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SAVE WILLIAMSTOWN



Bay fire protection crisis

Monday, 2 January 2012

The Age
Adam Carey
January 2, 2012

“MELBOURNE'S metropolitan fire authority is dangerously ill equipped to deal with marine emergencies, with billions of dollars worth of private and commercial vessels that use Port Phillip Bay and the city's rivers virtually unprotected in the event of a large fire.

More than 100,000 hectares of port waters - including the shipping channels from the mouths of the Yarra and Maribyrnong rivers to outside the bay - rely for their fire protection on two four-metre aluminium boats fitted with petrol-powered pump hoses, and two inflatable dinghies.

Two commercially operated tugboats that ferry container ships in and out of the bay are also equipped with firefighting tools, but fire officers must request access to these, and it is not always granted.

Internal documents obtained by The Age reveal the Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board has known for years that it lacks the resources

or training to respond to a large fire or other emergency such as a chemical spill in Melbourne's port, marinas and shipping lanes - all of which it is legally bound to protect.

And despite multiple reports identifying an urgent need to fix the problems, the board has failed to do so.

Rapidly increasing activity and development on and around the bay means the risk of disaster is only growing, recent reports by the organisation's board have found.

The risk to public safety is poised to peak at this time of year as boating activity on the bay is at its busiest.

The United Firefighters Union has taken the MFB to Fair Work Australia over the issue, and more than 40 out of 64 qualified marine response officers have vowed to hand in their qualifications - rather than face a deadly emergency they cannot properly respond to - if resources are not boosted.

"The MFB are playing Russian roulette with lives and property, hoping something won't happen, and they have known about it for years," said United Firefighters Union Victorian branch secretary Peter Marshall....."

<http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/bay-fire-protection-crisis-20120101-1phan.html>

Save Williamstown Comments:

Well this is precisely what Save Williamstown was telling the Ports and Environs Committee and the Port Phillip Woollen Mill Advisory Committee and which the Advisory Committee categorised as only Williamstown Resident's Opinion and not as Expert Witness information.

We have written to the Office of the Emergency Services Commissioner, the Police Commissioner, Energy Safe Victoria, EPA, Worksafe, Local Government, State Governments Departments, Premier and Politicians about these critical safety issues. We have made submission to the Green Paper "Victoria Prepared". As a community group we feel that we are banging our heads against brick walls because none of these bodies are treating this issue seriously.

We told the Port Phillip Woollen Mills Advisory Committee that in WA there is a prescribed 1km zone around Fuel Importation facilities, that in NSW Kurnell has a moratorium on new development on its peninsula, Mobil told the hearings that internationally there is a buffer zone around tanks of 10 times the diameter (ie 400m at Pt Gellibrand) and SW presented evidence about fuel fires on board ship around the world. The international oil tanker community refer to the zone as CORDON SANITAIRE.

BUT much of this evidence did not find its way into the Port Phillip Woollen

Mill Advisory Committee report. The officers in the DPCD again watered down the findings to favour the developer's plans....

In December 2011 the poison chalice was handed back to Hobsons Bay Council for development at PPWM to include residential dwellings up to 8 storeys which the Minister changed from mandatory to advisory height only.

No new building should be allowed at Point Gellibrand until our emergency services can give some sort of guarantees for the safety of existing residents and workers. It would be a FOOLISH government either state or local that allowed new buildings and particularly residential towers where WorkSafe rules do not apply and evacuation plans are not established and regularly tested...

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