



Speech by

Hon. MERRI ROSE

MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Fire Deaths

Hon. M. ROSE (Currumbin—ALP) (Minister for Emergency Services) (10.14 a.m.), by leave: December is traditionally Queensland's worst month for fire deaths. I cannot stress enough the need for Queenslanders to take extra care this month and throughout the festive season to reduce the risk of tragedy. The Fire Fatalities: Who's At Risk? report, which was released last year, highlighted that the festive season could easily turn into tragedy for Queenslanders. The research report found that on average more people died in Queensland in preventable fires during the month of December than in any other month of the year.

Firefighters believed that the casual mood leading up to Christmas, combined with alcohol, might be a contributing factor to the increase in domestic fire deaths. Often people become complacent about fire safety during the festive season, and that can be disastrous, if not tragic. Because it is a holiday period, many people are often out of their normal environment and may not take the same care and safety precautions they would at home.

Firefighters highlight a wide range of potential fire causes over summer, including faulty fairy lights, fans, airconditioning units, televisions and dryers, neglected mosquito coils and candles, and water getting into electrical wiring. It goes without saying that parents should not allow their children to have access to matches or cigarette lighters. Only yesterday a three-year-old child playing with a lighter started a fire in Mount Isa which extensively damaged a home. Luckily, no-one was injured.

It disturbs me, as I am sure it would every member of the House, that there have been 19 fire deaths in Queensland so far this year. At least seven of those deaths are considered by firefighters to have been preventable. That is almost double the four preventable deaths last year—and we still have December and the festive season ahead of us. Firefighters are not being sensationalist when they plead for people to take extra precautions. They are being realistic. They have seen the horror of fire deaths and the tragic aftermath for families that have lost loved ones.

People cannot afford to be complacent about fire safety for their own sake or for the sake of their families. If people are staying in holiday accommodation over the Christmas season, they should check if there are smoke alarms and have an evacuation plan in place. People should not assume that they are immune from fire simply because they are on holidays. If they are at home, they should not become complacent. They should take exactly the same precautions. Fire is a deadly enemy.

The Fire Fatalities: Who's at Risk? report revealed that 101 people died in domestic fires in Queensland from 1991 to 1996. Seventeen of those deaths occurred in December. These tragic statistics went against the national trend, which showed that people in other States and Territories were more likely to die in a fire during the winter months. Winter 1999 has been horrific in terms of fire deaths. Let us all make sure that we do not follow it with a tragic festive season. Smoke alarms make an ideal Christmas present. They provide early warning of fires and give people valuable time to evacuate the home or building. They are inexpensive and proven lifesavers. I recommend that people who already have battery operated smoke alarms installed in their homes check to ensure they are working. The life they may save could be their own or that of a family member or friend.