

From saving lives to saving planet

PENELOPE MOODIE

October 24, 2009



Matt Astill is taking part in a run to increase awareness of climate change. Photo: Michael Clayton-Jones

PROTECTING politicians and responding to riots are all part a day's work for Matt Astill. Next month the veteran policeman will be donating his precious annual leave to a higher priority: saving the planet.

Along with 24 other emergency service workers, Sergeant Astill hopes to raise awareness about climate change by taking part in a relay that takes in some of Australia's most threatened sites.

The Run For a Safe Climate will make its way from Cooktown in northern Queensland to St Kilda, detouring through the Alps, along the Murray River to Adelaide and then the Great Ocean Road to Melbourne.

Organised by Safe Climate Australia, the run will act as a "moving classroom". Scientists, school groups and local emergency service bodies will take part in forums at 28 stops en route to discuss the perils of greenhouse gas emissions.

An acting Sergeant in Victoria Police's Force Response Unit, Sergeant Astill has always been serious about his fitness, but he's never had to prepare for anything as demanding as a run across the continent. His training consists of three 12 to 15 kilometre runs each week, daily gym sessions and loading up on carbohydrates - preparation for running up to 100 kilometres a week.

Sergeant Astill hopes the run will demonstrate what can be achieved through collective action. "There is no way I could complete the 6000 kilometres by myself, just as one or two people changing their ways won't do much to reduce carbon emissions. But if we act globally we can make a significant difference," he said. The runners include police officers, firefighters and State Emergency Service members - not the typical crusaders for action to halt global warming.

"These problems aren't going away. They place a major burden on resources in terms of emergency services as well as on social and physical infrastructures," Sergeant Astill said.

Safe Climate Australia chief executive Brendan Condon said many of Australia's leading climate scientists were supporting the run. Money raised through sponsorship of runners will go towards developing a safe climate transition plan - effectively a map explaining how Australia can rapidly reduce its emissions.

The run, which starts on November 2, can be followed at www.runforasafeclimate.org