

Brigade

summer 2017

Protecting lives
and property

cfa.vic.gov.au



▼ How group officers plan for risk





05

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How group officers plan for risk

COVER PHOTO: ELLE ADAMSON

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Chair Greg Smith



CFA welcomes new Chief Executive Officer

I am pleased to announce that following a thorough and extensive recruitment process, Dr Paul Smith has been appointed the permanent Chief Executive Officer of CFA.

Dr Smith is currently the Deputy Secretary for Energy, Environment and Climate Change in the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP).

He has held a range of leadership roles in the public sector and has significant experience in environmental management.

His expertise in the areas of climate change, innovation and fire management make him well equipped to steer CFA into the future.

Dr Smith will bring a depth of experience and understanding of the complex public policy issues in the emergency and fire prevention sector.

He also led the former Department of Sustainability and Environment's response to the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission.

I would like to thank Frances Diver for leading the organisation through a challenging period. Frances has been CEO since June 2016 and has been responsible for driving significant improvements to the organisation, particularly around governance and stability.

I look forward to working with Dr Smith to consolidate and build upon the significant achievements the Board, Frances and CFA management have made over the past 18 months.

We are committed to strengthening our governance practices, enhancing support for volunteers and working across the fire services to continue our modernisation efforts.

Dr Smith will start at CFA on 1 February 2018. Frances will continue as Chief Executive Officer until this time, ensuring stability for the organisation during the summer season.

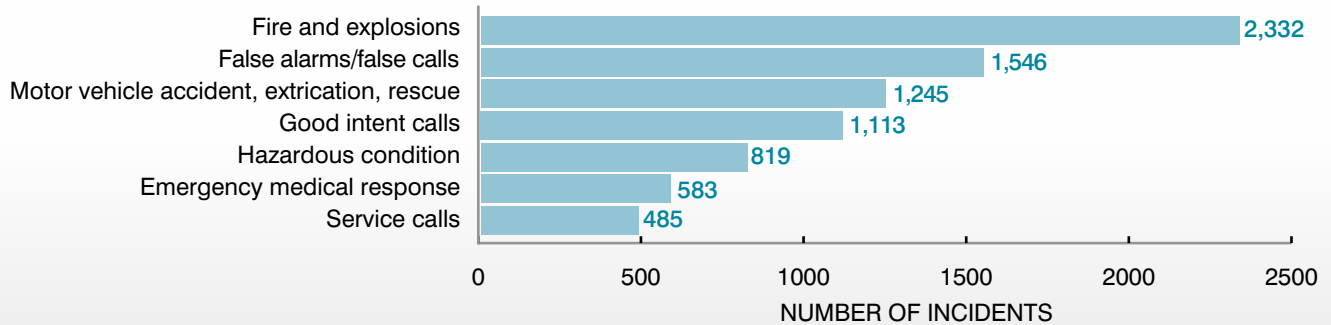


Left: Dr Paul Smith

Incident summary

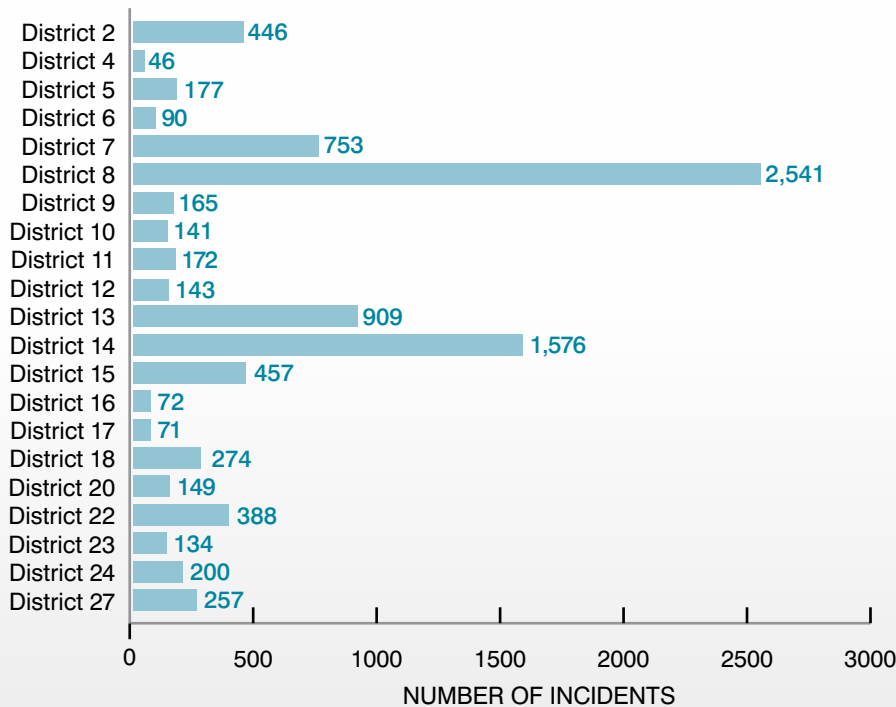
STATEWIDE INCIDENTS BY TYPE

1 July – 30 Sept 2017



STATEWIDE INCIDENTS BY DISTRICT

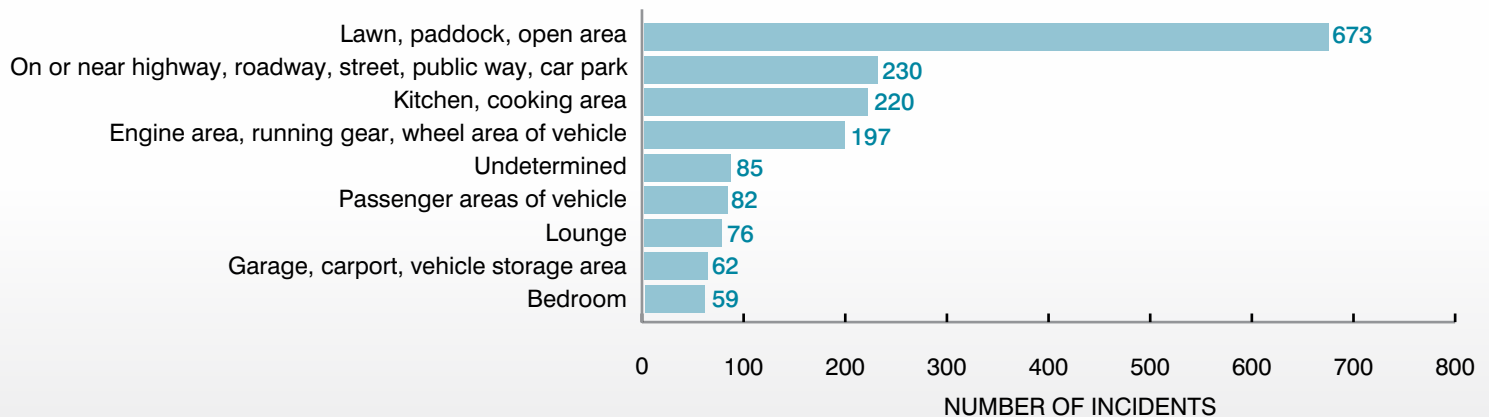
1 July – 30 Sept 2017



Brigades are reminded to submit their incident report as soon as possible after attending an incident. Brigades on strike teams also need to submit a report. FIRS Call Centre, 1800 62 88 44, is open daily 8am-11pm.

