

The History of Electricity Fires in Victoria.

Part 4

Exhibits 216 & 279 The Missing Files

(a failed document retention policy?)

This reproduction of Exhibit folders was created June 2011
by M. Gunter, mickgg@suburbia.com.au

Citation: PROV, VA 4393 Board of Inquiry into the Occurrence of Bush and Grass Fires in Victoria,
VPRS 13230/P1 1939 – 1983, Unit 7, Item: “Exhibits : Folder 9 No.210-249”
and Unit 10, Item: “Exhibits: Folder 11: No.270-280”

Reproduced with the permission of the Keeper of Public Records, Public Records Office, Victoria

Preface

Blue tabbed markers made of very modern translucent blue plastic material have been found apparently marking the place of two key documents, being exhibits to the 1977 Board of Inquiry into Grass and Bush Fires in Victoria, February 1977. The recent history of this Series 13230 is that it was never publicly accessible prior to Black Saturday 2009, but simply in a secure Public Records Office accession storage area awaiting processing to become VPRS 13230.

During the conduct of the 2009 Bushfires Royal Commission, it seems that the complete series was returned to the Victorian Government agency responsible for it. This was apparently the Department of Justice. (DOJ). It is reasonable to assume that DOJ realised that VPRS 13230 may contain valuable historical lessons to inform Justice Bernard Teague's 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission.

It seems rather unlikely that the blue plastic markers were inserted in the Exhibit folders prior to Black Saturday, because these dusty old files only became of interest, and relevant after power lines ignited several major firestorms on Black Saturday, 7th February 2009.

The following pages show in detail the appearance of the blue markers, in the hope that it jogs someone's memory from DOJ, from VGSO, from VBRC secretariat and support staff (including Corrs Chambers Westgarth, solicitors for Counsel Assisting), or perhaps even from the Office of the Administrator (SECV), or from the electricity industry. It is important to determine which agency was using this style of marker throughout 2009-2010, so that hopefully the two missing original documents can be located and returned to the state archive. This would seem to be a **mandatory "document retention policy" for sensitive historical documents** which almost certainly show when the electricity industry first became aware it had a problem igniting big and occasionally fatal bushfires, even firestorms.

Exhibit 216 was the Pleasance and Hart technical report on the results of some tests carried out at various locations (e.g. Camberwell, Fishermens Bend) which demonstrated that power lines clashing could ignite grass on the ground beneath, **or up to 60 metres downwind**. The original of Exhibit 216 is still missing as of June 2011

Exhibit 279 is cited in at least three separate locations within VPRS 13230 and VPRS 9823. For example cited in VPRS.9823/P0002/13 "List of exhibits. List of witnesses" - a public document at PROV. The citation is "279 Photostat copy of S.E.C. file relating to experiments carried out on conductors clashing in 1969. [transcript page] 2332". The original of Exhibit 279 is still missing as of June 2011. No digitized copy of it has been located either, despite the efforts of PROV staff over several months.

Given the events of Black Saturday, a reasonable person could be forgiven for thinking that the electricity industry may not care if these documents are never found.

M. Gunter
27th June 2011

EXHIBIT
219.

EXHIBIT
218.



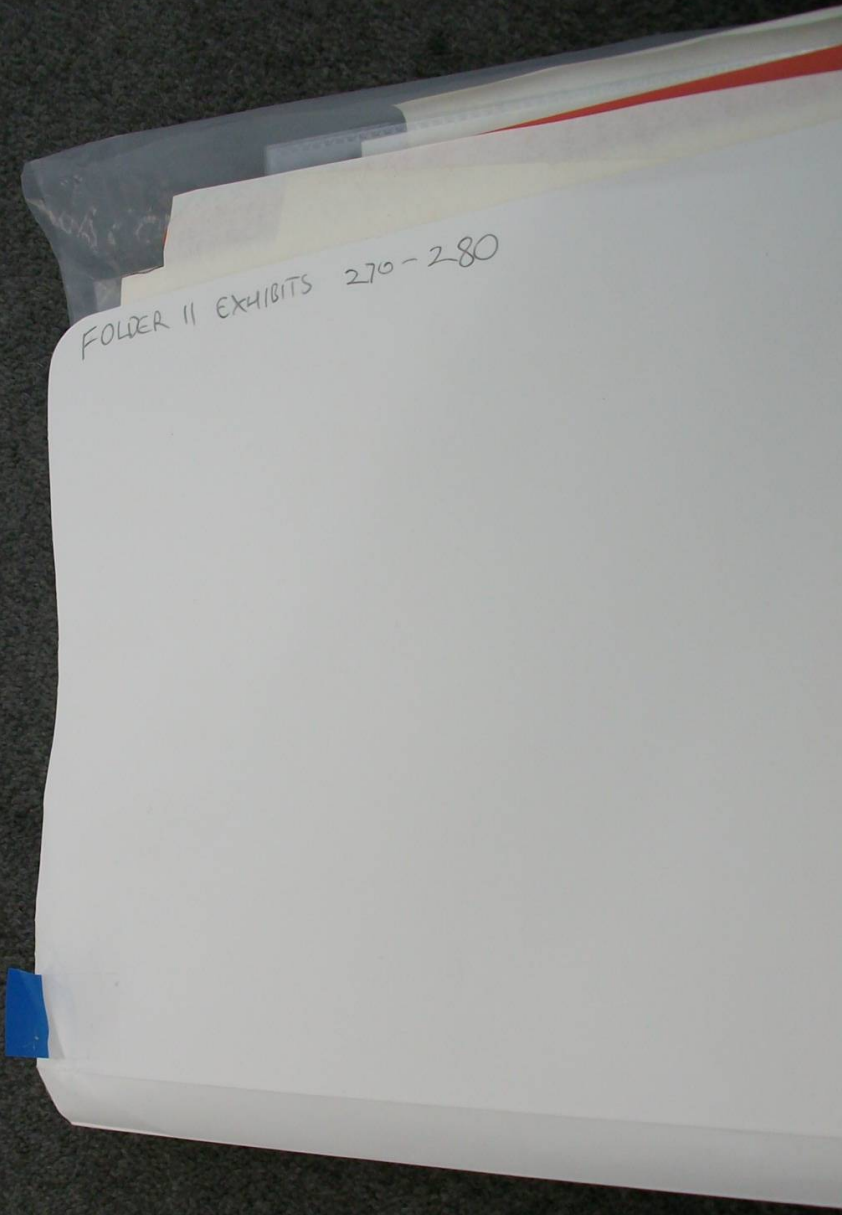
EXHIBIT
216

T



EXHIBIT
279

EXHIBIT
280



FOLDER 11 EXHIBITS 270-280



