

The FESA Fire Safety Education Center & Museum Into the 21st Century

(1. Intro slide name and logo, title of paper) Good morning everyone and thank you for inviting me to speak to today.

Some might ask, how does a museum and set of old equipment and photographs fit into an organisation like FESA? Well quite often it happens as a matter of course; at least at first. By this I mean it can begin with a few people who have a passion for historical material who just can't through anything out..., even willing to climb into a dumpster to retrieve material, as are some of the stories I've been told about this collection! Or spend 100's of ours restoring equipment and appliances to their original condition. Over time this material becomes rare, more interesting and intriguing to more people, throw in a building, and *Wha la!* We have a comprehensive and unique historical record and place to show case it!!

The next thing is to have the opportunity to allow the public to access this information and material. Then people soon see that all this stuff is about us, it creates a better understanding of who we are, where we came from, and why things are the way they are - the collection becomes significant, becomes heritage. The Old Perth Fire Station has been lucky enough to have both the will of people around it to collect and preserve material over time, and the opportunity for the public to access it. Very few heritage buildings in Perth remain associated with their original use or open as a public venue.

Further, FESA is very much a here and now organisation. It's operational, responsive, and looking ahead to the future and what it may bring. The Old Perth Fire Station and its collection offer FESA a 180 degree swing in perspective in which to launch and embrace its fire safety education and awareness campaigns.

Having said that, the Organisation is not just about fire anymore and some of the new ideas associated with the Museum, aim to embellish its heritage while enhancing its popularity as a 21st Century public destination. The new Plan has included "FESA", providing an opportunity for the public to access it as an experience. These ideas I will outline for you a little later. But first, I'd like to introduce you to the building and the collection!

(2. External building pic) This building is 104 years old; it not only holds a significant place in the heart of the WA Fire Service, but it is also an historical icon of Perth's architectural history, not surprising then, that it's listed on 4 different heritage registers. The building itself is testimony of how seriously the risk of fire and other emergencies were taken, over 100 years ago. This building was one of the largest custom built fire stations of its time in the Southern Hemisphere and included the ambulance service until 1922.

(3. Pic workshops and black smith's c 1910) The total area taken up by this station in its day was many times that which remains, as there were also stables, a black smith, storage sheds, houses, workshops, boiler room, gymnasium, paddocks and administration buildings.

(4. Pic of horse drawn turnout ph2002.74c 1914) Over 100 years ago, a fully automated alarm system was designed and installed in this station by the Chief Officer and his staff. This enabled turn-out times to rival the current status quo. According to our records, a turn out back 100 years could take place in under 1 minute; and in less than 30 second's if the horses weren't lying down!

(5. Pic Nickel Plated Helmet) One outstanding advantage of having a building remain in the same service for so long is that there can be a large accumulation of historical material. This site in no exception, boasting some very rare and unique objects, the collection totals around 8,000 items - including photographs, documents, operational books, clothing, equipment, appliances and archives.

(6. Pic of Vintage Fleet x2 ph2003.624) Part of this collection is a world class fleet of vintage Fire appliances. FESA and the volunteer Restoration Team's commitment to restoring and maintaining these appliances is reflected in the fleet's pride of place in parades and community events.

(7. Pic – Old Perth Fire Station c1903) Upon its retirement from service in 1979 however, the building went through an unsure period – At a time in Perth when many old buildings were being demolished in the name of progress, the Old Perth Fire Station was reviewed in this light, also as a pub, a backpackers lodge and a staff social venue? We have those whose persistent calling for the building to be recognised in its own right, to thank for the ultimate decision.

(8. Ed prog pic) Thankfully the State Government and WA Fire Brigades Board elected to not only keep the building, but to continue its long standing community service and transform it into a Museum and Education Centre. Since July 1985, the venue has educated around ¼ million people in fire safety and fire hazard awareness.

(9. Pic of Alex and Silvia working) As well as the educative programs, diligently working in the background, have been a committed team of volunteers who have supported a massive collections management project that will take around 4 or 5 years to complete.

2 and half years into the project, progress has seen just under 3,000 photographs recorded, as well as 260 Occurrence books, 500 subjects, 400 documents and a overhaul of the Museum's Heritage policy, collections policy and strategic plan.

There now exists a comprehensive FESA Heritage Policy which aims to collect, preserve and research heritage pertaining to all combat roles of FESA – which are the Fire Services, the State Emergency Service and Marine Rescue. Actualising this ambitious policy however, is some years away as we concentrate on digitising the fire service collection we already have.

Part of this collections management project has involved working with FESA Information Services to develop a suitable agreement between the archiving aims of the Museum and what Information Services Division will hold. The age and size of this organisation is such that there is plenty of material to go round – but we needed to develop an appropriate framework in which to disperse the material to avoid competition and inconsistencies.

