

Continuous training to maintain high standard

A MAJOR pre-fire season training program was run in the lead up to what has shaped up as the worst fire season for decades.

CALMFire manager Rick Sneeuwjagt said the program trained up to 50 additional fire-fighters to support CALM's existing fire crews over summer.

The Department needs a fire-fighting force of at least 220 crew throughout the south-west forest regions in summer.

According to Rick, the decision to employ and train additional fire-fighters stems from the report of the panel that reviewed CALM's fire management strategies earlier this year.

"That report found the manning levels of fire crews had fallen below required levels and when

the concern of age and fitness of the existing crews is added, emergency measures needed to be taken," he said.

"The report recommended at least 50 seasonal workers be employed to assist in prescribed burning operations and wildfire suppression for 20 weeks a year."

The course was structured on nationally-accredited lines and covered occupational health and safety, personal protection, communications, fire behaviour, fire suppression tools and techniques, fire prevention, vehicle driving and occupational stress.

"Each trainee was assessed to ensure they are competent in the knowledge and skills needed to perform effectively and safely at wildfires and

prescribed burns," Rick said.

"CALM's crews are acknowledged as the most skilled and experienced in the State when it comes to bushfires and it is imperative that this high standard is maintained."

The fire review report also provided a key contrast between the value of assets the Department protected and the amount spent on prevention and suppression.

The report noted that that CALM protects more than \$3 billion of assets in forest products alone in addition to the values of nearby homes, villages and other human developments, the ecotourism value of a uniquely beautiful flora and enormously interesting fauna and the major drinking water resources for Western Australia.

Rick said the important role CALM crews played in protecting towns, farms and other community assets from wildfire was often not recognised. The Department currently was seeking extra funding to enable this responsibility to be met.

Environment Minister Kevin Minson said the Government was committed to ensuring CALM had an effective and efficient fire-fighting force. This was why the Department had introduced a range of other measures to improve efficiency.

These included the using helicopters, new lookout towers, global positioning system satellite technology and other computer-based decision-support systems that had been developed specifically for fire management.





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