

**Secretary of Committee
Select Committee on the recent Australian bushfires**

May 25, 2003

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Submission / addendum to a submission

This submission supplements the synopsis document delivered to the secretary of the committee earlier this year. The submission comes in two parts: first part deals with the proposed information program and the second addresses possible extensions to the current bush fire codes in Australia. This letter is drafted per your request during our conversation in Canberra.

Part I – Information program

Recent Australian bushfires have clearly and tragically demonstrated that Australian still, by greater percentage, remain poorly educated and ill informed as to how to prepare for and deal with a bush fire attack. The result has been horrific loss of property and lives.

While nothing is going to stop some of the devastation caused by bushfire attack, it is commonly and broadly accepted that a lot more can be done to diminish the current losses.

We maintain that one of the most critical elements demanding attention is education of the Australian community at large.

Cease-Fire Technologies Pty Ltd has clearly identified the need for a ONE STOP – NATIONAL BUSHFIRE INFORMATION / EDUCATION PROGRAM that is supported with an ongoing high profile awareness campaign and made readily accessible to all Australians 365 days a year.

The program is designed in such a way that all state authorities associated with bushfire prevention, protection will be able to participate in the program with out any demands being placed on them to alter or modify current policies, procedures or laws.

Whilst a great deal of work and resources has been invested around Australia by both state and regional bodies in an attempt to educate Australians about bushfire, the fact of the matter is that such activities are not funded by endless financial resources.



Whilst these state and regionally based educational / communication activities have for the most part been undertaken professionally, they clearly have not by greater percentage reached their mark.

The proposed program will:

- Deliver up to date and accurate information on both bushfire prevention and protection measures that should be employed by all Australians living within bushfire prone areas. (Such information will be delivered by the program on a state by state basis.)
- Provide all relevant government departments, both federal and state, with a nationally centralized, cost effective communication medium to deliver information pertaining to Australian Bush Fire Standards / Laws and associated State policies and laws to all Australians.
- Provide all state based country - urban fire fighting services and emergency services with a cost effective communication avenue to all residents within their respective states and or regions.
- Enable home / property owners to gain access to information on available products and or services that will enable them to meet with both Australian Bush Fire Code Standards and or promoted bushfire prevention protection measures.
- Provide an interactive communication - information forum where members of the public, business community and government will be able to communicate on issues in a coordinated and cost effective manner.

Request for support to establish a national pilot program

Cease-Fire Technologies Pty Ltd (The Program Promoter) respectfully seeks federal government co-operation and assistance in developing and deploying this Australia wide Bushfire Information Program.

In the first instance a grant of \$350,000 is requested to establish a pilot program that would be ready for public launch prior to the next bushfire season 2003 – 2004.

Further details of the program are contained within the Synopsis Document.

Part II – Extension to bushfire codes/standards

We propose that serious consideration should be given to establishing a **new set of Australian Standards** pertaining to **existing buildings / premises** that are located within designated bushfire-prone areas.

We firmly believe that the recent devastation that was experienced in Canberra and throughout NSW clearly indicates the need for both Federal and State Governments to address the issue of having existing buildings / homes covered under a new legislation regarding **existing buildings in bushfire-prone areas**.

The current legislation in this area is excellent **but does not cover** the issue of existing homes in our communities, *but only the construction of new buildings*.

It is envisaged that such legislation would adopt and implement as many economically practical elements as possible as is currently detailed and required in the **Australian Standard AS 3959 – June 2001 – Construction of buildings in bushfire-prone areas**.

Arguably most of the homes and buildings lost during the recent bushfires were constructed well before the introduction of any bushfire building codes, and as such were understandably ill prepared for bush fire attack.

As an isolated example, even the most fundamental requirements of having the likes of recognized ignited ember access points correctly *meshed off* throughout a home (wall vents, verandah vents, air-conditioning intake points, gaps and voids in roofing and so on) would arguably have saved many homes from the total devastation that occurred.

There are many simple yet dramatically effective measures that are detailed in AS 3959 that could be undertaken around existing homes and buildings that would cause minimal financial burden on property owners but have a dramatic impact on the number of homes that are lost during bushfire attack.

It is further proposed that the Insurance Council of Australia are invited to place consideration to encouraging the Insurance industry to create a two tier set of insurance policy premiums for property owners located within designated bushfire prone regions. Those property owners that either elect to undertake and maintain bushfire protection initiatives can be insured at a reduced premium value, while those who elect to avoid compliance with such a standard would have to pay higher premium values.



We envisage that the creation of such a policy would not be all that difficult or costly as most of the required work already exists within the current AS3959 standard.

Respectfully,



Grant Dybing
Cease-Fire Technologies Pty Ltd



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