

References to Safety Risk Management in recent Royal Commissions

2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, July 2010, Final Report Summary p12

Although the proportion of fires that are caused by electricity infrastructure is low—possibly about 1.5 per cent of all ignitions in normal circumstances—on days of extreme fire danger the percentage of fires linked to electrical assets rises dramatically. Thus, electricity-caused fires are most likely to occur when the risk of a fire getting out of control and having deadly consequences is greatest.

Victoria's electricity assets are ageing, and the age of the assets contributed to three of the electricity-caused fires on 7 February 2009—the Kilmore East, Coleraine and Horsham fires. Distribution businesses' capacity to respond to an ageing network is, however, constrained by the electricity industry's economic regulatory regime. The regime favours the status quo and makes it difficult to bring about substantial reform. As components of the distribution network age and approach the end of their engineering life, there will probably be an increase in the number of fires resulting from asset failures unless urgent preventive steps are taken.

The Commission considers that now is the time to start replacing the ageing electricity infrastructure and to make major changes to its operation and management. The seriousness of the risk and the need to protect human life are imperatives Victorians cannot ignore. The number of fire starts involving electricity assets remains unacceptably high—at more than 200 a year. Although it is not possible to eliminate the risk posed by electricity assets, the State and the distribution businesses should take the opportunity to invest in improved infrastructure and substantially remove one of the primary causes of catastrophic fires in Victoria during the past 40 years.

In view of the size of Victoria's electricity distribution network, any replacement program will take years to complete even if it begins immediately. It is therefore necessary to consider interim measures for reducing the bushfire risk associated with the current network and the Commission suggests ways by which this could be done.

2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission Final Report, July 2010, Volume 2, 4.5.1

Protection of human life must become the priority when evaluating distribution businesses expenditure proposals. The economic regulatory regime must include a mechanism for ensuring that safety-related matters are properly reviewed so as to minimise the risk of bushfires being caused by the failure of electric assets.

Report of the Royal Commission into the Home Insulation Program, 2014

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14.1 Introduction

14.1.1 When failures occur of the kind that I have set out in this Report, there is often a tendency to see them as arising only within a specific set of circumstances and to conclude that these are unlikely to be repeated. Views of this kind do not inspire an examination of events to draw conclusions about what might be done in the future.

14.1.2 I do not think that the deficiencies I have identified are ones that could only have occurred in the specific circumstances of the Home Insulation Program (HIP). Several systemic or fundamental shortcomings can be identified which not only are capable of repetition (of course in different circumstances) but which might be avoided through diligence and the taking of some additional measures.

Pages 308-309:

14.7 Risk

14.7.3.1 Regular and ongoing engagement with identified risks—..... It is recognised that officials ought to treat seriously the whole question of risks and their management—it is not enough to name and dismiss those problems. The HIP has been a clear lesson in this respect, and I would hope that this Report will serve to make the lessons to be learned a little clearer and reinforce their importance.

14.7.3.2 Risk cannot be abrogated—Government must recognise that as much as it might seek to do so, risk cannot be abrogated. The responsibility of Government is to care for its citizens and to exercise care and diligence to do everything reasonable to ensure citizens are not placed in danger by its actions, particularly risk of death and serious injury.

14.7.3.2.1 The Australian Government should not seek to abrogate responsibility for identified risk. If another party (for example, a State or Territory Government) is identified as being able to mitigate an identified risk, this does not remove the Department's responsibility to take the necessary steps to manage the risk and to ensure that others are doing the same. The Australian Government should engage with the identified risk manager to ensure the adequacy of those arrangements for the new circumstance, and consider whether there are additional steps that it could take to complement that action.