

Number 12 | 15 November 2006

Firefighting and water replacement guidelines- Air Operations

For information

You would be aware that the State government has announced a water replacement scheme that will be introduced for drought-affected farmers whose dams are used to supply fire-fighting operations this summer.

This is a statewide scheme and if water is taken from domestic and stock or irrigation dams and if water is identified and required for essential stock and domestic services it will be replaced.

The aim is replace water supplies as soon as possible but the initial focus will be on containing the fire and essential water supplies are replaced within 48 hours.

The scheme will be part of fire recovery and the arrangements will be coordinated and delivered by the relevant Municipal Emergency Coordination Centre (MECC) and water authorities.

Both DSE and CFA are exploring greater reliance on fire fighting techniques that use less water and rely more on constructed fire breaks.

Bringing a fire under control by rapid and aggressive first attack is the primary objective for firefighting. Sourcing water from the nearest source will be critical to prevent a fire spreading.

Consideration will be given to the suitability and impact on water supplies however in extreme situations where life and property is threatened all available water will be used.

The *Country Fire Authority Act 1958* (s30 and 33) provides powers for the Country Fire Authority (CFA) and the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) to take water from any waterway or any other source of water supply; without any person being liable to any penalty or claim.

Comments

Agencies have been identifying and mapping areas and water points across the state where it is feasible to gather water for a

BRIEFING NOTE

first attack and for a sustained attack on fires.

Additional strategies that have been developed for ensuring water supply during fire suppression and to assist with continuous supply include:

- the purchase of additional floating collar tanks/portable dams,
- the establishment of a bulk water carrying fleet,
- the location of pre-filled points in public land areas and at aircraft refilling points and
- the placement of local bulk water tankers on stand-by.

Actions

Accredited air operations personnel, specifically Air Observers, Air Attack Supervisors, Aircrew of State Fleet contracted aircraft and Call When Needed tactical aircraft are requested to assist with the water replacement scheme.

Assistance will constitute the provision of information on the use of fire bombing aircraft at fires and is not exclusive to helicopter operations.

Most of the information can be derived from the AAS Operational Report. It is understood that Aircrew will supply specific information on aircraft operation only ie; number of loads and volume of suppressant delivered.

The information that is required but is not limited to consists of:

- The type of filling point- dam / river / airfield / portable / other.
- Use of reticulated/bulk supply at fill points.
- The time aircraft started using the fill point.
- The number of filling points used.
- The locations of fill points- map ref./photo.
- The number/type of aircraft-rotary/f-wing.
- Total number of uploads for each aircraft.
- Total number of uploads for each fill point.
- The approx. volume each aircraft lifted.
- Type of suppressant used water/retardant.
- If ground resources used same fill point.

All of the above information is to be submitted to the Incident Controller as soon as possible to be forwarded to the MECC to action the appropriate response for the water replacement scheme if required.

Further information

Hayden Biggs, State Aircraft Unit
Tel: 03 9412 4888.