



NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE



MEDIA RELEASE

Busiest bush fire season in years declared over

31 March 2014

Today marks the end of what has been a difficult and destructive 2013/14 bush fire season NSW Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS) Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons said.

“This was the busiest season the Service has seen in over a decade, with damaging fires occurring as early as August.

“NSW RFS crews responded to more than 14,956 incidents from August to March, including more than 6,643 bush, grass and scrub fires which burnt an area half the size of Greater Sydney (599,398 ha).

Commissioner Fitzsimmons reflected on 13 to 26 October as a particularly challenging period with 216 homes destroyed across the Blue Mountains, Southern Highlands and Port Stephens.

“The Winmalee and Yellow Rock communities in the Blue Mountains were the hardest hit with 195 homes destroyed in a matter of hours,” Commissioner Fitzsimmons said.

“Once again thousands of firefighters worked around the clock to protect life and property as part of a coordinated firefighting effort including Fire and Rescue NSW, National Parks and Wildlife, Forestry Corporation NSW, along with their interstate fire colleagues, NSW Police and the wider NSW emergency management community.

“Sadly this season two lives were lost. Walter Linder who suffered a heart attack while protecting his home near Lake Munmorah and pilot David Black, whose waterbombing plane crashed whilst firefighting near Ulladulla.

“The loss of both these men was felt deeply by their local community and the NSW RFS community alike. Our thoughts continue to be with their family and friends.”

Not only have NSW RFS volunteers been working hard here in NSW, but more than 1400 personnel were deployed to South Australia and Victoria.

“Throughout the season NSW RFS volunteers have taken time away from their families, jobs and communities to help others. For this they deserve our sincere thanks and gratitude.”

Commissioner Fitzsimmons also acknowledged the public’s efforts to prepare themselves and their families, noting that this season a record number of Bush Fire Survival Plans were downloaded.

“This season we introduced the MyFirePlan smartphone application which complements the existing Bush Fire Survival Plan and has made safety information even more readily available,” Commissioner Fitzsimmons said.

**For more information contact the State Duty Media Officer on 02 9898 1855
For current incidents or major fire updates visit www.rfs.nsw.gov.au**

“The public appetite for information was again considerable this season, including the localised information provided through public meetings which often had more than 1000 people present.

“During October alone the NSW RFS website had around 5.7 million visits, our Facebook posts reached more than 45 million people and NSW RFS Twitter posts were retweeted 18,300 times, enabling us to reach more people than ever before.

“It is encouraging to see the community engaging with fire information and taking their safety seriously.”

For more details, or to arrange an interview with Commissioner Fitzsimmons, call 9898 1855.

Searches for information during 13 – 26 October

- www.rfs.nsw.gov.au – 5.7 million visits, 14.1 million pageviews
- [NSW RFS Facebook](#) – 108.4 million impressions, 147,700 new likes
- [NSW RFS Twitter](#) – 24.2 million impressions, 18,300 retweets of NSW RFS content
- Bush Fire Information Line – 46,499 calls received
- Telephone/SMS Emergency Alerts - 72 issued, 418,247 emergency alert messages sent
- Fires Near Me App – downloaded 189,000 times
- My Fire Plan app – downloaded 8,600