ORIGIN OF FIRE

1 July – 30 Sept 2017



Explosion in Drysdale

At around 12.30am, residents in the Drysdale area were woken by explosions as a large shed at the rear of a petro-chemical distribution facility on High Street went up in flames, sending exploding gas cylinders into neighbouring properties.

CFA Operations Officer Wayne Aylmer said the shed was well alight when crews arrived. "The shed was approximately 20 metres x 50 metres and stored LPG cylinders," he said.

"Seven fuel tankers were destroyed as well as hundreds of LPG cylinders. There was a significant loss but, thankfully, no-one was injured."

Residents from 35 homes were evacuated to the SpringDale Neighbourhood Centre.

"As soon as we knew gas cylinders were involved, we knew what we were facing," said Drysdale Fire Brigade Captain Brendan MacDonald. "The initial firefight was using a monitor, as it was too dangerous to put crews with a line anywhere near the fire due to exploding cylinders."

"Evacuation of local residents was all we could do. Our tanker crew started the evacuation, and the police took over when they arrived so we could fight the fire. The police and Operations Officer Wayne Aylmer did a good job to send residents to a safe place."

When the Geelong City ladder platform arrived, crews battled the fire from the air.

As well as six CFA brigades, MFB, SES, Victoria Police, Ambulance Victoria, WorkSafe, Environmental Protection Authority, City of Greater Geelong building surveyor and the municipal emergency response coordinator also attended this major incident.

MFB used a drone to check for cylinders around the area and SES carried out an impact assessment and checked homes.

"Some of the footage of the fire was quite spectacular and it would have been a very difficult fire to both manage and fight," said Assistant Chief Officer South West Region Rohan Luke.

"There were complexities associated with exposures, evacuations, consultation with partner emergency services organisations and government agencies, not to mention the significant focus on crew and public safety."

"This was one of the most complex fires a fire commander and firefighter could attend. I was extremely impressed by the approach taken to swiftly escalate the incident to ensure crews were in place to not only deal with the incident but to ensure support was in place at every level."

CFA and MFB brought the fire under control at around 5am. It was investigated by CFA, Victoria Police and insurance assessors, but the cause couldn't be determined.



STORY DUNCAN RUSSELL

INCIDENT: Structure fire

DISTRICT: 7

DATE: 7 September 2017

BRIGADES: Drysdale,
Geelong City, Corio, Ocean Grove,
Mannerim, Wallington

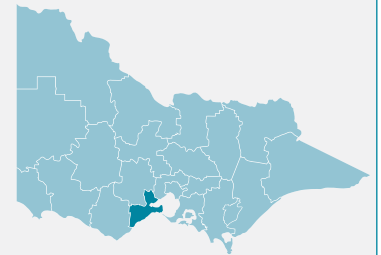


PHOTO: COURTESY OF MFB



PHOTO: WAYNE AYLMER

Buchan stares down another fire



PHOTO: PETER WHITE

On Saturday 23 September, Buchan Fire Brigade members spent the afternoon and evening working on a fire with DELWP (Forest Fire Management) at Quire Road, south-west of Buchan, where they'd been protecting a property and carrying out a back-burn. When they returned home at 8.30pm, they were shocked at what they saw.

"We drove over the hill into Buchan, looked across to Sunny Point, and saw a massive, red glow only half a kilometre from Buchan," said Buchan Fire Brigade Captain Peter White.

"None of us knew it was going until we went back into town.

"There wasn't much we could do that night because it was too dark and the fire was still in the bush. The wind died down and the fire stayed there, leaving a nice glow over Buchan all night."

Peter and his fellow brigade members got up at first light on Sunday, and two strike teams were organised from the Tambo Group, to start work on the Timbarra-Sunny Point fire which burnt 8,000 hectares of state forest and conservation reserve.

"The strike teams and Buchan brigade members spent Sunday setting up water points. We organised four collar tanks and three quick fills were set up at different points on the Buchan River," said Peter.

"We evacuated and shut Buchan Caves Reserve on Sunday, and cancelled a Buchan to Orbost car rally. There were 500-odd people arriving for the rally and we had to get them out of town.

"Every day, we were out carting water and our strike teams helped DELWP conduct two 500-hectare back-burns. We were pretty flat out for the first few days, and CFA volunteers worked for two weeks solid."

A field operations point was set up at Buchan Fire Station and for the first three weeks of the fire there was a CFA volunteer and DELWP member at

the station every day to organise the field operations, answer questions and to source anything people needed, including equipment and drinks.

Two days after the fire started, local police officers and Buchan brigade members checked on Timbarra camping areas that had been wiped out. Campers were escorted in to pick up belongings and then escorted out.

DELWP brought in resources from several regions around the state including Port Phillip, Hume, Barwon South West, Loddon Mallee and Grampians.

"Local DELWP staff were on leave, so my First Lieutenant Greg King and I went around with dozers to show them where to put in fire breaks," continued Peter. "They were picking our brains for local knowledge, which was fantastic.

"Working with DELWP Senior Forest Fire Management Operations Officer Peter Brick in Buchan was the best inter-agency cooperation I've experienced in 15 years. No secrets, all collaboration." Peter Brick was divisional commander for the first three weeks of the fire.

Peter White also set up an air base by asking a local property owner if four helicopters could use a paddock.

"The fire was very challenging because of the severe fire weather conditions and because of the number of CFA and DELWP crews away for school holidays," said Peter Brick. "Thanks to all the DELWP crews from across the state who spent many weeks walking into some rugged, difficult terrain to find and extinguish hot spots."

At a public meeting a few days after the fire started, a member of DELWP "stood in front of a map, showed where the fire was and what they were doing. It was all over in half an hour," said Peter White.

"We're a pretty resilient community because we've been through it six or seven times since 2003."

STORY DUNCAN RUSSELL

Double shop fire in Dandenong

CFA and MFB crews were called to extinguish a blaze that ripped through two double-storey shops in Dandenong in the early morning, and threatened adjoining shops and other premises.

When Dandenong and Hallam brigade crews arrived at Lonsdale Street just after 1.30am, the buildings were well alight.

