the session was used as an opportunity to refresh their understanding of Freedom of Information requirements. It was important to establish what are "good" records management practices and outline their responsibilities. The benefits of the new system were promoted, such as the ability to do a comprehensive search, a user friendly Windows environment which allows searching from the desktop and the retention of decentralised filing systems. It was also an opportunity to inform them about what would be happening with the old system and what would be changing. One aspect was the introduction of the FESA thesaurus and acknowledge their input into its development.

### **The Future**

To date, progress has been steady with most of the effort concentrated on managing paper-based records, adding in library material, establishing the regions and conducting awareness raising sessions. FESA policies and procedures have been developed and approved, together with training packages to support decentralised offices.

The next significant phase will be to commence the pilot stage of managing electronic documents, scanning images and activating the workflow module. There is quite a lot of interest in this area and with increased use of e-mails, an important area to get right. In parallel with this pilot stage, policies and procedures related to electronic document management will be developed. Business rules will be developed to determine when to register the electronic document, when you first put your finger on the keyboard or after several drafts. Also, who is responsible for adding e-mail documents; the originator or the receiver of the document.

The importance of a good, productive working relationship with the Information Technology gurus can not be underestimated. The computing networks are being upgraded to provide an effective platform to deliver Internet based information systems that are vital to the future delivery of decentralised management services. The records and document management system is one of the products that will benefit from this upgrade, which is good news for the Information Resources team and also for all FESA personnel.

## Urban Bushland Planning

Western Australia is a vast State covering 250 million hectares of some of the most ancient landscapes in the world. This includes rugged gorges, tropical reefs, towering forests, woodlands, white beaches and 12,500 kilometres of coastline.

Western Australia boasts one of the most diverse groups of plants found anywhere, from giant karri trees to underground orchids to brightly coloured wildflowers. It's estimated that Western Australia also has nearly 3,000 native species of animals and birds and fish - and many more insects.

FESA attends a number of emergencies that relate to wildfires - bush, scrub, grass and rubbish fires. Wildfires have a significant impact on our environment. FESA has recently appointed an Environment Adviser to help the Fire Services deal with these issues.

Much of the present focus within our environment program is on metropolitan urban bushland. Western Australia is a large state, but the concentration of conservationists is around the metropolitan area. They can be quite vocal!

The frequency of fire is one of the biggest problems confronting Perth's bushland. Normally the Australian bushland copes well with fire, and some plants even require fire at some stage in their lifecycle. However, the incidence of arson in our bushland means the frequency of fire is often too high.

Fire also contributes to the fire-weed cycle. Where there are lots of weeds, there is an increased risk for fire. Weeds increase the intensity of fire. After the fire, the weeds are better at invading the bushland, and so the cycle repeats itself. It is important for conservation groups to work on ways to reduce the weeds in their bushland and for firefighters to stop the fire as soon as possible, or to keep the fires as small as possible.

The Urban Bushland Program, which began in early 1996, is aimed at minimising the potential for, and the impact of, fire in Perth's urban bushland areas. Preservation of environmentally sensitive features in these areas is a primary objective.

This initiative is advancing in collaboration with local government and environmental interest groups such as the Urban Bushland Council. This involves the preparation, in conjunction with stakeholder groups, of agreed fire prevention and suppression plans for environmentally sensitive areas. Both local fire stations and the Communications Centre hold these plans. They document items such as pre-arranged turnout procedures and access points for bushland.

In real terms, this means that firefighters and conservation groups need to work together to develop strategies to reduce the impact of fire. For example, a conservation group determines that an area of bushland is of sufficient importance that it requires the area to be fenced off. It may contain a significant site such as the nest of a pair of eagles or a threatened ecological community. By fencing the area off, it "protects" what is inside that area from the elements of our society that would like to dump their rubbish there, or take their trail bikes through that bushland. However, it also has significant implications for fire prevention: it does not allow easy access for fire appliances.



Access to any area is important. Firefighters need to get in and be able get out, no matter what the fire behaviour does. This is often done by utilising existing tracks (they can be cycleways or walkways), just as long as it is wide enough to accommodate a fire appliance. Perth has lots of sand and it is so easy to get bogged!, so the tracks need to be trafficable and have at least two access points.

The identification of environmental considerations is also important. Flora (threatened ecological communities, rare or endangered plants) or fauna considerations (the eagles nest), need to be taken into account when planning for fire. Identifying not-so-important areas is also useful. The two groups may decide to put another fire access track in a weedy area, which would offer more protection for an important area.

Another consideration is the location of hydrants and if they are in working order. Recently, Sue Davies, our Environmental Adviser, was attending an Urban Bushland Planning meeting at Wireless Hill bushland. This facility includes a museum at the centre of a unique bushland area. When a check was done on the availability of hydrants, it was found that the surrounding street hydrants (included in our maintenance program) were working adequately. However, the one closest to the Museum had "pathetic" pressure. The landowner, in this case the local government, organised repairs to the hydrant. During the summer, a fire went through the Wireless Hill bushland. The Museum hydrant was used as a major water supply to combat the fire. If the hydrant had not been repaired it is likely that the bushland would have suffered even more significant damage.

This paper has talked about access and water supply. But it is the people aspect that is the important link with Urban Bushland planning. It is the local firefighters getting together with the local conservation group/s to exchange information about their surrounding bushland. The only way to get good fire planning is to get local involvement: to draw up plans together, and for both firefighters and the conservation groups to understand each other.

