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2 July 2012

Ms Leyla Stefano
Coroner's Registrar
Coroners Court of Victoria
Level 11, 222 Exhibition Street
MELBOURNE VIC 3000

Dear Ms. Stefano

ABDULLAH KOCOGLU

I refer to your correspondence of 5 April 2012 enclosing the inquest finding and recommendations made by Coroner Parkinson into the death of four-year-old Abdullah Kocoglu on 24 April 2011 as a result of injuries sustained in a fire on 14 February 2011.

The circumstances surrounding the death of Abdullah Kocoglu are tragic and this tragedy could have been prevented. It is important that members of the community understand the risks associated with children having access to fire lighting implements and that we are all responsible for fire safety.

Fire services have a role to play in raising awareness and educating the community about fire risks so that community members can implement strategies to ensure their own safety and that of persons under their care.

RECOMMENDATIONS

I note that Coroner Parkinson made the following recommendations at the conclusion of the inquest:

1. That fire and child safety authorities give consideration to a public safety campaign reminding parents and householders of the need to review the safety of their household if young children are likely to attend the premises.
2. That fire and child safety authorities give consideration to a public safety campaign reminding parents and householders that matches and other fire lighting implements should be stored safely and out of the reach of young children.

There are a number of existing CFA and joint CFA/ MFB Community Education Programs addressing the child focussed fire safety concerns referred to in these recommendations as discussed further below. In addition, both CFA and MFB work together to deliver public awareness campaigns on home fire safety each year to attempt to reduce the incidence of house fires in Victoria. Further details of these campaigns are also set out below.

COMMUNITY EDUCATION IN CFA

CFA is responsible for delivering community safety outcomes to 3.3 million Victorians over an area of about 226,000km. A task this large requires a regional approach to service delivery. At CFA Headquarters, located in Melbourne's eastern suburbs, a team of professionals is engaged in evidence based policy and program development. This team provides a range of community education programs and awareness campaigns for delivery throughout the state.

Region based Community Education Coordinators develop service delivery plans tailored to the needs of their communities. These plans include consideration of risk factors particular to community diversity, newly arrived families and other vulnerable groups. The programs are delivered by a range of paid CFA firefighters, volunteers and CFA staff members throughout the state who are trained in delivering CFA's programs.

CURRENT RELEVANT CFA PROGRAMS

Early Fire Safe

Early Fire Safe, last updated in 2008, is an educational program delivered by fire service personnel in both CFA and MFB.

The program is aimed at parents and carers of young children and is often delivered via new mothers' groups at maternal and child health centres in small groups. The aim of the program is to raise awareness of the causes of burns and scalds to children under the age of five and how to prevent these injuries.

Key messages of the program are:

- Children under the age of five are particularly vulnerable to burns/scalds;
- Fire, burn and scald injuries are preventable;
- Children under the age of five do not recognise danger or know how to protect themselves;
- Many children show an interest in fire at an early age;
- Home fire safety considerations (especially that matches and lighters should be locked away).

A key principle of the program is that the safety of very young children is best ensured by the people responsible for their daily care and protection.

By attending a 45-60 minute presentation, usually at a public venue like a maternal and child health centre, participants can increase their awareness, allowing them to foresee dangers and take actions to prevent these injuries.

This program is particularly aimed at highlighting the need for parental supervision of children around burns sources and provides strategies and suggested resources for preventing/restricting access to fire and heat sources. The program has a very strong emphasis on parental responsibility.

Fire Safe Kids

It is important that young children understand fire danger and are equipped to take simple actions to protect themselves. The Fire Safe Kids program and associated materials have been developed in conjunction with CFA personnel and teachers. The program is delivered in schools by CFA volunteers who have been trained to deliver the program. Fire Safe Kids is a complete review of the program previously known as Brigades in Schools which was

initially developed in 1997. Fire Safe Kids was launched in early 2011 and since then nearly 25,000 primary school aged children have participated in the program.