An incident emergency management team was set up with representatives from CFA, Victoria Police, Ambulance Victoria, the local council, gas supply and power supply companies.

Operations Officer Paul Carrigg took on the CFA commander role to assist the incident controller.

“There were attached shops on both sides and at the rear,” said Paul.

“There was a high risk of the fire spreading to other shops because the buildings were old and wouldn’t have the same standard of fire separation and materials found in modern buildings.

“We used a combination of an internal attack and external attack with the Dandenong ladder platform. When undertaking an internal attack, we shut down the ladder platform to maintain safety for firefighters, then started the aerial attack again once the firefighters were out of the building.”

Paul recommended that a second ladder platform was needed to help prevent fire spread at the rear, so MFB brought one from station 25. MFB also supported CFA with a pumper.

Hose lines went across Princes Highway so the road was shut. “We put arrangements in place to reallocate water supply so that Princes Highway could be opened for peak-hour traffic,” said Paul.

Adjoining shops were checked to make sure the fire hadn’t spread.

Recovery was a crucial part of this fire. “In the middle of Dandenong at 6am, we knew we’d be faced with a whole number of people coming into workplaces that were potentially unsafe due to smoke.

“We established a safe perimeter around the fire and set up atmospheric monitoring equipment. We monitored each building within a two hundred metre perimeter to make sure they were safe, prior to permitting owners and occupants to enter and conduct their business. This was undertaken

INCIDENT: Structure fire

DISTRICT: 8

DATE: 13 September 2017

BRIGADES: Dandenong, Frankston, Keysborough, Patterson River, Hallam



with the assistance of recovery workers from the City of Greater Dandenong. In the immediate adjoining buildings, owners and occupiers were unable to enter buildings until later in the day.”

As if all this wasn’t enough, at the height of the fire people approached firefighters to tell them there was a dog inside an adjoining building at the back. Firefighters found the dog and brought him out unharmed.

STORY DUNCAN RUSSELL



CHIEF OFFICER

Steve Warrington



All at CFA are ready

On the eve of summer, CFA has again been front and centre of public conversation on a number of sensitive matters. Unfortunately, some of this coverage has not been helpful and not a fair reflection of CFA today.

I am sick and tired of our great name being dragged through the mud.

More than 99 per cent of our people do a terrific job, and I've been frustrated that the focus remains on the handful of people who aren't.

I, along with others, will always recognise that issues and divisions of the past will continue to affect our people differently. We never intend to rake over the past.

CFA has acted on information received through a number of reviews, surveys and meetings and we continue to turn the corner. My focus is on the future and growing our organisation.

Change has started through strong leadership from the top and significant changes have been made. Most importantly, this includes a number of changes to our structure that puts inclusion at the forefront of our organisation, both in our thinking and our actions.

Where we need to take further action, we absolutely will. I've been very clear with my expectations on conduct and behaviour and the welfare of all our people is a serious priority.

Let's get on with our good work to keep Victorians safe and ensure CFA remains the champion emergency services agency it is.

Among all this external noise, I've been pleased with your efforts in working together to ensure we are prepared for the season ahead.

Following the release of my expectations, staff and volunteers have familiarised themselves with them and taken actions to minimise the risk to lives and property in Victoria.

As a reminder – my expectations are:

- 1 Be ready
- 2 Take care of yourself and your people
- 3 Connect with communities before, during and after emergencies
- 4 Tell those who need to know – communicate well
- 5 Do what you can, where you are, with what you've got – hit fires hard and fast
- 6 Demonstrate our values in everything you do:
 - Put safety first
 - Respect each other
 - Act with integrity
 - Work together as one
 - Be adaptive and agile
- 7 Everyone is responsible for safety – speak up.

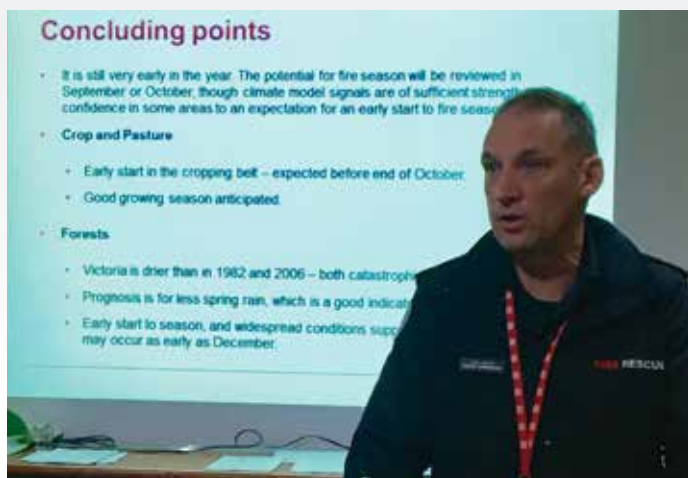
CFA provides a first-rate service to Victorians and central to that is our ability to work in partnership with the communities we serve, other emergency services and, most importantly, our own people. Everyone has to be on their game this fire season – communities across Victoria rely on us to protect life and property. That's my focus and I know it's yours.

Thank you to all who have participated in the summer pre-season briefings, which covered topics that included:

- the seasonal bushfire outlook
- new training on hazardous tree awareness
- insights from previous years – using a dynamic risk assessment and a Swan Hill tanker burn under
- research on cropland and grassfire behaviour
- findings from the 2017 community survey
- reminders about health monitoring and rehab, fire scene preservation, working with aircraft and the use of private firefighting equipment.

Finally, we also need to look after each other. As staff and volunteers of CFA, we face many challenges every day. It is therefore crucial that we look after ourselves and I ask that our leaders look out for members in their teams. Adopting this attitude will position us even more strongly to perform our duty to protect lives and property.

You're all valued members of CFA and the community can be confident our people represent our values at all times.



CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



Frances Diver

CFA finds itself better placed than ever to fulfil its important duty of protecting lives and property after a significant recent funding boost to the fire services.

The announcement by the Victorian Government in October that an extra \$60 million would be made available to further improve capability and preparedness has some very real and positive implications for how we go about our business.

The funding will enable CFA to continue its vital work and will help us deliver better training, support and equipment for staff and volunteers throughout the state. It represents an important step as we move to further strengthen service delivery and help keep communities safe.

The funding allocation is among the measures announced in the Fire Services Statement earlier this year. Among the initiatives the funding will underpin are:

- \$11.6 million for volunteer training and capability including Information and communication technology upgrades
- \$11 million for upgrades to CFA buildings and infrastructure across regional and rural Victoria
- funding to improve culture and diversity within CFA, including increasing the diversity of staff and volunteers
- \$11 million for specialist vehicles
- \$10 million for a CFA volunteer sustainability grants program
- \$6.7 million for workplace health and safety measures including new safety helmets.

