



21 June 2012

Ref: 747989

Ms K M W Parkinson, Coroner  
Coroners Court of Victoria  
Level 11, 222 Exhibition Street  
Melbourne VIC 3000



Dear Ms Parkinson

### **Investigation into death of Abdullah Kocoglu Court Ref No. 1453/11**

Fire is an important and natural part of life. It is often associated with celebrations, leisure activities, cooking, heating and work. Many young people have an interest in fire. This can be expressed by sitting close to open fires, barbecues and heaters and watching with fascination and excitement, poking combustible materials into the fire, requesting permission to help light fires (e.g. barbecues, open fires, birthday candles) and asking questions about fire such as "How did the fire start?" "How did it get big?" or playing games involving fire including pretending to smoke, cook food, role play as firefighters.

MFB recognises through past research that children under 5 years of age are:

- vulnerable to burn / scald injuries,
- do not recognise danger or know how to protect themselves
- have low retention of the information they learn
- in some children, fire safety information can stimulate their curiosity about fire and they may begin to dabble in fire risk behaviour; and
- early primary is the safest and earliest stage at which a structured fire safety program can be delivered to young children.

The tragic events leading to the death of Abdullah Kocoglu and the impact it has had on the Kocoglu family and community is a salient lesson. The safety of very young children is best ensured by the people responsible for their daily care and protection (parents and early childhood professionals) and relies on:

- knowing that very young children have a different way of thinking and behaving from adults
- foreseeing dangerous situations before they arise and taking positive action to reduce risks
- providing supervision for all children under five years old
- providing positive role modeling. Role modeling is the most effective method of developing fire safe behaviour. Children mimic adults who are important to



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them. If parents/carers display fire safe behaviour, children are much more likely to model their actions.

At present the Victorian Fire Services (MFB & CFA) have joint and community-targeted programs for the safety of pre-school and primary school children. In acknowledging the Coroner's recommendations as tabled in the **Investigation into the death of Abdullah Kocoglu; Court Ref No. 1453/11**, the MFB has alternate interventions in place. These include:

- **EARLY FIRE SAFE** (joint MFB & CFA program). These workshops complement and build on the Victorian Government Department of Human Services' strategy "*Taking Injury Prevention Forward*" (mid 1990's). Victorian Children's Injury Prevention Forums were a series of forums held in 1996 entitled '*Healthy Families, Healthy Children*'. The aim of the forums was to outline the current work in children's injury prevention, to provide models for future interventions and to workshop actions that could effectively reduce childhood injuries.

The Children's Injury Prevention Action Plan resulting from these forums outlined actions that could effectively reduce death and injury in the priority injury areas: burns and scalds, falls in the home, falls in the playground, poisoning, drownings and near-drownings, dog attacks and finger jams injuries. These areas were chosen on the basis of severity, prevalence, preventability and cost to the community; they identified leading agencies who could deal with the injury area i.e. Victorian Fire Services having a role in burns and scald prevention.

'*Early Fire Safe*' is delivered by firefighters to raise parents' and carers' awareness of how to prevent burns and scalds to the very young (0-5 years), with the key messages being:

- children under 5 are particularly vulnerable to burns and scalds
  - many children show an interest in fire at an early age
  - fire/ burn/ scald injuries are preventable
  - most children under 5 do not recognise danger or know how to protect themselves
  - home fire safety considerations (especially matches and lighters should be locked away).
- **FIRE Ed** (MFB) set up in the early 1990's, where evidence indicated early primary was the safest and earliest stage at which a structured fire safety program could be delivered to young children. *Fire Ed* is delivered to both Grade Prep and Upper Primary (Grade 5/6 levels) and uses firefighters from fire stations close to the school. The promotion of fire safety and prevention is the foundation of **Fire Ed for Preps**.

