



MEDIA RELEASE

EMBARGO: 5.00am FRI 20 FEB 2009

Australia needs you: Aussie youth called to become emergency volunteers

Young emergency volunteers have been actively involved in the brave fight against Victoria's tragic fires and their aftermath. Despite this good news, the bulk of Australia's 500,000 emergency volunteers are aging along with our population.

Estimates suggest that the average age of our world class - but shrinking - emergency volunteer base is over 50.

As temperatures rise and rainfall records break, we need young Australia to rise to the challenge of protecting people, property, and the environment.

Climate scientists predict more intense and more frequent floods, fires and storms, so we urgently need to reverse some troubling emergency volunteering trends.

Between 1988 and 2004, Country Fire Authority Victoria volunteer numbers declined 30% from around 83,000 to 68,000. Additionally just 6.4% of Queensland Rural Fire volunteers are under the age of 24, and 49% are aged between 45 and 65. These patterns of declining volunteer numbers and an aging volunteer base exist across the majority of Australia's emergency volunteering organisations.

It's not always been like this. The average age of WW2 infantry soldiers was 26. We need to build a comparable aged volunteer response force to prepare for extreme weather trend predictions.

Gen Y can play a crucial role in this effort. Despite negative reports about this generation, nearly 30% of them volunteer regularly, and this generation has considerable concern and awareness about climate change.

To help Gen Y connect the dots between climate change and emergency volunteering, a partnership between Green Cross Australia, the SES, the Red Cross and the Rural Fire Service is moving the recruitment call into cyberspace.

Five young active emergency volunteers from various agencies across Australia are reaching out to recruit their peers across social networks through www.extremeweatherheroes.org - an Internet network that utilises the web and Facebook, You Tube, Flickr and Twitter.

These five young 'Extreme Weather Heroes' are reaching out to Australia's youth with great stories about the new skills, friends and experiences that emergency volunteering brings.

Three of them have been active in the Victorian bushfire response, including 20 year old Jake, ACT Rural Fire Service volunteer, who has spent the last three days actively deployed in fire zones.

All of them are calling on young Australians to join their local emergency services and to take up the longstanding Aussie tradition of helping each other in times of trial.

For information or to set up interviews with the Extreme Weather Heroes please contact Fran Curro 07 3003 0644 or Mara Bun on 0448 848 860

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





Meet Australia's five Extreme Weather Heroes. These young people were selected by the SES, Red Cross and Canberra Rural Fire Service to participate in this initiative because they are great volunteers and great communicators.

- **Ruby** is a 26 year old 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> .
- **Ben** from Red Cross has been 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>
- **Jake**, a 20 year old ACT Rural Fire Service volunteer, has been deployed to assist with Victoria bushfires. Watch Jake do a 130 meter helicopter winch on his You Tube site: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pdFDGy4gall&feature=channel_page
- 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>
- **Katie**, from Red Cross, is posted in the Solomon Islands which was declared a "national disaster zone" last week 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=hyKOOTLivuU&feature=channel_page.

Follow their journeys as these amazing young people reach out to inspire their peers across Facebook, Twitter, Flickr and You Tube - start at www.extremeweatherheroes.org

- ENDS -

For information or to set up interviews with the Extreme Weather Heroes please contact Fran Curro on 07 3003 0644 or Mara Bun on 0448 848 860

Page 2 of 2

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

