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## FIRE CREWS ON TRACK FOR RECORD AUTUMN PLANNED BURNS



From the Premier

Thursday, 18 March 2010

Fire crews have completed more than 50,000 hectares of Spring and Autumn planned burns, almost five times more than at the same time last year.

There are currently a further 40,000 hectares burning which, when completed next week, will bring the total to about 90,000 hectares in the past seven months in key priority areas.

Victoria is also trialling new night vision technology for helicopter pilots that significant boosts the capacity of fire agencies to better conduct and monitor planned burns into the night.

The Premier John Brumby today said milder than average conditions had meant fire crews had been able to do more burns earlier in targeted areas across Victoria.

“There has never been a greater effort to make our state as fire-safe and fire-ready as possible – our emergency services are being backed by a record budget and across our state we’ve seen communities put in a massive effort to prepare,” Mr Brumby said.

“We live in one of the world’s most fire-prone areas and fuel reduction is essential to reducing the fire-risk in many parts of our state.

“We have been fortunate with a relatively mild February and early March which has meant fire crews have been able to take action early to protect Victorian communities for next summer.

“And for the first time, fire authorities have used new night goggles which are on trial from the United States and allow crews to monitor burns and fires at night from helicopters.

“Fuel reduction can only be done under certain conditions and while there are always risks in doing planned burns it is important that fire authorities seize opportunities to complete burns when and where conditions allow.

“While the combination of favourable weather conditions and the largest-ever firefighting effort has meant firefighters have been able to get on top of fires we’ve had so far this fire season, communities do need to remain vigilant.”

Mr Brumby today joined Environment and Climate Change Minister Gavin Jennings and Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) fire chief Ewan Waller at the State Control Centre to inspect progress on the DSE’s Autumn planned burns program.

The DSE has identified Ballarat and Macedon, including the Wombat State Forest corridor, the Otway Ranges, the Dandenong Ranges and Melbourne’s water supply catchments as key priorities for the Autumn burns program.

Mr Jennings said since the Autumn burns program started in mid February, 193 burns covering more than 31,000 hectares had been conducted.

“Favourable weather, early recruitment of project firefighters and strategic planning by the DSE around where and how they are doing planned burns has produced a very good result very early,” Mr Jennings said.

“Each year our project firefighters join more than 2700 permanent firefighting and support staff and this fire season we started them earlier and will keep them on longer.

“This has also meant we’ve been able to do slashing, track maintenance and other fire protection works earlier than in previous years.

“There are 600 summer fire crews who are still working and are now helping to carry out the planned burns to prepare our state for the next fire season.

“Over the past week alone the DSE have moved 11 crews of 25 firefighters each from different parts of the state to build on local resources as part of its plan to target key areas across Victoria.”

Mr Jennings said while the DSE currently used a 130,000 hectare target a minimum annual area figure for hectare burning, strategic burning that significant reduced risk around high-risk areas was a priority.

“The DSE has exceeded this target for the last three years and is committed to doing even more planned burning this year when and where conditions allow,” he said.

There have been 11 total fire ban days, one of them for the whole of Victoria, and two code-red days in parts of the state this fire

JOHN BRUMBY MP

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SHARE

season.

The new Emergency Alert system has been used to warn communities on 32 occasions in three states including Victoria, with more than 110,000 warning messages issued since its implementation in December.

The Office of the Emergency Services Commissioner last week won an Australasian Public Safety Innovation Award (APCO) for Emergency Alert, for outstanding commitment to the protection of the Australian Community. This was awarded by APCO Australasia.

The DC-10 air tanker made its first operational retardant drop on a fire in the Mallee, near Mildura, on 31 January.

The Very Large Aerial Tanker (VLAT) DC 10, dubbed Vicki, departed at the weekend for the United States following the completion of a 10-week trial. The results of the trials are being evaluated by the Bushfire Co-Operative Research Centre.