The lessons have strong links to the Victorian curriculum, support materials, worksheets and posters to help convey key concepts.

At pre-primary level the activities focus on fire fighters as helpers in the community. They also introduce the area of residential fire safety, and aim to ensure that in case of fire children know to get out, find a safe place and call for help. At this age a fire safety lesson provides limited benefit. Children under five can confuse fantasy with reality and lack appreciation of the consequences of danger.

Primary school level activities further explore all aspects of fire safety, including personal fire safety and common hazards found in a residential setting; they also aim to increase students' understanding of bushfires and ways in which students can help their families and community get ready for the fire season.

In Prep to Grade 2 children learn the basic messages of *Stop, drop, roll* and *Get down low and go, go, go*. They also learn about basic home fire safety rules and behaviours. Students are encouraged to be aware of hazards and report them to an adult.

The Grade 3 to 4 section looks at bushfires and how students and their families can work together to prepare their homes and community spaces. It also covers the topics of fire hazards that can be found around the home, with the students taking a more hands-on role at home in avoiding potential dangers rather than simply reporting them.

In Grades 5 and 6 the lessons are more focused on summer fire safety but also build on what has been previously learnt in relation to home fire safety. At this age students can be great behaviour change agents, as they can now attribute logic behind the messages. Children at this age will often take their learnings home and pass them on to parents – in particular smoke alarm and fire escape plan information.

Fire Safe Youth

The Fire Safe Youth program has been developed in response to the Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission and includes residential and bushfire safety material. The program will launch in mid-2012. The Fire Safe Youth lesson plans and support materials will help young people in secondary schools better know about and understand the nature of fire, and to be more empowered to protect themselves, their family, their friends, and their community.

The lessons help raise a number of key issues about fire safety with a secondary school class, and will help get across many key messages – the most significant one being that while residential fire and bushfires can be dangerous, there are actions that young people can take to remain safe.

Fire Safe Youth is designed for use in secondary schools. It has strong links to the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) at Level 5 (Years 7-8) and Level 6 (Years 9-10).

The program is delivered by teachers and specially trained CFA staff:

- in a classroom (with or without audio-visual equipment);
- outside in the school environment; or
- from a Mobile Education Unit (MEU).

Mobile Education Units (MEU)

The MEUs are three specially designed teaching units focused on either home fire safety or bushfire safety. They are used to deliver either Fire Safe Kids or Fire Safe Youth programs, usually covering a whole municipality over a number of weeks. The interactive presenter-based program is enhanced with multimedia and other exciting displays and activities. During financial year 2011/12 more than 8,000 children participated in MEU sessions throughout Victoria.

The first MEU was launched in 1998 and is used almost exclusively to deliver the Fire Safe Kids messages regarding residential fire safety in primary schools throughout the state. MEUs 2 and 3 will be commissioned in late 2012 in response to the Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission.

Casey Safety Village

The Casey Safety Village is a partnership between City of Casey and CFA which incorporates the Casey Road Safety Education Centre (CRSEC) and CFA Learning Centre. It delivers road and fire safety educational programs to kindergarten and primary school children. With facilities to accommodate up to 60 students, the village offers a combination of consecutive or concurrent educational programs covering the areas of road and fire safety. The CFA learning centre was initially established at the Pakenham Emergency Services Precinct in 2007 and was moved to the integrated facility in Cranbourne in 2009.

The Learning Centre program is integrated with and complements CFA's Fire Safe Kids Program. Inside the Learning Centre are several simulated home environments, enabling students to move through the high risk areas of the kitchen, laundry and lounge room. A significant portion of time is also dedicated to preparing and rehearsing Home Fire Escape Plans.

Inside the Learning Centre the students:

- recognise and explain how to remedy home fire hazards;
- discuss the science behind fire through understanding the fire triangle;
- learn personal survival strategies to extinguish clothing fires and to cool burn/scald injuries;
- identify the need to make a home fire escape plan and work through several possible scenarios;
- are encouraged to take the fire safety messages home and discuss them with family and friends.