These initiatives, collectively, will help shape the kind of organisation CFA will become. Ensuring our people are appropriately skilled and equipped to fulfil the role of a modern, highly-capable firefighting service is absolutely critical.

Of equal importance is a culture and work environment that underpins all these practical and technical capabilities. A key aim of the CFA leadership is to ensure a workplace that is inclusive and reflects the diversity of the community it serves.

According to most forecasts, this summer will be challenging but we're well positioned to meet these demands due largely to the commitment, professionalism and aptitude of our people. Supporting them through training, equipment and by creating a work environment which empowers them to perform to the best of their capabilities is incumbent on CFA leadership.

As the results of our People Matters staff survey show, we need to significantly change to ensure all staff and volunteers feel welcome and safe and are supported in the important work we do.

Bullying and harassment in CFA are completely unacceptable and, while management is working hard to improve the culture, the most significant change will occur when each of us steps up to make the necessary changes. Achieving this will not only set us up for the coming season but for the longer term, to the great benefit of our organisation and the broader community which we serve.

DCO Statewide Service Delivery and Safety



Garry Cook

Chief Officer Steve Warrington has stated one of his expectations for this summer is we "be ready". While being part of CFA means we are always ready, the heightened risk that the summer bushfire season presents, and the likelihood of extended incidents, give the phrase added meaning.

In brigades being ready means, among other things, planning to respond with trucks and equipment and appropriately-trained people. For many of our volunteers it also means they have spoken to family members and, if required, to employers about their expectations of their potential brigade activity during summer. It also means other things in groups, districts and regions.

We spend significant time and effort educating and encouraging our community to also be ready. What may not be well known is the planning, training and readiness activities that occur at a state level to support the community and our brigades during the summer season. The following is a brief overview of one of the key components to our success.

CFA plays a key role in Victoria's State Control Centre (SCC), the State Control Team (SCT) and State Emergency Management Team (SEMT). Senior operational personnel, along with administrative staff and volunteers with specialist skills are rostered seven days a week into the SCC. CFA plays key roles in the SCC including: media and social media unit; public information and warnings advice; fire behaviour analyst (FBAN); logistics; and resources and administrative support.

In the context of the Chief's message, everyone at every level must be ready, and the state level is no different.

More broadly at the state level, the joined-up approach to emergency management extends well beyond traditional emergency services organisations. It includes various key sector representatives from across government and non-government organisations who provide information in their areas of responsibility to support the community with advanced intelligence about impending situations, and be fully included during response and recovery activities.

While there is naturally a high focus on fire weather and any significant fire activity, other potential events such as heatwave, energy consumption and supply monitoring, storms and flooding can all occur in the space of a few days during the summer. That means having the broader team involved at the SCC is vital to the rapid exchange of intelligence and fundamental to the success of our actions in times of greatest need.

I ask you again to ensure you and your team are ready for what may be another difficult fire season. Get your gear ready, do your entrapment and hazardous trees drills and refresh your training.

Most importantly this summer, stay safe.

ASSISTANT CHIEF OFFICER North East Region



Ross Sullivan

As I write this column in October there are already worrying signs for the summer season ahead.

We've already experienced significant bushfires in East Gippsland and have had smaller lightning-strike-generated fires in the north-east of our region.

Over the past few weeks, members from North East Region have helped suppress fires through deployments on strike teams, air operations and incident management teams. When you read this column, a range of pre-season briefings and exercises will have taken place.

I know you will be aware of the Chief Officer's expectations that all operational members will have carried out an entrapment drill and completed the Hazardous Tree Awareness package either online through eLearning or via the awareness package delivered to your brigade. These are critical activities that directly affect you and your crew's safety.

The spring edition of *Brigade* magazine contained the *Pre-season Update 2017-18 Summer Season* supplement. The focus was firmly on frontline safety, with some of the topics being: LACES; speaking up; learning from experience (a number of short case studies); health, heat stress and injury prevention; firefighting in raised bed crops and aircraft and aviation.

I strongly encourage you to read or reread this supplement and, where you can, access the online reference material. It's also a great idea to discuss these topics with members of your brigade. Doing this, as well as the pre-season briefings and exercises, are important for your safety and will help update you on important operational matters for this coming fire season.

Remember the Chief Officer's expectations:

- Be ready
- Take care of yourself and your people
- Connect with communities before, during and after emergencies
- Tell those that need to know – communicate well
- Do what you can, where you are, with what you've got – hit fires hard and fast
- Demonstrate our values in everything you do
- Everyone is responsible for safety – speak up.

Our general activities and our pre-season preparedness not only take time and commitment from brigades and members on a particular day, but a significant amount of time goes into planning, preparing and coordinating the activities. To all of you, in whatever role you undertake in CFA, a sincere thank you for your significant contribution, commitment and effort.

Christmas and the New Year are only weeks away. It's a time for family and friends and, hopefully for most, a time to relax and recharge the batteries for the year to come.

Stay safe and look out for each other.

OPERATIONS MANAGER District 18



John Bigham

I have been in the role of Operations Manager in District 18 for almost three years. During this time, I've been impressed by the commitment of the District 18 team, volunteers, career staff and support agencies.

District 18 is CFA's largest district, comprising 76 brigades, including one integrated brigade at Mildura, and nine groups across 39,000 square kilometres. That means the approximate drive from Swan Hill to each brigade is 125 kilometres.

This diverse district includes large broad acre farms with continuous cropping, a significant horticulture sector of almond, citrus and olive trees, vegetable growing and a highly-regarded wine industry. The area also has diverse communities – for example, 47 different languages are spoken across the Robinvale area. This provides CFA an opportunity to engage with this multicultural community to broaden its volunteer base and to link with local police officers to develop an engagement approach to maximise participation.

Like many other areas across the state, District 18 faces a number of challenges including rural decline, where we are seeing smaller farms being sold off to create large holdings. With many of the modern farming practices no longer requiring a manual workforce, the number of people on farms has diminished, reducing the volunteer base.

Earlier in the year, workshops were held in the district to look at how we can better support our volunteers and provide efficiencies in delivering a fire service in this remote part of the state (see 'Combating rural decline' on page 35). A number of initiatives are also being developed, including five stakeholder engagement days to engage with our partner agencies and private unit operators to ensure a coordinated and safe approach to firefighting. A number of 'harvest breakfasts' are also planned, where CFA members will talk to local farmers about the risks, and we will have a number of private unit inspection days.

The last fire season kept us all busy and I am told by local volunteers who've lived in the Mallee all their lives that it was the most active summer fire season they had seen for 25 years. This was mainly due to the bumper crop season across the region and the change in crop type from the usual wheat and barley to legume, which has a lower flash point.

We had very large fires on Christmas Day and Boxing Day last year, which saw firefighters from CFA and Forest Fire Management Victoria (DELWP) giving up time with their families to protect their local communities.

