

## L-plater's near miss

AN L-plater has had a lucky escape after stepping on the accelerator and losing control entering a southern suburbs petrol station.

The driver missed the bowsers at the BP petrol station at Main South Rd at Darlington before careering in to the main building.

SA Police and the State Emergency Services are at the scene. The incident was initially considered a critical situation because the possibility of a major fire or explosion and the close vicinity of hazardous material.

A police spokeswoman said the driver was in a state of shock but there were no injuries reported.

## CHRISTMAS IN THE GOOD OLD DAYS

[ BOOMER P25 ]



## Stay out of the water

SURF Life saving crews cleared bathers from the sea at major suburban beaches yesterday as a large shark circles just 30m from shore.

It was last spotted close to the Somerton Sailing Club.

Authorities have called for further support to move the shark out to sea.

Two attempts using helicopters moved the shark around 600m from shore, but each time it turned and headed back in.

An SA Police spokeswoman said the public was not in immediate danger but no-one should enter the water anywhere in the vicinity until given the all-clear from authorities.

# AGL has \$6m energy plan to help battlers

**KAREN COLLIER**  
CONSUMER REPORTER

A MAJOR power retailer is considering giving free or cut-price energy-efficient TVs, hot water systems, heaters and whitegoods to customers battling crippling costs.

AGL will also wipe millions of dollars from bills to get hardship households back on track. And staff will visit disadvantaged communities to explain bills and offer financial assistance and savings tips.

AGL will commit an extra \$6 million over three years nationwide to help consumers in

temporary or persistent hardship.

The move follows years of punishing, industry-wide price rises that have added hundreds of dollars to annual costs and thrown increasing numbers of people into energy poverty.

"We recognise the need to change, both as a business and as an industry," retail group general manager Stephen Mikkelsen said.

"We need to be meeting and in fact exceeding community expectations."

Up to half the support fund will be devoted to expanded "incentive payment" schemes

and debt relief, where the company will partly pay bills to avoid huge overdue accounts mounting up.

Mr Mikkelsen said AGL would also investigate the possibility of upgrading ageing appliances for hundreds of the most needy customers.

The firm's hardship program customers have almost doubled to 20,000 nationally in the past five years.

People on low incomes are more likely to live in uninsulated properties and use inefficient refrigerators, heaters, and electric hot water systems with high running costs.

Free home energy audits for eligible customers, to assess how to reduce costs, will be extended from Victoria to South Australia, New South Wales and Queensland.

A dedicated phone line and email address for financial counsellors to contact the business will also be set up.

A Consumer Action Law Centre report released earlier this year highlighted the callous way some energy industry staff treated struggling customers.

Pensioners unable to afford to heat their homes complained of being told to "rug up".

## Legal action as mediation policies fall short

FROM PAGE 1

In another incident several students had burnt him by holding an aerosol can to his skin.

They further state the man, who suffers from autistic-Asperger's syndrome, has suffered permanent scarring as a result of the burn, has had surgery to mend his broken finger and has lost potential income as a result of leaving the college before matriculating.

The documents state that when the man's mother took the reports of "bullying and harassment" against her son to the college, the Education Department and the Independent Schools Board, nothing was done to protect him.

Mal Byrne, a partner at law firm Tindall Gask Bentley, said the action was part of a "wave" of schoolyard bullying lawsuits - which in part would be paid for by the taxpayer - expected to wash over SA's courts in the next five to 10 years.

He said he already had about 15 to 20 active and potential lawsuits on his books - a 20 per cent increase on two or three years ago.

"With a lot of cases you have to wait until the person has recovered from their treatment before you can start proceedings and we have more coming through," he said.

He said the bullying complaints were coming from all age groups and were equally spread across public and private schools.

Mr Byrne said too many

schools were treating bullying cases with mediation rather than punishing the offender.

He said lawsuits were increasing, in part, because of societal attitudes towards bullying.

Grope Hamilton Lawyers' Tony Kerin and Duncan Bashier Hannon's Matt Degregorio, both agreed bullying lawsuits were becoming hot legal topics.

"There are certainly a lot more numbers (of lawsuits) coming through now partly because there are a whole raft of laws to protect students that did not exist years ago," Mr Kerin said.

"People understand their rights a lot better nowadays."

Mr Degregorio said issues arise when schools do not take complaints seriously enough and immediately address the bullying.

In separate incidents, an "Adelaide burn book" page was created on Facebook in November, 2012 to attack, harass and defame students by spreading demeaning and sexually explicit rumours.

It was quickly shut down but, two weeks later, a second "burn book" was created, targeting anti-bullying campaigners for abuse.

In July, *The Advertiser* exclusively reported that a Year 9 student had been taped to a tree, bound with a garden hose and allegedly repeatedly sexually assaulted in an incident recorded and posted on social media.



ASSAULT: A Year 9 student is taped and tied to a tree.

Southern Vales College is yet to file its defence.

The Education Department's executive director of student and family services, David Rathman, said "bullying has no place in our schools and we strive to ensure teachers, principals and other staff are ready to respond to cases of bullying".

"We work hard to eliminate bullying through programs including the Keeping Safe child protection curriculum. Every school also has an anti-bullying policy in place," he said.

"We always attempt to

work with parents and students to address bullying through mediation in order to resolve issues for the benefit of the child being bullied and ensure the child engaged in bullying does not continue with the behaviour.

"But mediation does not replace disciplinary action, and schools do not shy away from taking a tough stance on bullying and will suspend or exclude students from school when appropriate. Support and counselling are made available to victims of bullying."

PAGE 16: EDITORIAL

## Torrens clean-up boost

ADELAIDE'S River Torrens will have banks reinforced, invasive species removed and new vegetation added as part of a Landcare scheme which has been given a \$1 million boost.

Federal Environment Parliamentary Secretary Simon Birmingham will today launch the River Torrens Recovery Program, focused on restoring the major waterway to health.

He said the money aims to improve water quality and native habitat condition.

"The River Torrens is one of South Australia's most significant rivers. It plays a vital role in conveying storm and flood waters away from urban roads and infrastructure, and provides valuable habitat for birds, animals and aquatic life," Senator Birmingham said.

"The funding will be allocated over two years to support a suite of works to rehabilitate the river catchment, including revegetation, invasive species control and river bank stabilisation, complementing existing restoration work."

## Emma dumped by Nine

EMMA Freedman's departure from Channel 9 has left some of her network colleagues reeling, with at least one Nine insider declaring it as "a stupid decision".

"She's really well-liked and was a talent here," the well-placed television insider said, after Freedman (right) confirmed on Twitter she was leaving the network. Another colleague said many of the staff at Nine were incredulous.

But a separate, senior Nine source confirmed Freedman's axing had nothing to do with performance, but plenty to do with money. "It was all about budget," the source said.

A Nine spokeswoman said yesterday: "Emma's contract is up at the end of the month and we are not renewing it".

The insider went on further to say the network would not be searching for an outsider to replace Freedman for the 2015 television season.





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