

MEDIA RELEASE



NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE

RFS gives helping hand to disabled & elderly

3 December 2012

More than 2,450 disabled, sick and elderly NSW residents have had assistance preparing their properties for bush fire from the NSW Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS) in the last three years.

The AIDER - Assist Infirm, Disabled and Elderly Residents - program helps protect at-risk residents living in bush fire prone areas by doing basic hazard reduction work around their properties.

NSW RFS Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons said the 'International Day of People with Disability' was an opportunity to highlight the assistance available to people with disabilities.

"There are many people in communities across NSW who are unable to undertake manual work around their house and garden, leaving them at greater risk from bush fire.

"The AIDER program does more than help reduce the community's bush fire risk; it also lends a hand to those who need it and helps them live more safely and confidently at home.

"In addition to providing manual labour, our crews also take the time to provide residents with helpful tips on what to do during a bush fire.

"It's important to give people some peace of mind throughout the hot summer months so that if a bush fire does break out, these people and their homes are as prepared as possible.

"Experience has shown that these simple preparations can help save lives," Commissioner Fitzsimmons said.

Ageing, Disability & Home Care Chief Executive, Jim Longley welcomed the efforts of NSW RFS in supporting people with disability living in rural and remote locations.

"Equipping people with practical skills required to keep them and their communities safe during bush fire season is an excellent initiative, empowering people with disability to save lives and avert tragedy," said Mr Longley.

The NSW RFS has also extended the Secondary School Cadet Program into a school for students with a disability – the Carenne School in Bathurst.

Ten students from Years 11 and 12 enthusiastically learned how to use fire hoses, how to pump water, use hand tools, fire hydrants and fire extinguishers.

"As well as learning practical life skills the Cadet Program also provides students with leadership, teamwork and initiative skills," said Commissioner Fitzsimmons.

People interested in AIDER should visit www.rfs.nsw.gov.au or call 1800 679 737 for a free assessment.

Editors note: Photographs of AIDER crews at work are available at www.flickr.com/rfsmedia