



MEDIA RELEASE

Future-proof our extreme weather response

BRISBANE, February 12 2009 -26 year old VIC SES volunteer Ruby Haoucher reports via Twitter that she “is trying to put into words what she has experienced over the past few days.” She has been at the heart of the response to the tragic Victorian fires.

As the nation confronts our largest natural disaster, the challenge of preparing for a hotter extreme weather future becomes apparent. No single heat wave, flood or fire can be attributed to climate change. However increasing numbers of severe events - 70 in the 1990s versus 28 in the 1970s¹ - reflect a pattern predicted by scientists.

“Australia currently has 500,000 emergency volunteers working for 18 different community organisations. It’s a world class system but the current volunteer base is aging, at a time when communities are more exposed to severe weather than ever. We need to inspire a new generation.” Green Cross Australia CEO Mara Bun said.

www.extremeweatherheroes.org is the world’s first social network designed and led by young emergency volunteers.

The aim is to inspire and empower young people to prepare for their future and encourage communities impacted by disaster to rebuild ‘green’ to break the greenhouse cycle.

The network is led by five young volunteers from the SES, Red Cross and Rural Fire Service. It offers practical steps for becoming involved, and runs across Facebook, Twitter, You Tube and Flickr with science-based supporting materials, evidence of a changing climate, and a strong ‘how to rebuild green’ theme.

Climate change is the #1 concern for Gen X and Y. But only 1 in 5 young people actively volunteer. An effort to drive home the link between concern for our climate and communities and emergency volunteering is needed in the face of increasing climate impacts. www.extremeweatherheroes.org offers a pathway to skills development and finding the right volunteer role.

www.extremeweatherheroes.org is like a reality show except it’s real.

- **Ruby** is a VICSES sensation. Days before the fires erupted her blog posted this message: “Hot off the PRESS!!! VICSES is getting hit pretty hard with 123 requests for assistance from midnight last night”. See Ruby’s profile here: <http://www.extremeweatherheroes.org/our-heroes/ruby-haouchar.aspx> . Ruby says, “We need to accelerate our forward planning process to best deal with the events, as we now know it’s not a matter of IF, but a matter of WHEN”.

¹ According to Munich Re who track severe weather events defined as having over 100 deaths and/or US\$100 million in claims.

Extreme Weather Heroes is a Green Cross Australia inspired project. www.extremeweatherheroes.org was developed in partnership with:





- **Ben** from Red Cross is running the emergency call centre flow over from the Victorian fires – follow his twitter “...preparing to feel like a scrambled egg with the heat forecast in NSW this weekend. Don't forget to check on ur neighbours & the elderly!” here: <http://twitter.com/EWHeroBen> Ben says, “Without change the world will become a more uncertain place to live.”
- **Jake**, a 20 year old Rural Fire Service volunteer in Canberra, just returned from a deployment near Bundanoon. Watch Jake do a 130 meter helicopter winch on his You Tube site: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pdFDGy4gall&feature=channel_page He is on standby to be deployed to Victoria or NSW later this week. Jake says, “I haven't been around that long but to me it seems like we are experiencing more extreme weather than in the past.”
- 22 year old **Ayla**, a Brisbane SES volunteer who just finished her training, is spreading the news about QLD's floods across Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=1032112537> Ayla's Twitter spreads hype about her pre-recorded Nova promo radio spot which you can find here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tGftPhEx8RI&feature=PlayList&p=EE1FAF7A84F528C2&index=0> Ayla says, “More severe weather is an obvious effect of climate change.”
- **Katie**, from Red Cross, is posted in the Solomon Islands which has just been declared a “national disaster zone” with 8 dead and 13 missing after torrential rains and flooding. Watch Katie tell it like it is with Red Cross in Solomon Islands http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hyK00TLivuU&feature=channel_page. Katie says, “In my own mind, there is a very clear link between climate change and extreme weather, and one that needs to be factored into disaster planning and preparedness.”

Follow their journeys as these amazing heroes reach out to their peers to join the dots between extreme weather and climate change. To get active – start at www.extremeweatherheroes.org.

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For information or to set up interviews with young heroes and their agencies contact:

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