



In the face of adversity neighbours count on each other

As the full horror of the worst natural disaster in Australia's history begins to be understood, heroic tales of neighbours joining together to save lives and protect their communities have begun to emerge.

In Victoria 31 fires are burning, at least 108 people have died, 750 homes have so far been destroyed and an estimated 5000 people are now homeless. 330,000ha has been burned out and authorities are warning some blazes may burn for weeks.

Around 3000 CFA volunteers, 3500 DSE firefighters and resources from other states are tackling the Victorian infernos. Over 500 Australian Red Cross volunteers are registering evacuees, providing first aid and supplying meals to fire victims and firefighters.

"While the devastation has been widespread the danger continues and many communities in North East Victoria remain under very serious threat," said Neighbour Day founder Andrew Heslop.

"Already stories of neighbours risking their lives for each other are being told. In one instance near the fatal Kinglake inferno a man found his neighbour on fire and immersed him in a swimming pool for over six hours until emergency services could get through.

"In another incident a man hid behind his hot water system with a wet blanket over his head while hosing his neighbour's home.

"Sadly whole towns like Marysville and smaller villages have been destroyed but the overwhelming message from survivors is that their communities will be rebuilt. Residents who have lost homes are absolutely resolute – they will stay and rebuild.

"We have not yet begun to appreciate the full horror of these fires and in some instances the worst is yet to come. As disaster areas move into recovery phase Australians must reach out to the people who have lost everything by donating money to buy clothes, food and blankets.

"But we must wholeheartedly thank the brave CFA volunteers who are continuing to put their lives on the line to prevent further carnage," Andrew said.

Neighbour Day - Australia's annual celebration of community - is always held on the last Sunday in March (*Sunday 29th March 2009*).

For more information visit www.neighbourday.org

To support bushfire victims and their families donate to the **Australian Red Cross Bushfire Appeal** at www.redcross.org.au or call **1800 811 700**.

FOR MEDIA INFORMATION ONLY

Andrew Heslop
Founder - Neighbour Day
0404 038 106

Released 09.02.2009