

Secretary Bushfire Inquiry

FIRE PROBES AND TELSTRA

CEPU welcomes the various inquiries into Victorias' worst bush fires in twenty years. As part of the examination, it would be important to review Telstra management practices in relation to the failure of telecommunications services to Omeo, on Saturday January 25 , 2003.

The failures occurred at a critical time during the bush fire crisis, arising from technical problems via the Wangaratta and Morwell switching centres.

We understand there was an optical fibre link failure from Wangaratta and a mains power failure to the city of Morwell and the Morwell telephone exchange, which led to the isolation of Omeo and surrounding areas.

We are further advised that backup power provision at Morwell exchange was inadequate to cover the mains failure and subsequently crashed. The serious failure at Morwell should never have happened. This incident follows similar mains power cuts at Pakenham and Kyneton telephone exchanges which also led to major telecommunications outages.

Hopefully the inquiries will include an investigation as to what arrangements have been put in place to prevent such serious failures happening again.

Yours Sincerely

Burt Blackburne
Assistant Secretary
CEPU Communications Division