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General

Unions express sadness at bushfire losses and pledge \$250,000 to Red Cross appeal

09 February 2009

The ASU and the Australian Council of Trade Unions have today expressed their sadness and condolences at the tragic loss of more than 100 lives in the bushfires that swept Victoria over the weekend.

The ACTU and its affiliates have today pledged at least \$250,000 to the national appeal for the victims of the bushfires, and called on Australia's 2 million union members and their families to dig deep.

ACTU President Sharan Burrow said union leaders this morning had decided to make the donation to the national appeal being co-ordinated by the Australian Red Cross.

"We are shocked at the immense human loss and level of devastation inflicted by these bushfires," Ms Burrow said.

"The thoughts of the entire union movement goes out to the victims at this time.

"These include union members and their families who have lost their lives, and those whose livelihoods have been devastated."

Given the ASU's significant rural and regional membership, particularly through our local government coverage, we know that many of our members are directly affected by the bushfires, either through direct experience or involvement in emergency services or both (see the ALGA media release below for more information). The ASU is donating to the coordinated union fund raising effort and we encourage our members and friends to do the same.

Ms Burrow said unions stood ready to support members, including emergency service personnel involved in fighting the fires, the healthcare and government workers caring for the many thousands of people affected, the media workers who are covering the events as they are unfolding, and countless others caught up in this horror.

"We are asking our members to donate to the Red Cross Appeal by calling 1800 811 700 to make a credit card donation or log onto www.redcross.org.au," Ms Burrow said.

"We are encouraging union members to take up a collection in their workplace and for employers to match whatever is raised.

"Union members who know of a colleague or relative experiencing hardship because of the bushfires should contact Unions Australia on 1300 4 UNION, or email appeal@actu.asn.au, so that support can be arranged.

"A special page has been set up on the ACTU website at www.actu.asn.au/bushfireappeal to provide up to date information about unions' support for bushfire victims."

Victorian bushfires - local government role praised

Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) media release February 9, 2009

The President of the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA), Cr Geoff Lake, today praised the efforts of local councils for the role they are playing in the response to the Victorian bushfire disaster.

"Councils play a critical but often unrecognised role in responding to these types of catastrophic events," Cr Lake said.

"In all affected areas, councils are working around the clock supporting emergency services and their local communities.

"The work of councils is only just beginning. Councils will lead the community recovery effort which, given the unprecedented scale of loss and damage in many communities, will last for years," Cr Lake said.

During an emergency local government supports emergency services by providing vital resources and local knowledge of vulnerable communities, property and infrastructure.

Councils are responsible for establishing relief centres for displaced and stressed members of the community and coordinating counselling and other personal support services.

There are more than 25 relief centres currently operating in Victoria.

"The role played by councils in an emergency is not as visible as the firefighters on the frontline, however it is no less important in protecting, safeguarding and rebuilding devastated communities.

Councils from parts of Victoria unaffected by the fires are now providing staff and other resources to councils in the areas most hit by the fires to assist with the huge task ahead.

"I also want to recognise the role being played by councils in other parts of Australia responding to other emergencies at the moment. From the major flooding in north Queensland to bushfires still underway in other states, particularly in New South Wales, councils are performing an invaluable role in assisting affected communities," Cr Lake concluded.

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