

Update from Australia.....

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### **USA Firefighters Arrive**

The arrival of the crew went smoothly yesterday afternoon. As they came down the escalator at the arrival area the Premier of Victoria, and the U.S. Consul General met them. The press (TV, radio, and print) covered the welcoming. After a few comments by the Premier and the Consul General, Grant Beebe, the team leader, also expressed how happy the team was to be in Australia to be able to help wherever they could. The word was out to the press that some of the team members were smokejumpers, so of course their first question was, "What's it like to jump out of an airplane into a fire?" Grant did a great job of deflecting that one by saying "We are all professional firefighters, some of us are smokejumpers and some of us are hotshots, but we are here to go wherever you ask us to go, and to help out wherever we can." Actually all the questions were softball questions because I don't think the press quite new what to think of this bunch, and because this is all so new. Maybe in a few weeks they'll start asking questions about cost containment and salvage sales! Grant has already had two other interviews and in a few minutes will be on the local "Today Show."

They were given about three hours of general briefings on the current situation, the current and forecasted weather and general organizational relationships. Today they will receive more detailed information on fuels, weather, topography, safety, AIIMS (their ICS), fire camp and other issues.

One point I want to make is that from the moment they were welcomed by Gary Morgan, Chief Fire Officer for the Department of Natural Resources and Environment, SAFETY of firefighters has been stressed as their number one overriding concern. I appreciated that and I know the team did as well.

They will be in Melbourne one more night and then tomorrow a.m. they will head to the fires. My understanding at this point is they will be going to the complex of fires in northeastern Victoria. As the Aussies briefed the situation yesterday, I was struck by the similarities in weather conditions, fuel conditions and management strategies for this complex of fires. It looked a lot like the Florence.....Biscuit situation in SW Oregon last summer.