In this relationship, the Museum has become responsible for conserving and archiving what we call operational archives – these include standing orders, brigade regulations and Acts, the early annual reports, minutes books, Occurrence books, alarm response reports, staff rolls, training manuals, reference material, early brigade notices and circulars, station specifications - to name but a few. For example we now hold over 1,500 occurrence books from over 20 stations with many more to come. These books are a good example of the primary and unique raw data that the Museum holds – from these books; we can determine fires the State of WA was experiencing at any minute in history.

The aim of digitising the collection is two fold. Firstly, having the entire collection and its associated information in electronic form will greatly enhance our accessibility and use of the collection itself; it will give more meaning to each object by way of association, and expose under

and over representations of material. Having the collection at ones finger tips will also aid research and historical interpretation.

Secondly, we aim to increase public access to the stories, events, people, places and things that we have and what we know about. Having a comprehensive database will enable visitors to personalise their museum experience, we can also support external and internal research and carry out public inquiries more efficiently.

(10. Pic of MOSAIC database) we selected a software program that had a high and potentially complex search, sort and retrieval capability. Essentially, the program develops two separate databases which are linked by a sub form. On the desk top image you can see an objects section and a subjects section.

(11. Pic- objects record screen) For the Objects section, we create an image file of the item which is entered into the record. Each item is given an accession number. There are five forms in each record that are completed. Which divulge information about the historical significance, who donated it, what condition it is in etc? This takes quite a long time as the record created involves bringing together information from a variety of sources.

(12. Pic –subjects' record screen) the subjects section is available to record an event, person, place, topic or organisation. We have several hundred entries in here to date, which include major fires, and other incidents, history and information about brigades and stations, and a wide range of topics such as the auxiliary fire service during the war, origin and development of breathing apparatus, automated alarm systems, uniform evolution and any related person who has a legacy.

(13. Heritage Site Sub form) in this subjects section there is provision for the recording of extra information such as places that have heritage significance or registration.

(14. Pic – Associated Subject – sub form) both these separate sections are linked by a sub form known as “history”. Once linked, a user can transcend both areas of the data base and follow any topic at all - through a multitude of topics or objects. This linking form allows all the objects and photographs to be linked to its associated event, place and person thus creating virtual sub collections with infinite possibilities.

(15. Pic -printable reports) contained within each section are half a dozen template reports. These reports drag information from a retrieved record which is printed off as a hard copy for filing or visitor requests and other public inquiries.

The whole accessioning process is very time consuming, as it requires many details about each object. Each item is also conserved as it is recorded and placed in archive materials and environmentally controlled storage. Both these databases will continue to expand as we accept more material from the Information Services Division and begin to accept material from the other combat services.

(16. Pic –Discover FESA) as mentioned to you earlier, a new strategic plan has been developed for the Museum and its programs. Like most museums in the 21st Century there is a need to illuminate its relevance to the present and compete with many other leisure and educative choices.

Being a heritage building there is an extra challenge in installing public amenities such as rest rooms, café and a souvenir shop while at the same time maintaining its heritage character and form. The Museum's new Strategic Plan was developed with two priorities in mind.

- *(17. Pic – historical image of brigade drill 1905)* Firstly, to provide an historical interpretation of the building and the Perth Brigade - To bring the building to life using our historical collection – old equipment, parts of the building itself like the fire poles and engine room, photos and text. Museums are often accused of suffering from what is termed the “iceberg affect” - one third of the ice you can see the other two-thirds are permanently under the water out of sight. We aim to provide a greater opportunity for people to access the collection in a more meaningful context and to develop the building as a museum artefact in its own right. This section of the project we are calling a heritage trail as it will involve a walk around the inside and outside of the building as it explains past functions and stories in each domain.
- This plan also supports the State Government’s Sustainability Strategy which advocates the preservation and historical interpretation of Perth’s built heritage.
- *(18. Pic – all hazards gallery)* Our second priority was to focus on prevention and preparedness education, thereby making the site more akin to FESA’s core business. Like the new FESA Heritage Collections Policy, this education focus will embrace FESA across the board in the form of an All-hazards interactive gallery. This gallery will involve the upper floor display area only.
- As an exciting theme for this exhibition, we chose to embrace the natural elements that generate our hazards – Earth, Wind Fire and Water and a section we call the Fifth Element which will focus on human generated emergencies – For example –
- Wildfires, cyclones, floods, earthquake, hazmats, terrorism and so on. This exhibition will include interactive exhibits which allow the visitor to actively manipulate and partake in the experience of learning – smell a fire and feel its heat, see what it can do to us, and feel the wind speed of a tropical cyclone for example.
- Research has shown that involving all the senses in learning, can increase the understanding of information, and hopefully enactment upon information such as associated advice and warnings.
- We intend the visitor to achieve a better understanding of the role that FESA plays as our combat agency for many emergencies that threaten us and to learn how it responds to different emergencies so that visitors may know what to expect if ever in an emergency situation.

With the continuing support of our great team of volunteers and that of Community Safety, we believe the venue will not only receive the heritage recognition it deserves, but that the collection will be preserved and utilised to a fuller potential. We believe the Plan has a compatible mix of the past and present and will ultimately contribute to FESA’s vision – a safer community.

Thank you