Friday March 25, 2016

Victorian bushfire losses push summer catastrophe bill past $550m

A sharp rise in the value of insured losses from the Great Ocean Rd bushfires has pushed the insurance bill from last summer's four declared catastrophes past $550 million.

Insured losses from the Victorian bushfires that destroyed or damaged 235 homes in late December are now at $110 million from 527 claims, up from $88 million just one month ago.

Insurance Council of Australia (ICA) CEO Rob Whelan said the Victorian Government's centralised clean-up operation was now underway, allowing insurers to speed up the process of finalising claims.

At least 15 sites have been cleaned up so far by contractors Grocon.

"Insurers can only commence rebuilding once each site has been cleared of debris, including asbestos materials," Mr Whelan said.

"The extremely steep terrain is presenting significant challenges, but insurers are determined to rebuild homes in the shortest time possible once the design and planning approval process is completed.

"Each insurer has its own process for handling claims and rebuilding properties. In many cases, higher bushfire resilience building standards will be required, which may affect construction costs. Insurers will discuss rebuilding and settlement options available under the policy with each customer.

"Not all insurers are taking part in the centralised clean-up. Policyholders with questions about site clean-up and rebuilding should contact their insurer."

The ICA has also released updated data on losses from the summer's other catastrophes.

- Claims from South Australia's Pinery bushfires have reached 2030 with estimated insured losses just under $172 million

- There have been 5199 claims from Sydney's Kurnell tornado with insured losses of $206 million

- Insured losses from the Yarloop bushfires in Western Australia have reached $71 million from 1358 claims

The ICA's Catastrophe Hotline – 1800 734 621 – remains in operation to assist policyholders with questions or concerns about the insurance process.

-ENDS-