



Speech by

**Hon. MERRI ROSE**

**MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN**

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Hansard 17 November 1998

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

**Fire Safety Report**

**Hon. M. ROSE** (Currumbin—ALP) (Minister for Emergency Services) (10.12 a.m.), by leave: Last week, I officially launched a fire research report which, I am certain, will save countless lives. Fire Fatalities: Who's at Risk is a world first in that it draws from the results of coronial inquiries into fire deaths to help fire authorities plot a course of preventive action. It is a sad report in many ways, particularly for those who have suffered as a result of fire. However, it was produced in the hope that the findings would lead to safer communities in Queensland.

The final report unearths some tragic, but extremely useful, information about fire death trends, and who and what we should be targeting in terms of fire safety awareness campaigns. It confirms firefighters' long-held beliefs that many fire fatalities occur before fire services are notified. The report also tells us that the majority of fatal home fires happen when residents are asleep and are unlikely to notice the initial stages of a fire. Even if they do wake, the smoke and poisonous gases that emanate from a fire cause people to become confused and disoriented, making it difficult for them to escape.

The report provides statistical proof of who faces the most threat from structural fires. It tells us that those most at risk of dying in fires are people aged over 65, children under five years old, people not in the work force, people living in private rental properties and those affected by alcohol. Another finding, and one which the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority has been pushing for years, is that most fire deaths are accidental and therefore preventable. In the five years between 1 July 1991 and 30 June 1996, the years covered in the report, 101 people perished in 79 structural fires in Queensland. Over the past two years there has been a total of nine fire fatalities.

The importance of smoke alarms in saving lives cannot be underestimated, but still more than one million Queenslanders are living in homes without that protection. Many of those are living in private rental properties. One in three Queenslanders lives in rented accommodation. In all, around 57% of Queensland homes have smoke alarms. This year we aim to boost that figure to 65%. Then we must strive to have all Queensland buildings fitted with smoke alarms.

Fire is one of the most destructive forces in our society. Each year in Australia, dozens of people die in structural blazes and many more suffer horrific burns and injuries. The financial, social and emotional costs of fire are very high. In the past financial year in Queensland, the total cost of fire damage to property was more than \$100m. Of that, close to half was the cost of damage to structures including domestic, commercial and industrial buildings. The value of property saved by our fire services would be many times that figure.

For the past five years the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority has placed an increasing emphasis on preventive strategies as a means of further reducing the loss of life, level of injury and loss of property resulting from fire. Those public education programs have undoubtedly contributed to the reduction in fire deaths. We all have a role to play in helping the QFRA educate the public about fire safety. We all need to work with the fire services to minimise fire fatalities. Business, industry, insurance organisations, community welfare groups, tertiary institutions and Government agencies can all make a difference by influencing and educating those people in the community most at risk from fatal fires.

One fire death is one too many. I pose this question to every Queenslanders: are you prepared for fire in your home, on your boat, in your rental premises, and in your workplace? If the answer is no, help is as close as a phone call to your nearest fire station. Firefighters are ready, willing and able to help. The advice may save your life or that of a loved one.