Given the early start of the Fire Danger Period in this area, in October, our focus is to increase air support. This fire season there will be two air bombers at Ouyen and a type 2 helicopter at Sealake on pre-determined dispatch to support brigades fight grass and scrub fires.

Prototype sand tanker on trial





Left: Wheel with inflation/deflation device fitted

PHOTO: KEITH PAKENHAM AFSM

Below: Dashboard control

PHOTO: KAREN BARNET

Right: Testing the sand tanker

PHOTO: GRAHAM HILL



CFA has produced a prototype sand tanker, which was developed after consultation with stakeholders, and a further five are planned this financial year.

The tanker is an updated and modified 3.4D tanker, originally built in 2000. The cab chassis is an Isuzu FTS 750 single cab and has had significant updates to make it suitable for use in sandy country, including super single tyres (Bridgestone 385/65 R22.5 tyres on 11.75 x 22.5 Mullins rims) and an AirCTI central tyre inflation system.

This system allows the tyre pressures to be changed from the cab of the vehicle and while the vehicle is in motion. In sandy conditions, the truck's tyres can be deflated so that the tyres have a greater surface in contact with the sand.

Bell Environmental in Sunshine completed the body modifications and the new stowage arrangement. The central tyre inflation system was fitted by AirCTI in Moe.

Other enhancements to the vehicle include: a permanently-connected suction hose in a locker mounted at the rear on the offside; altering the live hose reel to 30 metres of 19mm hose; moving the dead hose reel to mid under-tray on the offside; and changing to a Quenchmaster Class A foam system.

Safety improvements include:

- New LED hazard lights and beacons
- New red/lime green Battenburg striping and outline striping
- New continuous yellow handrail
- Lowered front cab access steps
- Cab access handles, step ring and step treads changed to safety yellow
- Air horn which includes activation from the rear of the vehicle
- New non-flammable Thermaguard mud flaps
- New larger tray access steps with swinging lower section.

In mid-September for two days, this modified truck underwent trials in the north-west, where it was tested in the sandy areas near Yanac and Pigick in District 17. Brigade members were briefed on these new features, and then drove the truck in sandy terrain to test the improved drivability.

At the end of each day's testing, the members were asked about the design changes and feedback was positive. The tanker was judged as

being well suited to the sandy terrain. However, the testers weren't sure whether super single tyres or dual rear tyres were best suited to the sand. All agreed the AirCTI system was an essential improvement.

One of the testers, Murray Miller from Yanac Fire Brigade, thought the system was much needed.

"Allowing brigades to deflate and inflate tyres easily will definitely save many hours wasted with bogged trucks waiting to be towed out instead of fighting fires. I think the inflation system will be an A grade addition," Murray said.

All the feedback from these sessions is being assessed and further trials in District 18 may be undertaken after the 2017 harvest season.

When the prototype isn't being evaluated, it's based at Yaapeet Fire Station.

STORY KAREN BARNET, SAND TANKER PROJECT MANAGER



Trial of intercom systems

With the heat, smoke and noise during bushfires, communications on the fireground remain a key issue.

All inquiries into major fires have highlighted the importance of delivering and receiving clear instructions at all levels, from incident controllers to the field, between units on the fireground and at crew level on fire trucks.

In particular, firefighters on tankers at grass and scrub fires, where fire behaviour can be changeable, sometimes can't hear each other because of the noise of pumps and the fire.

Some activities, such as operating a hose from the side of the rear deck of a tanker or working on the ground away from the vehicle, give rise to situations where natural conversations between crew members are not possible. In most situations this doesn't cause a problem, but in others clear communication is crucial to crew safety and vital seconds can be lost.

Some time ago, a trial of a wireless intercom system came up with some interesting findings: clearer, more natural conversations between crew members were possible; the use of headsets freed up both hands to operate equipment; and the amount of operational radio traffic was reduced.

Around a year ago, CFA put a call-out to the market to find a system suitable for trialling. Key criteria were personal mobility, ability for hands-free operation, headsets that are compatible with helmets and goggles, and a good working range.

Five companies approached CFA with a variety of solutions and two systems were selected for full-scale trials. The systems support full duplex communication between a crew of five, operate on DECT frequencies (which are also used for cordless telephones), are recharged in the vehicle, and have a range of more than 100 metres.

Craigieburn, Wildwood and Wollert brigades are using four tankers to run trials over the summer. Plans are in place for more brigades to work with the four tankers, so that we can collect a wide range of feedback. Some District 14 brigades attended a field day in mid-November to take part in a number of exercises that simulated regular tasks at bushfires, such as grassfire attack and asset protection. Crews were then asked to provide feedback based on their past experience and how they found the systems during the exercises they undertook.

These trials will firm up the required features of a tanker crew communication system, identify hands-on operational issues and focus on other aspects such as installation, maintenance, technical support and training.

CFA is always looking to improve safety, security and efficiency for all our staff and volunteers. Wireless intercom systems have the potential to advance all three.

STORY MARK GARVEY AFSM



Top right: intercom system on trial

PHOTO: GRAEME BLAND

Right: unpacking the kit

PHOTO: MARK GARVEY AFSM

Left: intercom units racked and ready for use

PHOTO: GRAEME BLAND



Fire Awareness Award winners

Upper Ferntree Gully Fire Brigade is this year's winner in the Innovation category of the Fire Awareness Awards.

The Fire Awareness Awards celebrate the achievements of individuals, community groups, and organisations in delivering initiatives that address community safety and reduce the impact of fire.

This year's awards night was held on 4 December, with winners celebrated for a range of great projects, including the Monterey Fire Ready program, which received the RACV Most Outstanding Award.

Upper Ferntree Gully brigade was recognised for its innovative efforts in compiling a local fire preparedness and awareness four-part video series (stills from the videos are shown right and below). Each video covers a different theme, and was designed to help community members in Upper Ferntree Gully and the surrounding Dandenong Ranges to prepare for bushfires.

The videos are presented by local volunteer Emily Peel, who captures the interest of her viewers by presenting information that's tailored to the local community and environment.

The videos have been launched on the brigade's Facebook page, and encourage action from the community, pointing them in the right direction for specific advice on CFA's website.

The videos bring together a range of existing information from CFA, the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Emergency Management Victoria and the Department of Education and Training, and presents it in an appealing way.

The Fire Awareness Awards have recognised and celebrated communities for their fire prevention, protection and recovery activities across Victoria since 1983.

