



Speech by

**Hon. MERRI ROSE**

**MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN**

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Hansard 28 October 1999

**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

**Fire Awareness Week**

**Hon. M. ROSE** (Currumbin—ALP) (Minister for Emergency Services) (10.04 a.m.), by leave: Eighteen Queenslanders have died in house fires so far this year. This is an alarming and tragic statistic. It is also a frustrating statistic for Queensland's thousands of dedicated firefighters—both rural and urban. Recent research conducted by the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority into domestic fire fatalities has shown that many were preventable. For this reason, educating the public about fire prevention and safety has become a major part of a firefighter's job. In 1997 and 1998, their hard work had begun to pay off with a dramatic drop in fire-related deaths. In 1997 there were five domestic fire deaths; last year it was down to four. This year's aberration suggests a level of complacency has begun to creep into the community, despite the constant, dedicated efforts of our firefighters.

No-one knows better than firefighters the costly, and sometimes deadly, consequences of fire—one of the most destructive, devastating and terrifying forces of nature. Across Australia this week, they have teamed up with the Fire Protection Association of Australia for Fire Awareness Week. They will be out in force to spread the fire safety message. Over the years, they have developed a number of highly successful public awareness campaigns that, without a doubt, have helped to save lives. They have taught lifesaving messages to more than 50,000 Year 1 students around the State through the Fire Ed program. They have worked with children identified as fire setters to help them break the habit through the Fight Fire Fascination program. In conjunction with Rotary and RACQ-GIO they have installed smoke alarms in the homes of thousands of elderly Queenslanders through the Smoke Out program. They have provided householders with important fire safety advice through Operation Safe Home. And this year retired firefighters will take the message to elderly Queenslanders through Seniors Fire Ed.

The State Government is proud to be able to support our firefighters in their fire safety endeavours. This year, we have provided them with a record \$19m public safety budget. This money will be channelled into a range of projects, including new and expanded fire prevention and safety initiatives. A total of \$6.5m will be spent on fire safety inspections and advice, while \$4.6m will go towards public education campaigns. Around \$1.5m has been allocated to fire education and safety programs in schools and existing programs such as Fire Ed, Operation Safe Home, Fight Fire Fascination and Seniors Fire Ed will be further developed and expanded. Money will also be spent on fire investigation to help determine the cause of fires, which may help to prevent them in the future.

The QFRA's public education campaigns continue to be highly successful, but the mounting fire death toll this year proves that we must continue to be vigilant. We need to work together to prevent, or at least minimise, fire-related death and injury. Mr Speaker, as any firefighter will tell you, the only thing more frightening than waking up in a fire, is not waking up at all. Protecting yourself and your family from fire is not hard, nor is it expensive. Smoke alarms are one of the cheapest forms of life insurance you can get, while developing and practising a home evacuation plan with your family will take only a few minutes of your time. People also need to consider having a fire extinguisher and fire blanket on hand.

I urge Queenslanders without smoke alarms in their homes to make the decision during Fire Awareness Week to have one installed. If they already have smoke alarms in their homes, they should think about putting an evacuation plan in place or investing in a fire extinguisher or fire blanket. A better-prepared community is a safer community.