



Training exercises need facilitators to set the scene. CALM Mundaring district fire co-ordinator Ross Mead (right), David Webster from the Bush Fires Board and Dave Mitchell from the WA Fire Brigade formed the trio that set the scene for Operation Darling Scarp.

Test becomes reality

THE first major multi-agency fire exercise in the Swan region - Operation Darling Scarp - soon became a reality as a big bushfire raged through the scarp threatening houses in the hills suburb of Bedforddale last month.

The exercise was arranged following from recommendations of the review panel that looked into the fire situation in the Darling Scarp (the Day Report) and the Lewis Review of CALM's fire management strategy.

CALM Swan region fire co-ordinator Bruce Harvey said the objectives for the exercise essentially were:

- To provide a realistic test of the control and co-ordination arrangements set down in the State emergency management policy;
- To provide a training opportunity for command and control arrangements for participating combat and support agencies;
- To promote public awareness of the fire emergency arrangements and the need for fire prevention measures.

The exercise also provided a test of communications, public information through the media, the role of the regional emergency co-ordinator, the regional decision making process and the co-ordination and setting priorities of resources.

Representatives of the three fire lead combat agencies prepared a suitable scenario that involved a big fire in the Helena Valley as well as peripheral fires and other events such as a hazardous chemical spill.

Bruce said while the exercise highlighted some short-comings, it was particularly successful in that it was the first time key agencies

had physically met to discuss control and co-ordination arrangements.

"What we didn't suspect was that in less than 24 hours, we'd be faced with a real situation where the regional management system would have to be swung into action," he said.

The Bedforddale fire was one of a number of incidents in the Swan Region on December 9 - a day that marked the beginning of a hectic 72 hours for CALM fire crews.

Bruce and Swan region manager Alan Walker formed the CALM contingent of the management team at the BFB's regional headquarters at South Guildford, ironically the site of the exercise the previous day.

Mundaring district fire co-ordinator Ross Mead was appointed planning officer on the Incident Control team.

CALM crews from Mundaring and Dwellingup also were on the fire face.

Meanwhile, Perth district manager Alan Briggs had his own hands full as CALM crews from Perth were called out late on Friday afternoon to respond to a wildfire in the Gnangara plantations.

"The regional emergency management structure gave us direct personal contact with other agencies such as the Police, SES, WAFB and the Bush Fires Board," Bruce said.

"It meant all the agencies were fully aware of what was happening and the resources we had in reserve.

"It certainly is something that will be used more in the future as the various fire fighting authorities are committed in a multi-fire situation in the Swan region."



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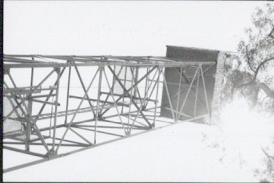
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