STORY STEFANIE RUSSELL



Category	Winner
Access and Inclusion	Southern Grampians Glenelg Primary Care Partnership (SGGPCP) Balmoral Fire Connect
Community Learning and knowledge	Monterey Secondary College, Magenta Safety Training and Parks Victoria Monterey Fire Ready
Community prevention and preparedness	Conservation Ecology Centre Cape Otway Fuel Reduction and Ecological Burns Program
Recovery	Indigo Valley Bushfire Community Recovery Committee Barnawartha-Indigo Valley Bushfire Recovery
Government and Industry Diversity	The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) Asylum Seeker Employment Pathways
Government and Industry Partnership	Corangamite Catchment Management Authority Wiyn-murrup Yangarramela – Fire Spirit Comes Back
Innovation	Upper Ferntree Gully Fire Brigade (CFA) Upper Ferntree Gully Fire Brigade Local Preparedness Videos
RACV Most Outstanding Award	Monterey Secondary College, Magenta Safety Training and Parks Victoria Monterey Fire Ready



Attack and lay pack success

In 2013, changes in building codes and the increasing number of multi-storey developments around the Dandenong area put a strain on the existing high-rise hose deployment packs we use to fight fires.

Dandenong Fire Brigade career firefighters wanted to introduce a better high-rise kit that was also multipurpose and easier to use than the existing one.

Dandenong firefighters looked at a number of hose pack systems from around Australia and settled on the QuickLay Fire Attack packs being developed by a career firefighter from Fire and Rescue NSW, and already being used by Queensland Fire and Emergency Services, SA Metropolitan Fire Service and the Northern Territory Fire and Rescue Service.

Following the research, Dandenong crews carried out trials of the quick lay hose packs. The aim of the trials was to find a system of hose deployment that could deliver 60 metres of 38mm hose to meet changes in the building code, and be flexible enough to be used on a range of jobs in addition to high-rise firefighting.

Crews were already trialling the Cleveland load for 38mm attack lines, so it made sense to incorporate this into high-rise kits.

Manufactured by QuickLay Fire Attack, the Attack Pack and Lay Pack were trialled at Dandenong for around 12 months, with crews using them in a number of different environments. The firefighters were asked to comment on their effectiveness in confined areas and ability to cover longer distances with minimal effort.

The Attack Pack stores an attack line in the Cleveland load, a pre-connected firefighting nozzle plus adapters and reducers. With three quick movements, the Attack Pack hose deploys into a coil which can be easily advanced into the fire. This pack can be deployed in restricted spaces such as high-rise stairs, a terrace courtyard or a balcony.

The Lay Pack stores an attack line, adapters and reducers. It deploys hose 'on-the-fly' or as the firefighter covers the distance – ideal for laying hose in a restricted space.

Following these trials, CFA headquarters moved to incorporate the packs as part of standard stowage on the new medium

pumper and the next stage of the heavy pumper project.

Leading firefighter Kieran Purcell from MFB's Structural Training department worked closely with Dandenong firefighters to develop joint training materials for future use of the hose packs and to help increase interoperability between the agencies.

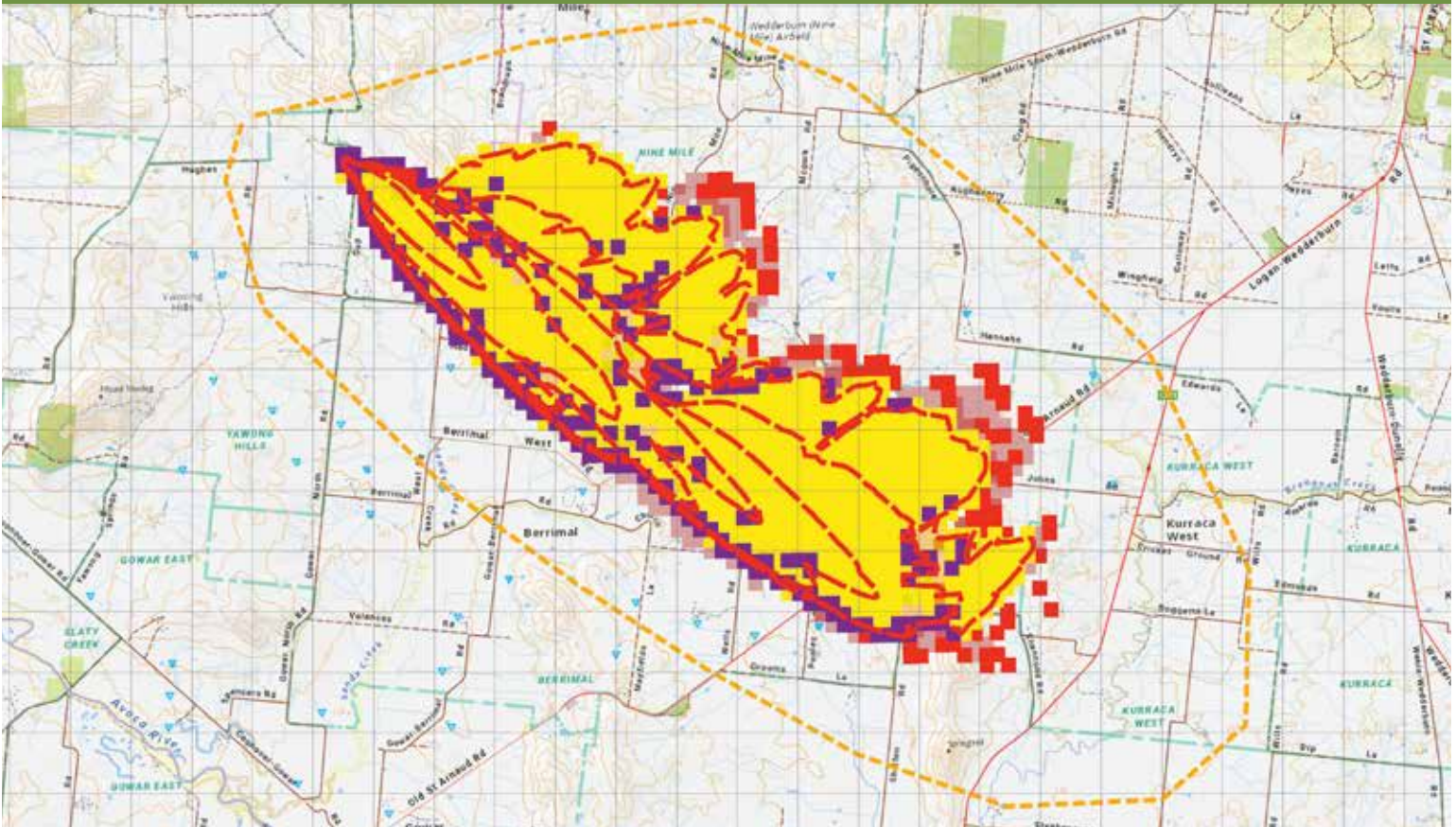
The main benefits of the new packs are:

- the ability to easily deploy 60m of 38mm hose using standard flaked hose from the Lay Pack in a lay-as-you-go method and the Cleveland load in the Attack Pack.
- they share the weight of equipment between two firefighters, minimising manual handling issues.
- they give greater flexibility of deployment in both low-rise and high-rise environments.
- they increase flexibility because they can be laid out towards the fire or from the fire back to the truck or hydrant.
- they contain a large amount of small gear including adapters, door chocks, hose securing straps, gated Wye piece and low pressure high-flow nozzle.

