

# Municipal Fire Prevention – Best Practice Review Discussion Paper

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Beginning with the formation of its Risk Management Department in 1994, CFA progressively introduced risk management principles into its business. In the fire prevention area, risk management was facilitated by the 1997 amendments to the *CFA Act 1958*, which required each municipality to prepare and maintain a Municipal Fire Prevention Plan (MFPP). In addition, the changes provided CFA with the power to audit such plans.

To support the amendments, CFA produced the *Municipal Fire Prevention Planning Guidelines* (1997) to assist municipalities with the planning process. These *Guidelines* not only introduced risk management, they also emphasised the need to consider all fire-related events and to be inclusive of the community and other stakeholders. The *Guidelines* clearly identified that the old-style works plan also needed to be supported by a strategic management plan that municipalities could use to manage their prevention activities.

These events were the catalyst for a paradigm shift in fire prevention planning. Municipal fire prevention is no longer focused solely on wildfire. Stakeholders are beginning to develop partnerships and adopt a strategic risk-based approach to addressing all fire-related risks.

This Best Practice Review, conducted in conjunction with the CFA's 2001 MFPP audit, sought to review municipal fire prevention planning in relation to the processes and supporting structures used to develop, manage and implement the plans.

## Uptake of the Guidelines

The 2001 audit of MFPPs identified that 16 out of 63 municipalities had not successfully implemented the risk management methodology. Many municipalities have not adopted the planning approach outlined in the *Guidelines*. Evidence from the Best Practice Review revealed that many municipalities found the *Guidelines* too difficult to implement, as revealed by them engaging a consultant to develop their plan. Following the Review it is apparent the *Guidelines* need restructuring to ensure they clearly articulate the required outcomes.

**R1: The *Guidelines* should be reviewed and rewritten to:**

- **Incorporate the lessons learnt from the Best Practice Review with practical implementation examples (such as targeting risk treatments);**
- **Clarify desired outcomes that better reflect legislative responsibilities, so that fire prevention planning has a defined scope; and**
- **Demonstrate integration with other community safety planning processes (such as Emergency Management Planning).**

**R2: The new *Guidelines* will be reinforced by the development of a set of clear criteria by which municipalities will be audited.**

**R3: Additional audit powers in accordance with the *CFA Act 1958* will be pursued, to require MFPPs be implemented.**

**R4: The implementation of the revised *Guidelines* should be supported by the identification and supply of appropriate training.**

## **Alignment of CFA business plans and Municipal Fire Prevention Plans**

The Best Practice Review found few linkages between Municipal Fire Prevention Plans and CFA business plans. However, there was some evidence of CFA Area programs being included in the risk treatments identified in Municipal Fire Prevention Plans, for example, Community Fireguard Groups being referred to as a treatment for wildfire related risks.

One impediment to the alignment of CFA business plans and Municipal Fire Prevention Plans appears to have been the failure to provide clear advice to CFA personnel that coordination is desired and indeed how it can be accomplished. Those in CFA who have achieved linkages have done so by aligning their Area business plans with the strategies in Municipal Fire Prevention Plans. This has largely been a 'top down' rather than a 'bottom up' approach. Such an approach is in conflict with the tenor of the 1997 *Guidelines* which suggest that risks and corresponding treatments be identified at the local level though the fire prevention planning process. This type of process would also meet the State Government's agenda to deliver services based on community needs.

The majority of people interviewed during the Best Practice Review expressed the view that a joint approach to fire prevention planning is important for improving service delivery to the community. In order to achieve this joint approach, CFA must demonstrate that it has aligned its own business planning with the Municipal Fire Prevention Planning process.

- R5: The revised MFPP *Guidelines* will contain an increased focus on integration of business plans.**
- R6: Clear policies which detail the integration of planning process that should be developed.**
- R7: Support tools should be developed which enable business planning at Area level to include community needs.**

## **Integration of other stakeholders with Municipal fire prevention planning**

Many government, private and community agencies are currently involved in fire prevention activities. However, the Best Practice Review revealed that programs delivered by the range of stakeholders are only included sporadically in the risk treatments identified in Municipal Fire Prevention Plans. This limited coordination appears to be the result of a lack of focus on relationships between government and other service providers. Indeed, there are few arrangements that promote the management of fire safety in a holistic, cooperative and coordinated manner.

