

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

Thursday 29 June 2006

FIRE HYDRANT MAINTENANCE

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond): I congratulate SA Water on its 150th anniversary but ask it to recommence a fire hydrant maintenance program in country areas. My information is that a regular maintenance program was discontinued about 10 years ago. The implications of the lack of a regular maintenance program are the risk to life and property. Recently, I came upon some correspondence in the local media about how long it took a local CFS chief to access a fire plug that was unserviceable. He went to an open paddock and found a white post, which supposedly pointed to where the fire plug was situated, but the fire plug was in the opposite direction. In this case, it was surrounded by overgrown grass and weeds. He proceeded to dig it out.

He had already been to the plug, so he knew where it was. However, at times this can take up to 20 minutes by the time they find the plug, which has been overgrown and covered over with dirt, and then dig it out. At this stage, the people charged with this task go through the sequence of digging out the plug, getting to the cap and taking the cap off. Then they have to get down to the plug, and sometimes the hole is full of dirt and debris. So, after about eight minutes, they would have managed to connect a CFS truck to water. This is a practice that just cannot go on in country areas, or any area for that matter. Current checking of fire plugs is done only when a complaint is lodged, and this can take up to two months. In fact, some CFS brigades have given up reporting faulty plugs, because they say there is no point, as there is not the resources to follow them up.

In relation to my own experience with fighting fires, there was a fire in February, when many CFS brigades were brought from all over South Australia—from down in the South-East and as far away as Lucindale, over to Clayton. I commend the CFS for its efforts in fighting the fires not only in my local area at Coomandook but also at Ngarkat. It was a very busy period for several days, when the temperature exceeded 45 to 46 degrees. It was quite an experience for me out there personally assisting in the fighting of fires, with the CFS assisting property owners and myself in saving our own farms, and I certainly commend the CFS for its efforts. However, the situation is exacerbated when you have fire units coming from out of area, trawling up and down either your back roads or the highways looking for not only fire plugs but serviceable fire plugs.

On this occasion, I was working in my office in Murray Bridge as a candidate, and I remember that, as I drove down there to fight the fire, I had one of the local people ringing me to say, 'Which plug is serviceable near your farm?' It is just outrageous. They need to re-invigorate a fire plug maintenance area, because right throughout the region lives and property are at risk, and it cannot go on. I am surprised that the insurance industry has not come out about this issue. Something definitely needs to be done. It will not be long, somewhere down the track, before we will have another Ash Wednesday, or something similar. I really hope not. Fire maintenance certainly needs to be done. The CFS, with its strike teams, and the MFS are all quite ready to fight fires out of area, but we need to be able to access water at marked plugs.