

REPORTS

The AFAC Knowledge Web

*September 2008 will see the launch of the AFAC Knowledge Web;
Australasia's largest cross jurisdiction repository of fire and emergency service information.
By Jay Gleeson, AFAC Communications Manager*

The fire and emergency service industry will soon have a new central resource for the sharing of information. Construction has begun on the AFAC Knowledge Web, a web based information portal for the fire and emergency service industry that will play a key role in the Fire Knowledge Network.

The Fire Knowledge Network was developed after the Bushfire CRC received additional funding from DEST in 2004 for increased communication and public outreach programs. The primary audience for the Fire Knowledge Network was the fire and land management agencies around Australasia and the general public.

The intent of the Fire Knowledge Network was to be user driven by the needs of the agencies and to become a permanent, long term entity that acts as the focal point for fire knowledge within Australia, New Zealand and globally. Its value would be in its ability to link research and knowledge to practice and to create an inclusive community for the exchange of information and experience.

The Fire Knowledge Network project took a holistic approach to knowledge sharing by incorporating the various aspects of people, technology, process and content as part of its overall development. One key element of this project was a series of events, run by the Bushfire CRC, as part the Network's public outreach program. Between 2004 and 2007 the Bushfire CRC ran approximately 20 events, including the Bushfire Forum held in Canberra in 2007.

The second key element of the Network was a web based application (the Knowledge Web) for the sharing of fire and emergency knowledge and experiences. Finally a third element was a range of publications generated by the Network's activities and outputs of the Bushfire CRC.

Considerable effort went into the development of the website with a large amount of agency consultation undertaken to understand user needs and what agencies would value in a Fire Knowledge Network website. The results of these consultations were captured in various reports which then fed into the development of a prototype website design. The prototype was further developed and refined through additional testing with agencies.

During this time marketing and branding activities were conducted to raise the awareness and profile of the Network and a range of executive briefings, public forums and workshops were conducted.

After the consultation process, some core elements were developed for the Fire Knowledge Network website project, including:

- A database of research material, reports and summaries
- A database of lessons learnt (case studies) reports and summaries
- Latest news and events
- Moderated forums, collaborative workspaces and communities of practice
- Operational knowledge and resources
- A primary online information dissemination system
- Public and secure (member) areas of the site
- AFAC Group working areas

As the Bushfire CRC entered its fifth year it began to move into its knowledge transfer and adoption stage. For the Fire Knowledge Network project this meant taking the concepts developed from the research and consultation stage of the project and making them a reality.

To achieve this, in October 2007 Bushfire CRC began discussions with AFAC on the best means of delivering the website aspect of the Fire Knowledge Network project to the industry and wider public. Both organisations decided to undertake a collaborative approach to the project with AFAC coming on board to provide the infrastructure, people networks and content development skills to make it a reality.

AFAC and Bushfire CRC began a tender process at the end of 2007 and chose a content management system and website developer before the end of the year. In January 2008 the construction of the website got underway.

Since construction began the original prototype for the website element of the Fire Knowledge Network has been further progressed to draw in a wider cache of

information. When the project team started reviewing the material being submitted by agencies they quickly realised extra areas of the site would need to be created. So along with the original concepts focusing on research and lessons learnt material (case studies, reports, inquiries) the site will now draw in information from areas such as:

- Management and administration
- Business development
- Learning and development
- Professional development
- Community safety

Other areas may be added as they are identified.

When thinking about improvements to emergency service and what has been learned from experience, we naturally think of the emergency itself and what was learnt from the incident and the operational procedures that stood behind it. What is often overlooked is the amount of improvement and learning that occurs in the areas of management, business development, training and professional development. The sharing of this information helps support agencies in the design and development of their processes and procedures. The potential for saving time and avoiding duplication through this sharing is significant and supports the industry's desire to have a more consistent approach to service delivery across Australasia.

The website, to be known as the AFAC Knowledge Web, is being designed to facilitate the transfer of information through, interaction, collaboration and sharing. AFAC Groups will use the website to progress their work in an online environment. Each Group will have its own collaborative work space where they can share documents, post comments and co-author papers. The sites forum function will allow AFAC to seek a wider array of comment and feedback when developing positions on national issues.

The website will also use the forum features to develop (over time) a range of communities of interest who can share experiences in an online environment. As the website is utilizing an enterprise content management system the natural evolution of the site will see each agency being able to contribute, author and edit its own content; ensuring this web resource is owned, operated and developed for the industry, by the industry.

The launch of the AFAC Knowledge Web in September will be the beginning of a new era in knowledge and resource sharing for the fire and emergency service industries. It will make up a key piece of the Fire Knowledge Network and provide another avenue for information dissemination throughout the industry. As well as sharing knowledge from agencies in Australasia, AFAC and the Bushfire CRC are working to forge agreements and partnerships with

international fire agencies to make the Knowledge Web a truly global resource.

For more information on the AFAC Knowledge Web visit www.afac.com.au or email jay.gleeson@afac.com.au

Key Areas of information exchange on the AFAC Knowledge Web

Research

- Bushfire
- Structure fire
- Hazmat
- Rescue

Case studies (lessons learnt)

- Bushfire
- Structure fire
- Hazmat
- Rescue

Operations

- Standing orders and standing operating procedures
- Incident management information
- Manuals
- Mous and agreements
- Specifications
- OH&S material

Community Safety

- Education programs
- Fire Engineering
- Alerting and communication

Business Management

- Agency profiles
- Collaborative Purchasing
- Legal
- Performance Reporting
- People management
- Volunteering

Interoperability

- Business processes
- Information management
- Technical Standards

Professional Development

- Training resources and programs
- Leadership development
- Resources
- Recruitment