

News and Fire Management advice from the West Gidgegannup Volunteer Bushfire Brigade

By John Mangini – Captain/FCO

The fire season so far has been relatively quiet in the hills so far, a few small incidents. One notable one in Gidgegannup was on Xmas morning which was very likely started by a campfire on private property. Please be reminded that the prohibited burning season is in force and no fires should be lit in the open. Gas cookers should be used outdoors and even then should only be used in a place well clear of flammable material.

On the coastal plain firefighters have been busy attending many fires which have been deliberately lit, particularly in the Warwick and Carine areas, and near Beeliar. Both West and East Gidgegannup Brigades sent units to assist at Beeliar. Arsonists cause considerable inconvenience and disruption to volunteer firefighters, as well as being responsible for property and environmental damage. If you see suspicious activity please report it to police. There is a reward available of up to \$50,000 for information leading to the conviction of arsonists.

As the weather warms up, we must all be more careful with fire prevention. Machinery can be a significant cause of fire. Sparks may be produced by the exhaust, by cutting edges and other steel parts striking rocks, or by breakdown or short circuits in the machine itself. Under the Bushfires Act any tractor or machinery used in pasture, crop, bush or forest must be fitted with appropriate safeguards. This includes such things as spark arresting exhausts, and means of extinguishment. To comply with the Act a supply of water and an effective means of delivery are required. Generally a 9 litre stored pressure water extinguisher or a knapsack spray complies with this requirement. Water is required as it is by far the best means of extinguishing a bushfire. While a dry powder or similar extinguisher is great for the machinery itself, it performs poorly in bush/grass and does not comply with the Bushfires Act. Some machinery such as chaffcutters may require additional water supply.

Hot work also requires precautions. Any welding, gas cutting or abrasive grinding in the open air requires under the Act a 5 metre zone clear of all inflammable material around it, and an effective means of fire extinguishment. The fire last season near the corner of Strawberry Hill Drive and Braidwood Pass was started by an angle grinder, as was one a few days ago at Bedfordale.

Discarding cigarette butts and ash from cars is a common cause of fire, and it is an offence both under the Bushfires Act and under anti litter laws. Many firefighters now carry cigarette butt report cards which will result in offenders being infringed and fined under the Bushfires Act and a second infringement is issued by the Keep Australia Beautiful Council leading to a very expensive smoke!

One concern for firefighters are bees. If you keep hives or know of feral bee nests on your property, please advise firefighters if they attend. The bees can become extremely aggressive around machinery, especially diesel powered, smoke and flames don't exactly improve their temper. Hive owners should also be aware of the environmental effects of bees. Feral bees can take over nesting hollows favoured by native animals such as possums and birds, and have been known to sting these to death to remove the competition. Poorly maintained hives are the largest source of feral bees. A prominent local beekeeper recommends that hives be moved frequently, as often as weekly, and the honeycomb removed regularly, so there is always plenty of free space in the hive. This prevents the hive from becoming too crowded and reduces the tendency for bees to swarm and move on.

Please be reminded that if you see a fire, your first call should always be to 000, as this results in pager and SMS messages being sent simultaneously to approximately 30 recipients in the Gidgegannup area and will usually result in the most rapid and effective response.

Have a safe fire season