

# Officer Phuoc Tan

On June 18, a monk decided to match his yellow robes with a yellow helmet, hinting, perhaps, at the future direction of fire-fighting in Melbourne. In dispensing his monastic advice, he implored that all should learn a message painted on the side of two fire trucks 'like a mantra'.

The message: 'Hôm nay quý vị đã thử báo động khói (smoke alarm) trong nhà của quý vị chưa?' roughly translates to: Have you checked the smoke alarms in your house today?' It is painted against a backdrop of a water-breathing dragon.

Dragons, as perceived by Westerners, are fierce, fire-breathing creatures ready to wreak havoc on their surroundings. But as Venerable Phuoc Tan notes, dragons are seen as friendly creatures by Asian cultures. The water dragon design on the fire trucks thus complements an Asian understanding of dragons, which hopefully, will attract attention from Vietnamese motorists and passers-by.

As Mr. Tony Murphy, Acting CEO and Chief Fire Officer MFB (Metropolitan Fire Brigade) said at the launch of the trucks, fire prevention is an increasing concern for the MFB in its community and emergency safety response program. Checking the batteries in smoke alarms on a regular basis is part of this effort.

In recent times, fire fighters have witnessed a growing number of fire-related fatalities which have occurred in homes fitted with smoke alarms. The smoke alarms either did not have working batteries, or were fitted only in one or two rooms in the house. Fire fighters advise that all rooms, especially bedrooms, should be fitted with smoke alarms to prevent fatalities, and that these alarms should be tested often.

Following the launch, Venerable Phuoc Tan blessed the fire trucks and accepted them on behalf of the community. There was also a demonstration on stopping the spread of fires using a fire blanket. Several people were asked to attempt this themselves, including Venerable Phuoc Tan and Vivienne Nguyen from the Victorian Multicultural Commission.

Members of the Buddhist Youth Association (Gia Dinh Phat Tu) were allowed to test fire-extinguishers (a perfect chance to squirt unsuspecting adults). Free fire-safety pamphlets and wristbands were also seized with delight.

The fire trucks will be based at Footscray and Richmond fire stations, and are hoped to save many lives.

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