Sue Davies has recently completed a document on this topic. "Guidelines for Fire Management in Urban Bushland". For further information or a copy of the guidelines, contact [sdavies@fesa.wa.gov.au](mailto:sdavies@fesa.wa.gov.au)

## Community Involvement

The local government area of Mundaring is north east of the Perth central business district, with the town centre being 35 kilometres by road from the City of Perth. Geographically, the Mundaring area covers the top of the Darling escarpment comprising an area of over 644 square kilometres and has a population of approximately 34,300 people. Nearly one third of this area is eucalyptus forest. The remainder comprises residential, rural landscape living, agricultural and industrial zones.

Ensuring public safety from the threat posed by fire and other natural and man-made hazards is an important responsibility of governments. People have an expectation that Governments (Federal, State, and Local) will assist in providing a safe environment for the community. Within Mundaring this task is exacerbated by problems of:

Geography (size, severe wind conditions, topography of the Darling Scarp and extensive areas of natural vegetation).

Sociology (thin population densities, clustered townsites, on multiple acre blocks).

Transportation (major road access route to the Eastern States)

These factors impose limitations on resource availability. Mundaring's emergency management arrangements have developed over many years in response to hazards faced by the local community. The Shire provides operational and financial support to:

- Eight active volunteer bush fire brigades;
- One dual registered brigade (Fire and Rescue and Bush Fire);
- One communications and forward control brigade;
- The Air Operations Group based at the Darlington Fire Station; and,
- A volunteer training school currently operating from the Stoneville Community Centre.

Currently responsibility for the management of the provision of fire and emergency services within the Shire of Mundaring is delegated by the Chief Executive Officer to the Executive Manager Community Services. Implementation occurs10.4(4)10.4(t)-7.1(a).2(pl)10.85(t)-7c( Ser)

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For outer metropolitan local governments, population growth brings with it an increase in community assets and consequent fire risk. There is a multiplicity of hazard types, which differ from the metropolitan areas because of the bushland environment, and the nature of the Darling Scarp. Preventing an increase in the incidence of fires will be a major challenge within the context of the growth projected for Mundaring over the next ten years. This will demand the delivery of high quality community fire prevention programs and the expansion within the Shire of further structural firefighting capacity.

Mundaring was the first local government to jointly fund with FESA the position of Fire Management Officer. Under current employment arrangements for the FMO there is limited availability within the Shire of Mundaring of the required expertise to support the FMOs operational role in his/her absence. In addition, there is limited opportunity to maintain the skill levels essential to this position.

Transfer of this position to FESA (without altering the funding arrangements) would provide essential backup and support and provide a career and development structure for those officers in local governments holding this position.

The major recommendations from this report include:

- The Fire Management Officer appointed by the Shire as the Chief Bush Fire Control Officer becomes a FESA employee, when legislation is changed to permit this.
- Until this first recommendation is achieved, the Bush Fires Act is to be amended in a minor way to permit the temporary transfer of the powers of the CBFCO to a qualified FESA Officer.
- FESA and the Shire to jointly agree the appointment of the position of the Fire Management Officer.
- A contract for management services between FESA as the service provider and the Shire as client be developed.
- A Memorandum of Understanding between FESA and the Shire be developed that will describe the manner of fire service provision and the monitoring of future service delivery arrangements.

Bruce Jones, Regional Director Fire Services was the project leader and has recently completed a report on this topic. "The Future Delivery of a Fire and Emergency Services Function in the Shire of Mundaring". For further information or a copy of the report, contact [bjones@fesa.wa.gov.au](mailto:bjones@fesa.wa.gov.au)

## Collocated Facilities

In the report by the Emergency Services Taskforce, the Minister for Emergency Services identified three key outcomes the Government wished to achieve:

- Improvement in the delivery of service to the community and to volunteers by bringing them together under the one umbrella agency.
- Improvement in the effectiveness and coherence of policy development and implementation.
- A coordinated approach to planning and management matters across agencies.

An underlying principal is the hope that greater collaboration will yield quick and realisable operational benefits and savings to the advantage of all involved. There is also a commitment on the part of government to ensure that the most efficient and effective use is made of all resources in the public sector.

Construction of collocated facilities in regional Western Australia has been part of a Government initiative since 1995. Eleven have been completed and a further 12 are in the pipeline. According to the requirements of the specific centre or region they may include facilities for the Bush Fire Service and Fire and Rescue Service, the State Emergency Service, Volunteer Marine Rescue Service or the St. John Ambulance.

To use the town of Bruce Rock as an example. Bruce Rock is located in the wheatbelt area some 244 kilometres from Perth. Geographically, the local government area covers an area of over 2,772 square kilometres and has a population of approximately 1,250 people. For interest, the area is mainly dedicated to agriculture, with some light industry and a blue metal quarry. There are 547 dwellings in the district and most of the roads are unsealed (not bitumen or asphalt, but gravel) (767.8 kilometres).

The Bruce Rock centre accommodates the operations of the St John Ambulance, the Bush Fire Service and the State Emergency Service. The centre replaces three outdated and inadequate buildings that no longer met the needs of each emergency service organisation. The design of the centre provides office space for each of the emergency services groups operating from it, training areas and vehicle bays to house a variety of emergency service appliances.

Whilst there are obvious cost savings for each of the organisations involved, collocation also assists in the training of personnel and the timely delivery of emergency services through improved coordination.

Another major issue related to collocation is the declining population throughout rural Western Australia. Bruce Rock is a good example where members of the community are working together and who are committed to providing an effective response to a wide range of emergency situations within the Bruce Rock community and surrounding districts.

Roy Phillips, Manager Property Services is actively involved in planning collocated facilities. For further information, contact [rphillips@fesa.wa.gov.au](mailto:rphillips@fesa.wa.gov.au)

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For further information, please contact:

Elizabeth Hides, Manager Information Resources, Fire & Emergency Services,  
480 Hay Street, Perth Western Australia 6000  
ehides@fesa.wa.gov.au