

Western Region

EVACUATION

Tell 'em why, tell 'em where, tell 'em when.



Wye River aftermath

Early Planning is the key

The Wye River-Jamieson Track fire occurred as a result of a lightning strike in the Great Otways National Park on the 19th December 2015. The fire commenced in the vicinity of Jamieson Track in difficult and steep terrain. CFA and DELWP crews with air support attacked the fire from when it was first spotted. Despite their best efforts to suppress the fire, it continued to burn in difficult and steep terrain for days.

On the 21st December, the weather forecast for the end of the week (Christmas Day) posed a significant risk to communities on the Great Ocean Road. The Incident Controller (Colac ICC) decided to conduct a burn back operation to assist in further fire suppression. Simultaneously Victoria Police members commenced to prepare traffic management and evacuation plans for Wye River and Separation Creek.

On Christmas Day about 11.00 a.m. the fire made a southerly run under extreme weather conditions towards Wye River and Separation Creek. About 11.40 a.m. an order was given to evacuate residents from these areas. In the ensuing hours under extreme weather conditions the fire destroyed 116 dwellings at the coastal hamlet. Whilst a significant number of dwellings were destroyed, importantly no lives were lost.

Preparing and enacting the evacuation plan

Response from all agencies was exceptional when they were made aware of the fire and its potential impact for the community on Christmas Day. Agency representatives quickly formed an IEMT at the ICC and the Geelong RCC.

Victoria Police planned for an evacuation at Wye River and Separation Creek as well as formalising Traffic Management Plans to support the evacuation, utilising the pre-existing and recently tested Great Ocean Road Traffic Management Plan. The evacuation management plan was implemented on Christmas Day when the fire broke containment lines. Remaining Wye River/Separation Creek residents were safely removed from harm and the Great Ocean Road was closed. The plan was again implemented on the 31st December when the fire again threatened surrounding towns.

Strong relationships with other agencies and local residents, confirmed through a sense of mutual co-operation and shared community preparations taking place prior to Christmas Day and New Year's Eve, allowed effective implementation of the evacuation and traffic management plans. ***This was the key factor for success.*** For instance, residents had been provided with a piece of ribbon to be tied to the front fence when they had left their property, saving significant time for police members facilitating the evacuation.



Preparation and training build confidence

Preparing personnel to undertake pivotal roles, such as evacuation management, when responding to emergency incidents is necessary, so in events requiring extended police presence all members can efficiently perform their duties. This involves general awareness training, key skill development and identification of those with expertise especially in planning and executing essential tasks. The value of preparedness achieved through regular exercises cannot be understated.



Aerial fire fighters at Wye River

Victoria Police need to continue to emphasise with our members their roles and responsibilities in emergency management with particular emphasis on:

- **IERC (Incident Emergency Response Coordinator)**
- **MERC (Municipal Emergency Response Coordinator)**
- **Traffic Management Planning**
- **Evacuation Management**

JSOPs 03.10 (Traffic Management) and 03.12 (Evacuation) have recently been updated to incorporate learnings from the 2015-2016 Summer season.

Early planning and exercising before a major emergency, with contribution from affected communities, is invaluable to the success in preserving life and was evidenced at Wye River. A commitment from Victoria Police members to continue practicing their emergency management roles and responsibilities regardless of the incidents that we attend on a daily basis will enhance major emergency responses.

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The Wye River-Jamieson Track fire