Juvenile Fire Awareness and Intervention Program (JFAIP)

The Juvenile Fire Awareness and Intervention Program (JFAIP) is aimed at children from 6-17 years of age who have engaged in fire-lighting behaviour or are considered to be at risk of this behaviour.

Carefully recruited and specially trained firefighters visit the child at home over a number of weeks to educate and promote fire safe behaviour. The practitioner's partnership with parents helps develop an environment where the child and all family members learn safe, responsible behaviour.

This program is delivered jointly by CFA and MFB, taking referrals from:

- parents;
- schools;
- MFB and CFA;
- Department of Human Services and social service organisations or social workers;

- Victoria Police, courts and Juvenile Justice;
- Doctors, paediatricians, psychologists and psychiatrists.

Reduce the Risk

Reduce the Risk is a home fire safety program delivered to the general community. It is often delivered to community groups such as Probus, Neighbourhood Watch, Lions, Rotary and Community Houses.

The program raises awareness of common causes of house fires and provides strategies to prevent house fires and what to do if one occurs.

MFB/CFA Winter Home Fire Safety Campaign

Each year MFB and CFA work together to deliver a public awareness campaign designed to raise awareness of home fire safety and to attempt to reduce the incidence of house fires in the State of Victoria.

The 2012 campaign was launched by the Minister for Police and Emergency Services at the Royal Children's Hospital (RCH) on 22 May 2012. The launch involved senior members of the RCH Burns Unit and featured the family of a five-year-old burns victim. The launch received very good media coverage across all major media and gave significant emphasis to the dangers of leaving children unsupervised around sources of fire.

The campaign creative features a focus on personal responsibility and the three main images feature burns victims and their carers/family members. One image in particular features a mother with her two daughters, one of whom has suffered a burns injury to her lower legs. The images and copy are designed to be very personal and to remind people that wishing for a different outcome will not deliver one; only taking preventative action and being personally responsible will reduce fire risk.

Relevant Partnerships and Community Consultation

CFA works very closely with MFB on all aspects of residential fire safety and continues to participate in joint initiatives such as a new Home Fire Safety booklet, Smoke Alarm Brochure, Early Fire Safe Program and JFAIP. CFA is also a member of the Victorian Burns Prevention Partnership which consists of CFA, MFB, Royal Children's Hospital Burns Unit and Alfred Hospital Burns Unit. This partnership meets regularly and seeks to work together in improving burns prevention in Victoria.

CFA also works directly with municipalities and community groups to extend the reach of our fire awareness and community safety programs. One example was working with City of Casey on their Safety House which provided a display home fitted out with child safety items.

Residential Fire Safety Strategy

In addition to the above existing programs, CFA is currently developing a Residential Fire Safety Strategy which will provide for evidence-based community safety programs delivered in a manner which targets identified high risk groups so as to bring about a measurable reduction in home fire deaths and injuries. The strategy will use a systems approach which coordinates education, engineering, environmental and regulatory solutions providing for shared responsibility for residential fire safety outcomes.

Children under the age of five years, along with the aged and intellectually disabled, are identified in the strategy as having an elevated risk of fire fatality. Included in the strategy as possible fire safety treatments are:

- Development of a family carer/volunteer carer's program to provide fire safety education to people who care for young children, older persons and people with disabilities. The target group for such a program would not currently benefit from the fire safety information delivered as part of the Community Services Training Package being delivered through TAFE colleges;
- Continued delivery and improvement of the Fire Safe Kids and Fire Safe Youth programs as a key component of CFA's fire safety programs;
- Development of outreach programs to increase delivery capacity into target groups including parents and carers of children under five years of age;
- Completion of a five-year review of the Early Fire Safe program.

Yours sincerely



Mick Bourke
Chief Executive Officer