Through the Best Practice Review it was identified that one CFA Area is being proactive in integrating government and non-government sectors involved in fire prevention planning. That Area has developed a '*Municipal Fire Prevention Plan Implementation Steering Committee*'. This committee comprises agencies that are identified as responsible for treatments documented in the Fire Prevention Plans for the municipalities located in the CFA Area. The steering committee meets on a regular basis and is chaired by the CFA Manager Community Safety (MCS). It sets strategies for the implementation of the programs, and ensures that monitoring processes occur. It also provides regular reports to the relevant council and Municipal Fire Prevention Committee.

**R8: The Community Safety Directorate should seek to address the integration of fire prevention planning according to the following principles:**

- **Strategic support is required to obtain the commitment of agencies to fire prevention planning;**
- **All levels of government and stakeholders need to be involved; and**
- **Municipal Fire Prevention Planning is relevant and beneficial to each stakeholder.**

### **Functioning of Fire Prevention Committees**

Regional Fire Prevention Committees (RFPCs) and Municipal Fire Prevention Committees (MFPCs) are the primary mechanisms through which fire prevention is planned. According to the terms of reference contained in the 1997 *Guidelines*, such planning is intended to be inclusive of the community and other stakeholders. Furthermore, the plans should produce works plans as well as an integrated strategic plan to help municipalities manage the range of fire-related prevention activities.

Despite the existence of these committees, it appears that most public, private, voluntary and community stakeholders operate in isolation. Indeed, many stakeholders indicated that they did not see the current prevention committees as being relevant to them. Furthermore, it appears that committees are not well placed to fulfil a strategic planning function. MFPCs are chaired by the Municipal Fire Prevention Officers (MFPOs), usually a lower-level employee within the council structure.

A number of factors are contributing to this situation:

- The committees are regarded as being ineffective, lacking both objectives and direction;
- The committees do not serve the requirements of government and non-government agencies and hence their representation is declining;
- The membership of the committees is unrepresentative of the agencies responsible for fire prevention;
- The non-alignment of municipal boundaries with CFA and other agency boundaries does not support decision making;
- The skills and knowledge of many representatives on committees do not reflect the outputs that are required; and
- The inordinately high number of attendees to MFPCs is hampering the productivity of the meetings. Since municipal amalgamations, the average number of CFA representatives on MFPCs has increased from a State-wide average of 9 to 19 members.

Having identified the factors that are constraining the effectiveness of committees, a number of areas for improvement will be pursued. Some of these initiatives will involve elaborating on best practice identified in the field.

**R9: Guidance should be provided to clarify the role of fire prevention committees, their objectives and outcome targets.**

**R10: Supporting tools should be provided to facilitate an integrated approach to fire prevention planning both at the management and implementation levels.**

**R11: CFA should review the current Regional and Municipal Fire Prevention Committee structure.**

**R12:** The review of these committees will be based on three key principles:

- 1.** The committee structures should be inclusive and foster appropriate representation from relevant sectors. Notably, the Best Practice Review identified one CFA Area that has been able to continue using the Municipal Fire Prevention Committee as an inclusive forum for the identification of risks and developed an Area-based implementation group to drive the delivery of treatment programs identified the Municipal Fire Prevention Plan.
- 2.** The burden on CFA volunteers should be reduced wherever possible, while maintaining sufficient consideration of brigade priorities in the fire prevention planning process. Importantly, some participants in the Review considered Municipal Fire Prevention Committees and Regional Fire Prevention Committees were creating undue workload for volunteers.
- 3.** There should be no loss in legislative power; rather there should be an extension and strengthening of current legislation (for example the requirement to implement the plan). A review of Regional and Municipal Fire Prevention Committees is likely to require amendments to the *CFA Act 1958* and *CFA Regulations 1992*. The scope of such changes will only be apparent once the review is completed.

**R13:** Municipalities should allocate resources and ensure the provision of training to enable the fulfilment of MFPO duties in relation to fire prevention, based on the municipality's level of risk.