

# From The Chief Officer.....



Number 104

*"Our mission is to protect lives and property"*

15th January 2014

## Heat Related Illnesses – Be Prepared

This week of extreme temperatures and subsequent fires has already taken a toll. About 10 firefighters have been treated for heat related illnesses yesterday. These members are now fine but it demonstrates the difficult conditions we're working in. **Heat related illness is a very real danger on the fireground.** It is brought on by dehydration that starts early on in the day and well before a firefighter gets on a truck to respond to an incident. I urge you all to be fully aware of the need to be fit for duty on these days of extreme heat. **CFA members that are on-call to respond should be actively hydrating at work or home prior to attending a call-out to a fire or other emergency incident.** Brigade Captains and Strike Team Leaders need to monitor the condition of members of their crews before they even get on a truck. That means **checking to confirm that everyone is well hydrated** and reminding them of the necessity to take-in the required levels of fluids while actively working on the fireground.

**Dehydration symptoms include the onset of headache, dizziness, nausea, cramps and dry skin.** These signs of dehydration are late signs and should be attended to immediately. If left untreated you can develop heat stress and this may progress to heat stroke very quickly on days like we're experiencing this week. Active firefighters working in extreme temperature conditions on the fireground should be drinking up to two bottles of water and electrolytes every hour. **Electrolytes are a key ingredient in reducing the risk of dehydration** that regulates the body function. **Remember that water alone will not rehydrate you.**

All CFA operational members have a responsibility to themselves and their families to be fit to perform their duties and not place themselves or others at risk due to the impacts of dehydration and fatigue. Importantly, **Captains and Crew Leaders need to be aware of any members who may have health issues** or are on medication that may worsen a medical condition in the heat. On the fireground, I encourage Crew Leaders to **initiate task rotation** for crew in order to avoid the potential for heat exhaustion and subsequent dangerous effects on the health of firefighters.

Remember that **CFA has a 'Health Support Team'** that is prepared and ready to assist with advice or monitoring of crews, and general health related assistance at fires. They can be contacted on **9262 8844**, or they can be requested through Vic Fire and the State Duty Officer. See [Operations Bulletin 001/2012](#) for more information, and also our Fireground Health page on the [intranet/Brigades Online](#). Heat Health Alerts have also been issued by the Department of Health – visit [www.health.vic.gov.au](http://www.health.vic.gov.au) for more information. **Stay safe and hydrated.**

## Whole of State Total Fire Bans:

Some reasons why we have "whole of State" Total Fire Bans at the moment:

1. Extreme temperatures mean that fuels are super dried (or are super-drying). High overnight temperatures mean that there is little moisture recovery of fuels.
2. We have existing fires in the landscape (and therefore workload).
3. With elevated potential for lightning, there is a risk of more fires prior to the peak risk day which is Friday.
4. The objective is to prevent any new fire starting that can be prevented.
5. The high temperatures put a high degree of heat stress on or firefighters, suppression is more difficult.
6. Finally, in the lead up to the peak risk period of Friday / Friday night, we want a simple consistent message.

***"Coming together is the beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success."***  
- Henry Ford