

WELLBEING IN FOCUS

Australian Red Cross, in partnership with the City of Swan and the Shire of Mundaring, has recently started a new round of outreach visiting residents in the area.

Red Cross acknowledges that community members affected by the Wooroloo bushfire are still going through a difficult time, especially given the long, wet winter that we have experienced. At this point in the community recovery, it is normal to sometimes feel tired, upset or anxious.

There is a lot of information to process and decisions to make which can feel overwhelming. Red Cross says it is important to prioritise your wellbeing and that of your family and take time out for activities you enjoy. Connection with loved ones, trusted friends and neighbours is very important.

Recovery project officers Andrew Maytom and Lauren Holmes, and a team of Red Cross volunteers, are visiting homes in the Shire of Mundaring and the City of Swan at weekends, providing an opportunity for residents to have a conversation.

There are also several community connection events hosted by the City of Swan, Shire of Mundaring, Department of Communities, Bendigo Bank, Parky Care and Country Women's Association, and Red Cross will be available at these events to chat.

Alternatively, the team can be contacted via email at wa_recovery@redcross.org.au

RED CROSS TIPS

Normal stress reactions:

- Finding it hard to think, concentrate and remember details
- Feeling tired, frustrated, upset, sad or moody
- Muscle tension
- Headaches, nausea
- Restlessness, unable to relax
- Problems sleeping

How to look after yourself:

- Minimise exposure to media coverage
- Talk to people you trust about the event and your reactions
- Take extra care of yourself
- Acknowledge you have been through a highly stressful event
- Allow time for memories, dreams or flashbacks to fade
- Take time for leisure and pursue activities that give you feelings of enjoyment and satisfaction

How to help others:

- Spend time with friends and family
- Offer support and listen
- Help with practical tasks and chores
- Give people time, space and patience
- Don't try to talk people out of their reactions

ABC Listen's new podcast series "After the Disaster" featuring Dr Kate Brady from the Red Cross is a recommended resource for anyone impacted by a disaster.

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If you have any feedback or content ideas please contact wooroloo@dfes.wa.gov.au





MESSAGE FROM THE STATE RECOVERY CONTROLLER, DR RON EDWARDS

It is wonderful to look around the local area and see signs of the physical work that has been undertaken to clean-up and start rebuilding following the Woorloo bushfire.

Significantly, the residential clean-up program has now reached practical completion on all 135 registered properties. This is an important milestone and the result of a huge effort from all contributing parties. I am sure it will be a relief for the landowners and residents involved to now be able to take the next steps in their lives.

That said, I understand that recovery is a complex journey and there are many more aspects to it than physical recovery alone. Dealing with the aftermath of a bushfire and the effort of picking yourself up and starting again can certainly take its toll on even the strongest of individuals.

I encourage everyone to stay connected. There are community centres in both Gidgegannup and Woorloo where you can find a friendly ear and links to support services, as well as regular events where people can come together. The City of Swan, Shire of Mundaring, Department of Communities, Australian Red Cross and many other organisations are working together to provide a solid support network and ensure that people receive any assistance they might need.

I commend these organisations for their ongoing efforts and I strongly encourage you to reach out for support if and when you need it.

To find out how you can access support services, please visit the City of Swan, the Shire of Mundaring, or call the Disaster Response Hotline on 1800 032 965.

ANIMAL WELFARE PLAN ACTIVATED

The Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD) activated its State Support Plan – Animal Welfare in Emergencies for the first time during the Woorloo bushfire.

The role of the plan is to coordinate animal welfare efforts and provide local government authorities with resources to assess and manage impacted animals.

DPIRD staff coordinated the plan’s implementation from the Mundaring Control Centre, while others supported the response from several locations.

Incident and Emergency Management Director Pamela l’Anson said as part of the plan, veterinary response teams visited impacted properties within the fireground.

“Up to 40 veterinary professionals were involved each day, many who volunteered their time, with 756 animals and wildlife assessed and/or treated,” she said.

“We also worked closely with Committee for Animal Welfare in Emergencies members, Swan, Mundaring and Wanneroo council staff, as well as local community groups, associations and volunteers.

“This was to coordinate the response efforts, including setting up animal evacuation points, identifying

locations for feed distribution points and managing reports to the control centre on numbers of animals assessed/treated.”

Ms l’Anson said it was a great effort by everyone involved.

“There were good outcomes with most of the animals that we assessed found alive and well,” she said.

In all, twenty-one DPIRD staff supported the response, including vets, compliance and project officers, administration, mapping and public information staff, the Incident and Emergency Management Branch, as well as a senior biosecurity officer, livestock director and deputy director general.



More than 750 animals were assessed



DPIRD emergency response manager Cherie Sandilands (left), State Animal Welfare Emergency Coordinator Brett Hopley, Director General Ralph Addis and Deputy Director General Sustainability and Biosecurity Heather Brayford review activities at the Mundaring control centre during the Woorloo bushfire response

WILDLIFE RESCUE

In the wake of a major bushfire the recovery focus tends naturally to fall on people and property. But the impact of fire on wildlife is significant, with countless animals, reptiles and birds killed, injured or displaced every time a big area of bushland goes up in flames.

Historically in Western Australia there has not been a coordinated approach to the welfare of wildlife during the response and recovery period. However, the Wooroloo bushfire was different with the State Support Plan – Animal Welfare in Emergencies activated for the first time by the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development (DPIRD).

This meant a small team of wildlife rescue specialists from not-for-profit organisation WA Wildlife, including a senior vet and vet nurse, were able to enter the fire ground under escort and attend to wildlife. One member of the team, WA Wildlife Director of Operations Dean Huxley, said they rescued and transported 10 animals for treatment at the WA Wildlife Hospital in Bibra Lake.