STORY BRENDON SIINMAA



Predicting fire behaviour



As a fire develops, CFA aims to provide the best possible information to communities about the potential impact it may have on them. To achieve this, we need to predict what a fire might do.

For many years, fire predictions used prediction models and sketching lines onto paper-based maps. This approach, combined with local knowledge, fireground experience and observations of the fire activity, can be really effective, particularly in the early stages of a fire.

More recently, thanks to fire behaviour research and the development of computer-based fire simulators, we can run a large number of fire simulations and predictions with much greater detail.

Whether we do manual or computer fire modelling, the information needed is largely the same:

- The ignition location of the fire
- The type of fuel the fire is burning
- The current and future weather
- The topography the fire is travelling over.

As with all predictions, the quality of the prediction will be greatly affected by the accuracy of the input information, and predictions always need to be reviewed. This means fire behaviour analysts need good situation reports from people on the fireground. Confirming the current fire location and updating VicFire is vital to the accuracy of predictions, as is information about the current fire behaviour, direction the fire is travelling and any spotting that's occurring.

Fire predictions are not only used in response to a fire – planning and preparedness products are also produced to help decision-makers ensure prevention works are carried out in particular areas. For preparedness products, computer simulations model thousands of fire-start locations across the state so that we can assess how these fires might spread and impact assets and communities. Decision-makers can then determine the fire risk and the potential damage the fires could do across the state over several days.

Over the summer, fire behaviour analysts are on standby every day at the State Control Centre. They provide briefings about the potential fire threat across the state over the next few days. From a response perspective, analysts may run predictive modelling on new fire starts that have the potential to spread. The predictions usually show how they are likely to spread for at least the next six hours, but they can predict the behaviour over several days.

Fire behaviour analysts may also work as part of an incident management team, where they can advise the Operations and Planning sections about the current and future fire behaviour.

Generally, predictions don't show the impact of fire suppression, so if suppression is effective the actual fire spread may be significantly less than that predicted.

If you want to find out more about predicting fire behaviour email, cfapredictiveservices@cfa.vic.gov.au

Improving safety at burns

For many years quad bikes have been used by CFA brigades at roadside fuel reduction burns because they are more effective and faster than using hand-held drip torches.

But, as we reported in *Brigade* magazine in the spring 2017 issue, there has been an increasing number of injuries and deaths following rollovers.

As a result, CFA is investigating a switch to a safer vehicle to improve firefighter safety on the fireground, which also aligns with a general thrust by WorkSafe and the Victorian Government to do the same across rural and farming communities.

Called side-by-side vehicles, which look like a golf buggy, the driver and passenger can sit side by side. They have a fitted roll cage, are easier to drive – thanks to a steering wheel – have seat belts and a wider wheel base for better stability.



CFA has bought two side-by-sides to trial this summer across South West Region. They are made by Landboss and have a three-cylinder diesel-powered engine. They will be used by brigades involved in spraying and burning.

The productivity, manoeuvrability, flexibility, safety and transportability of the vehicles will be assessed.

Some people think side-by-sides are not as effective at roadside burns as quad bikes, so we'll make sure we compare the two vehicles, like for like, on the fireground.

By the end of the summer, CFA hopes to show that side-by-sides are flexible, manoeuvrable and safe, and perform as well as quad bikes. If so, CFA will have the evidence to extend their use across the state.

STORY MARK GARVEY AFSM

PHOTO: MARK GARVEY AFSM

Inclusion and fairness update

Emergency services across Australia have more in common than protecting the lives of Australians. Recognising the need to join a global movement to re-evaluate a culture accepting low levels of women in leadership roles, the sector has collectively moved forward by joining the Male Champions of Change. CFA CEO Frances Diver signed on as CFA's Champion in 2017 with ACO Inclusion and Fairness Steve Smith as implementation leader.

Gender equality is an issue of international importance. In 2010, a group of senior men met with Sex Discrimination Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick to explore the idea of a group of male leaders focused on increasing women's representation in leadership.

The group formed the Male Champions of Change (MCC), made up of eight CEOs and non-executive directors from IBM, Goldman Sachs, Qantas, Citi, Deloitte and Telstra. Women's activism is cited as essential to progress within organisations. However, power positions are largely held by

men and MCC recognises that this needs to be addressed.

After a number of years together, and with strong guidance from many, a great deal has been learned about change in organisations. CFA's Inclusion and Fairness program endeavours to learn

from some of the success of MCC including the introduction of Listen and Learn sessions.

ACO Steve Smith believes ongoing consultation and organisational temperature checks are essential to improve CFA's record on gender equity.

"We need to continue to have a two-way conversation with staff and volunteers about their experiences and to check in with what's working and not working – this is an important part of cultural change," Steve said.

He added that governance was important to CFA's journey to equity. Regional ACOs are currently working on the rollout of regional Inclusion and Fairness councils.

"Senior leaders in business, government, education and community are calling on all employers to confront the way they use the concept of 'merit' when making decisions about appointment or promotion."

Male Champions of Change Network

STORY JODIE HENRY

Research highlights gaps in fire safety knowledge



PHOTO: KEITH PAKENHAM AFSM

To understand how people living in high-risk areas view their bushfire risk and how well prepared they feel, CFA has carried out post-season community surveys in bushfire-prone areas since 2009.

Key findings are incorporated into pre-season briefings to share knowledge and inform decision making. Some findings to emerge from the research over the past few years include:

- high levels of general awareness of bushfire risk, but a tendency for many people living in high-risk areas to underestimate the risk at their own home
- an increasing expectation among residents that they will receive official warnings from emergency services about bushfires that might threaten them, and get help from the emergency services during incidents
- people living in high-risk areas are reluctant to leave early before a bushfire threatens them. The majority intend to leave, but are heavily reliant on official warnings and trusted networks to trigger this decision.

This research helps us develop targeted summer fire safety messaging and design community education and engagement programs.

Urban fringe risk not understood

This year, we carried out additional survey research to examine perceptions of grassfire risk on the urban fringe. This is the first time CFA has done research on grassfire risk near cities and towns.

A key piece of advice for residents living close to grassland is never drive if you can see smoke or fire. Another important message that has been targeted at residents in recent years is that in the event of a grassfire those living next to grassland should walk at least two streets back and those living two or three streets away from grassland should stay put.

