

Question on Notice No. 548, Wednesday, 19 May 2004

Mr Fraser asked the Minister for Emergency Services (Mr Cummins) –

With reference to research which shows that more people die in house fires between June and September compared to other months –

What advice can he provide for residents to reduce the risk of the tragedy of house fires?

Mr CUMMINS:

Queensland Fire and Rescue Service (QFRS) is constantly making use of research it has conducted to reduce the risk of house fires.

Research, undertaken by officers from the QFRS in my department, has shown that 55% of all structural fire fatalities between 1 July 1991 and 30 June 2000 occurred in the cooler months of June, July, August and September.

The QFRS officers are committed to reducing the occurrence of death, injury and property loss due to fire. Officers have continued their emphasis on community safety initiatives to educate the Queensland community about fire safety.

The service continues to promote smoke alarm installations through mass media campaigns, printed promotional material, and the installation of smoke alarm message is a key element of fire safety education conducted in schools. The installation of smoke alarms is also a key element of the Operation Safehome Program which involves operational firefighters being invited into the homes of people to advise on fire and other general home safety issues.

In the financial year 2002-2003, QFRS staff installed 4,256 smoke alarms as part of visits to private residences.

Findings from the Queensland Household Survey 2003 showed that 72% of Queensland homes now have operational smoke alarms installed, up 0.6% from the previous year. While these results are encouraging, my department is committed to ensuring the safety of the Queensland community by investigating ways in which households across the State can be encouraged to increase smoke alarms installation and improve maintenance.

A specific winter fire safety campaign, developed by officers from my Department will focus on major fire issues such as the installation of smoke alarms, home fire prevention and domestic fire evacuation plans. This year the key target groups for the winter campaign will be elderly people and people living in rental accommodation.

The campaign will begin on June 1, the first official day of winter. It will run through to the end of August with a range of media and community based activities, highlighting fire safety issues being run across the State.

Some important advice I can give the people of Queensland at the start of the cooler season is to take a moment to think about how you can improve fire safety in your home.

If you haven't got smoke alarms, go out and buy some, and if you already have them, make sure that they're working properly. Also, work out an escape plan to ensure the best way to get out of your home should a fire occur.

Simple steps like this can give you vital seconds you need to survive a fire, but it is also worth adopting a few safety habits recommended by the QFRS.

These include:

- Turning electrical blankets off before getting into bed;
- Ensuring appliances are turned off at the wall and home fires are extinguished when not in use;
- Getting your appliances checked for frayed and damaged cords by a licensed electrician;
- When using a clothes dryer, allow your dryer to go through the fully cycle, including cool down, and remember to clean out the lint filter after use!

Many house fires can be prevented, and this winter Queensland firefighters will continue with their proactive approach to fire safety.