



CALMFire equipment manager Garry Kravainis, Mundaring district forest officer Ian Gale and tower fire spotter Kerry Gigante inspect the safety climbing harness at the new Bickley lookout tower.

Towers are back

CALM's upgraded fire surveillance effort with the reintroduction of lookout towers in the south-west forests and hills around Perth already has proven its worth with one of the worst starts to the fire season for years.

CALMFire manager Rick Sneeuwjagt said the tower network, which stretches from north of Perth to Walpole on the South Coast, was upgraded to improve response times to fire emergencies.

The towers form part of a crucial link with rapid-response spotter aircraft to lessen the time between detecting fires and mobilising suppression crews, Rick said.

"In addition to that, they enable us to maintain constant surveillance while spotter planes are doing 'recces' over fires that have broken out," he said.

"In the past, once a spotter was plotting a fire, it meant calling in aircraft from other areas, thereby creating gaps in the system but the towers overcome this problem."

Environment Minister Kevin Minson and Emergency Services Minister Bob Wiese recently inspected the new tower built at Bickley near Perth Observatory on the Darling Scarp.

Mr Minson said the towers gave line-of-sight coverage from the pines near Yanchep to Jarrahdale and provided a panorama over the Swan coastal plain.

He said effective fire suppression hinged on early warning systems, well trained fire-fighting forces, well equipped and reliable heavy duty equipment and fast attack units, and rapid and safe access for fire crews.

Mr Wiese was particularly pleased towers were being reintroduced. He said as a former bush fire control officer in Narrogin, he well remembered the towers in the Highbury and Dryandra forest areas.

"There's no doubt they picked up fires often before we did," he said.



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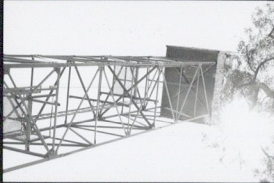
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