



Clean up begins for fire-affected residents

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RICHMOND Valley Council will work closely with local bushfire-affected communities and government agencies to provide the support needed for clean up and rebuilding, as services move towards a recovery phase.

The Busbys Flat fire, which burned 47,790ha, destroying 44 homes and damaging nine more, is currently listed by the RFS as controlled. However, Richmond Valley Council's General Manager Vaughan Macdonald, who heads the Local Recovery Committee, said if the bushfire threat escalated, Council and emergency services remained prepared and ready to protect residents and their properties.

Mr Macdonald said some back burning was taking place in an attempt to prevent break outs. However, with temperatures predicated to climb to the mid 30s towards the end of the week, authorities remained on standby.

Residents are being urged to be of assistance to emergency services and listen to warnings; to not put themselves in harm's way.

Evacuation centres have now closed, and the Summerland Way is open to all travellers.

A coordinated clean-up effort will soon take place, and will include disposal of debris, potential asbestos removal, transport of waste, and the waiving of some landfill levies.

Mr Macdonald thanked the agencies and support services involved in what was the largest scale emergency response the Richmond Valley had experienced in several years.

He said the emergency response to this disaster had been a massive multi-agency effort, including NSW Police, the RFS, SES, Fire and Rescue NSW, NSW Ambulance and Richmond Valley Council.

He said the task ahead was a huge one, but significant achievements to restore vital infrastructure had already been made.

"Following the loss of more than 300 power poles in the fire, Essential Energy tasked 150 staff to the area in the immediate aftermath and were able to restore power to Rappville village by Friday evening, with remaining rural properties being restored throughout this week," Mr Macdonald said.

“The rail line between Sydney and Brisbane was able to be restored by Monday afternoon thanks to a huge effort by work crews from Australian Rail Track Corporation.”

Mr Macdonald said the safety and well-being of the community during the clean up was paramount.

“Council will continue to work with Federal and State agencies to clean up fire-damaged properties as safely as possible, and provide support to those affected,” he said.

“It’s a long haul ahead, as the recovery process has only just started, so we need to stay on task for our communities from Busbys Flat through Rappville and across to Bungawalbin who need us.”

Council has established a temporary waste transfer station at the Rappville Showground, which will remain open until Sunday 20 October.

Mr Macdonald said as communities recovered, other types of assistance remained available. He urged those communities affected by the fire to seek assistance from relevant agencies tasked to assist the recovery.

He said the NSW Office of Emergency Management had released a dedicated newsletter with up-to-date information and contact details for disaster welfare assistance, insurance, disaster relief for farmers, housing assistance and mental health care, and more.

This is available on Council’s website, alongside detailed fact sheets on community safety in and around fire damaged areas.

Mr Macdonald said regular community meetings would continue, with the next two set down for Thursday – 2pm at the Casino Golf Club and 5.30pm at the Rappville Public School.

Superintendent Toby Lindsay, from the Richmond Police District, acknowledged the significant and coordinated multi-agency emergency response, deployed over the past week, through the Operations Centre to assisting the local community and the hard working fire-fighting services.

“All emergency services, the Richmond Valley Council, State Government support agencies, many volunteer groups and non-government organisations came together, around the clock, to help our community during this tough time,” he said.

Richmond Valley Council Mayor Robert Mustow said the primary focus would remain on supporting residents’ safety and well-being as the significant clean-up process began.

Cr Mustow said the damage from this bush fire was a devastating loss for the community, and it would take an enormous amount of effort, commitment and support for those affected to rebuild their lives.

He said Council and the wider community would be there every step of the way to support the individuals and families impacted by the bushfire.

“It is a huge task, but the way the community has pulled together over the past week to support one another has been inspirational,” Cr Mustow said.

“I would like to thank our firefighters, emergency service personnel, volunteers and community organisations, and Council staff for their hard work and assistance in protecting and supporting our local communities.