WA Wildlife Chief Executive Officer Diane Munrowd said a positive result of the activation of the State Support Plan was the recognition of wildlife

as a priority during a bushfire, and the group commended DPIRD for its actions.

She said lessons identified from the first experience under the State Support Plan would help guide future responses by animal rescuers.

The plan was active for a week, giving rescuers a short window of time to enter the fire zone. WA Wildlife is now working with DPIRD to review the operational plan to potentially enable wildlife rescue teams a longer period of access as it is not until days and weeks after the fire that many wildlife will emerge, some injured and some not.

One important outcome for WA Wildlife was obtaining funding from global conservation body World Wildlife Fund to train veterinary professionals in wildlife medicine with an emphasis on treating burns. Dean is hopeful that the two-year funding will be enough to reach all veterinary professionals in WA.

Diane said models developed across Australia in response to bushfire and recovery efforts supported the concept of having licensed and trained recovery teams for wildlife. These teams would be trained in bushfire safety and licensed/insured by relevant government authorities.

Consisting of veterinarians, experienced wildlife practitioners, animal control agents and local rangers, the teams would be allowed on the fire ground, and would have the responsibility to capture and transport injured wildlife to wildlife hospitals and rehabilitation centres and local rehabilitation groups.

“A veterinarian and vet nurse will be appointed in October,” Diane said. “Initial contact with the veterinary industry will begin soon after to determine the design of the training, which will be available online and be specific to WA needs.”

Another outcome of the Wooroloo bushfire was WA Wildlife joining forces with fellow not-for-profit groups Native Animal Rescue, Kanyana Wildlife Rehabilitation Centre and Darling Range Wildlife Centre to form the Wildlife Emergency Response Group.

Diane said the group would address a range of issues around helping wildlife during bushfires. She said the four wildlife centres were very supportive of DPIRD’s initiatives.

“The Wildlife Emergency Response Group is committed to working closely with Government to ensure the safety and care of wildlife affected by future bushfires,” she said.



ALL FENCED IN

The massive scale and sheer hard work of replacing important infrastructure such as fencing can be a daunting prospect for landowners in the aftermath of a bushfire. In the case of the Wooroloo bushfire, as with countless disasters across the country in the past 12 years, the volunteer-based organisation BlazeAid came to the rescue.

BlazeAid mobilises in areas impacted by fire, flood or drought, providing practical support to rebuild fences and structures, and to also lift the spirits of people going through the toughest of situations. Following the Wooroloo bushfire, BlazeAid quickly swung into action with work to rebuild fencing beginning on 15 February, just two weeks after the fire started and only a week after roads were cleared and opened.

From a base camp at the State Equestrian Centre in Brigadoon, teams of volunteers set to work

clearing burnt and damaged fencing and erecting new fences on 168 properties across the fire zone. In all, 89 kilometres of fence line was cleared by the volunteers and 130 kilometres of new fence installed.

Starting in the wake of the Black Saturday fires in Victoria in 2009 when neighbours, friends and families came together to help rebuild fences, BlazeAid is entirely volunteer-based. Camp Coordinator Jo Delaney said a total of 356 volunteers joined the effort, some for a day and others for the full four and a half months until the completion of the campaign at the end of June.

“Ninety-five per cent of the volunteers in Wooroloo were inexperienced with fencing but we were able to put them in teams with experienced volunteers and get them trained up,” Jo said.

Gidgegannup landowner David Massie is grateful for the support he received from BlazeAid, who put up 550 metres of boundary fence of his 32

hectare Tilden Park property over the course of a week.

“After the fire, we were in shock. We didn’t know where to start,” he said. “It was great to see something physical happening as the new fencing went up. It felt like we were making progress.”

“They did more than just build a fence. Their work around the fire zone was great for community morale and our recovery.”



Volunteers Joseph and Jules at work

CLEAN-UP COMPLETE

Major work is now complete on all properties registered for the Wooroloo Bushfire Residential Coordinated Clean-up Program, bringing to an end the demolition and waste removal phase.

Taking just over four months, the clean-up has ensured the safe removal of bushfire damaged waste from 135 properties to enable community members to rebuild.

The Department of Water and Environmental Regulation’s (DWER) Director Operations, Compliance and Enforcement Shaun Hodges said reaching this stage was a significant milestone in the community’s recovery journey.

“The overwhelmingly positive feedback received from residents demonstrates the great work of the contractors from GHD, McMahon and Thuroona who were involved,” Shaun said.

“The diligence and consideration they’ve shown while also working to a tight schedule has been remarkable.”

Sponsored by the contractors, an end of clean-up community event was held on Tuesday 7 September enabling residents and contractors to mingle and acknowledge the program coming to its completion.



Representatives from DFES, DWER, GHD, McMahon Services and Thuroona Services met recently to share observations about the clean-up operations, as part of the program’s evaluation

John Edwell from McMahon Services said they were proud to be involved.

“The occasion marked not only the completion of the demolition phase but provided an opportunity for all parties to gather informally and share their experiences,” John said.

A large proportion of the waste from property clean-ups is being recycled for use, including 8,829 cubic metres of rubble and 108 tonnes of metal. Some of the recycled material is used to make road base, as well as other uses including retaining walls and landscaping, drainage and filtering applications.

The next step in the program is to complete the Site Completion Reports for each property and then issue Completion Certificates to landowners. There may be some remedial work that arises as part of this process.

The program is overseen by DWER, in collaboration with the City of Swan, the Shire of Mundaring, the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and the Department of Communities.

The Wooroloo Bushfire Coordinated Residential Clean-up Program is jointly funded through the Commonwealth-State Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements.