The key messages include:

- an adult needs to stay with children (adults are responsible for looking after fires) when a fire, cooking or heating is used ("Good fires and Bad Fires")
- firefighters are helpers, they are here to help keep us safe.
- everyone needs a working smoke alarm in their home.
- "Crawl Down Low and Go Go Go" (escaping a smoke-filled room).
- meet at the Safe Meeting Place.
- how to call for help ("000")





- “Stop Drop Cover and Roll” (if your clothes are on fire).

Students take the fire safety messages home and inform their families. In this way the messages are reinforced for the student and an opportunity is created for an additional group to learn about fire safety.

Following the firefighters’ visit, teachers continue the process by developing a unit of work for their class, using teacher resource materials and class sets of student resource books. The teacher resource materials include teacher manual and 80+ task cards covering the topics of:

- Fire Safety
  - Fire Science
  - Hazard Identification
  - Evacuation
  - First Aid
  - Roles of Firefighters
- The **MFB KidZone** website (designed and online to public 2011/2012) complements the in-school firefighter delivered *Fire Ed* programs by reinforcing the same vital messages with online content. It recognises the varying ways in which children can be engaged and educated in the modern world. *MFB KidZone* provides fire safety education and informs young people about firefighters’ roles and the organisation through appropriate games, activities, photos and fact sheets.

The MFB also engages and assists parents and carers with fire safety in the home through:

- MFB’s **SmokeBUSTer 2** [SmokeBUSTer 1 (2001) reviewed and upgraded 2008 (SmokeBUSTer 2)] is an interactive education experience contained in a purpose-built vehicle. Members of the public walk through and experience responding to a house fire and rooms of a house typically affected by fire.
- **Home Fire Safety book** [designed and released to public 2011 (book enclosed)]. Knowing how to prevent and respond to a fire or other emergency in your home is vital. The joint Victorian Fire Services *Home Fire Safety Booklet* contains the information needed to know about how to:
  - prevent a fire occurring in your home,
  - install and maintain a working smoke alarm,
  - escape your home safely if a fire or other emergency occurs.

The booklet delivers this information through strong visual messages which are reinforced by simple text. Each page spotlights a specific area of the home and highlights the most common causes of fire, as evidenced from actual home fire incidents, injuries and fatalities. To ensure the booklet is accessible to our diverse community it has also included the development of:

- an insert sheet containing the information in 21 languages designed to be used in conjunction with the booklet,



- an additional aged and disability insert sheet to address the specific risks of older people and people with disability, designed to be used in conjunction with the booklet,
- translation of the aged and disability insert sheet into 21 languages, and
- development of an audio version of the booklet and the aged and disability insert sheet for people who are blind or have low vision.

The *Open Flame* section of the book (page 10) raises the issue of keeping matches and lighters out of reach of children.

- **Consultation and committees** – MFB consults and works with community groups, other organisations and specific interest and industrial committees in relation to partnerships opportunities regarding sharing information and resources, linking prevention into other organisations' agenda, specifically fire safety promotion to the community and pursuing research.

The Victorian Burns Prevention Partnership (VBPP 2005), a formal partnership between the Metropolitan Fire Brigade, the Country Fire Authority, the Victorian Adult Burns Service (Alfred Hospital) and the Royal Children's Hospital Burns Unit, to maximise work around prevention of burns and scalds injuries and therefore enhance each agency's work within the community to minimise risk.

One developed outcome of the group is the *Stay Safe newsletter*. The aim of this newsletter is to provide valuable fire safety and burns prevention information to parents, teachers, grandparents and all those responsible for caring for young children aged between 0 and 8 years old.

*Stay Safe* is distributed electronically to kindergartens, playgroups, maternal health care centres and primary schools and is continually extending its catchment to other organisations and safety networks.

Please do not hesitate to contact MFB's Chief Officer, Shane Wright, if you require any further information. Shane's telephone number is 9665 4241 and his email address is [swright@mfb.vic.gov.au](mailto:swright@mfb.vic.gov.au).

Yours sincerely

**Nick Easy**  
**Chief Executive Officer**