The survey revealed that just a quarter of respondents living next to grassland intended to leave their house as soon as they became aware of a grassfire nearby. Just over a third of respondents living two or three streets back from grassland thought they should leave if there was a fire in grassland threatening the area. These findings highlight a need for CFA staff and volunteers to raise awareness and understanding of the key messages among residents in high-risk areas.

Despite living close to grassland, 61 per cent of respondents believed a grassfire was unlikely to impact their street. While around 70 per cent of respondents reported feeling prepared for a grassfire, there were clear gaps in people's understanding of what they should be doing before and during a grassfire. Despite being contrary to CFA advice, almost one in five respondents believed it was safe to drive through smoke. Only 16 per cent of respondents had discussed with members of their household what to do if there was a grassfire, which is a significant gap in their planning.

These findings highlight some important areas to focus on when engaging with communities exposed to the risk of grassfires in urban areas.

Community connection to CFA

The bushfire survey found that almost 70 per cent of respondents feel well connected to their local CFA brigade, highlighting the vital role that brigades play in communities across Victoria. Further analysis of the survey data revealed a strong association between those who feel well connected to CFA and many of the desired outcomes around understanding of bushfire risk and preparedness actions, including:

- having a realistic understanding of risk
- feeling informed about how to get warnings
- taking action as a result of participating in CFA programs
- feeling better prepared and more confident about bushfire survival planning.

Such findings reinforce the value of building community connections and emphasise the role staff and volunteers play in community safety. The day-to-day interaction members have with residents in high-risk areas contributes to people assessing their risk and taking actions to improve their safety. This is characterised by listening to people's concerns, building connections, respecting local knowledge, challenging assumptions about risk and response, and addressing local needs.

For more information about the research, email j.gilbert@cfa.vic.gov.au.

STORY JOHN GILBERT

Hub of learning



Around five years ago, the search began to find a new and better learning management system to replace the ageing TRAIN and WebTRAIN programs. After an extensive search and selection process, the chosen system was an off-the-shelf program from global learning technology provider IMC.

The new system, called CFA Learning Hub, is a modern learning program and, thanks to its cloud-based platform, can be accessed by all CFA staff and volunteers with an internet-connected computer, tablet or smartphone.

Learning systems have come a long way in the past 10 years and the Learning Hub has many contemporary features and functions to improve the ability of staff and volunteers and brigades to access learning programs and training information easily and quickly.

The Learning Hub has been live for six months and its features and functionality will be progressively enhanced over the coming year. It currently lets staff and volunteers:

- check their training records
- see what training courses are available
- apply to attend courses using the online nomination process
- automatically have messages and reminders sent to their personal email
- check their progress as they take part in a course or qualification
- provide online feedback about courses
- complete the online Tree Hazard Awareness training course.

In addition to these, brigade captains, group officers and brigade and group training officers can:

- view their brigade members' training records
- approve nominations in the system
- run reports on their brigade or group members
- nominate or recommend brigade or group members for courses
- run brigade operational skills profile (BOSP) reports (additional access approvals may be needed)

- enter skills maintenance drills for their brigade or group (training officers only).

Before the Learning Hub was launched in June, a huge amount of work was undertaken to configure the program, link to CFA's member database, transfer training records, set up courses and test the functions with user test groups. This development is ongoing and will continue for the life of the program.

Over the next six to 12 months, the look and feel of the Learning Hub will be improved and it will also:

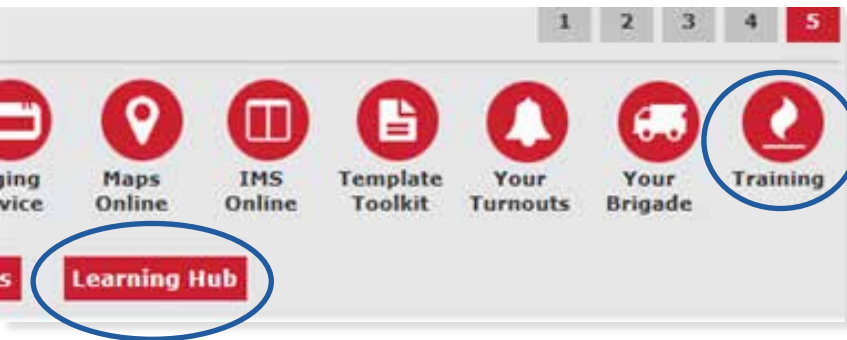
- allow individual members to generate and print certificates and reports
- release online training programs on:
 - Work Safely at CFA Incidents
 - Introduction to AIIMS
 - Drive on Road – policy and legislation
 - Asbestos Awareness
 - Electrical Safety Awareness
 - Microsoft Office online training modules
- expand reporting options available to brigades
- receive incident attendance uploads from FIRS
- increase the information and materials available to course participants
- link to lessons learned and research articles.

To access the Learning Hub, select the Learning Hub link in Brigades Online (see above, right).

New Tree Hazard Awareness online course


The Tree Hazard Awareness training program can be completed by logging on to the Learning Hub and enrolling in the Tree Hazard Awareness online course available in the Course Catalogue menu.

After enrolling, participants can take the course in their own time, over a number of sessions if desired. When someone completes the course,



it will be recorded automatically onto their records. Information about how new users can access the course is available on Brigades Online > Training > Resources > Learning Hub or from the launch page of the Learning Hub.

TREE HAZARD AWARENESS



Available now

Availability

Unlimited

Available after start

Open course

You finished the course

This online course enables learners to identify tree hazards and to understand what are the consequences, causes and your responsibilities.

This training should take between 15-20 minutes. Once you have enrolled click the right arrow to commence your training.

Contact
Gary Weir

SKILLS

This course influences the following skills:

TREE HAZARD AWARENESS

Role profiles

Role profile reporting is an exciting and innovative new function of the Learning Hub that provides greater clarity about seasonal training preparedness.

Role profiling allows CFA to group a set of skills together to represent the capability requirements of a role or specific activity. The first designated role profile is FDP Preparedness which incorporates the Wildfire

Skill	Value	Emp...	Required skill
WILDFIRE FIREFIGHTER	<div style="width: 100%; background-color: #2980b9;"></div>	Completed	1 Yes
TREE HAZARD AWARENESS	<div style="width: 100%; background-color: #2980b9;"></div>	Completed	1 Yes
ENTRAPMENT DRILL	<div style="width: 100%; background-color: #2980b9;"></div>	Completed	1 Yes

Firefighter Qualification, Tree Hazard Awareness course and Entrapment Drill. The Chief Officer requires all operational firefighters to complete an Entrapment Drill and the Tree Hazard Awareness course before they respond to bushfires this summer.

The FDP Preparedness Role Profile means CFA can monitor and report training completion rates to the Chief Officer in real time to ensure he has a clear picture of response capability.

Brigade training

Brigades can run group sessions using materials from the recent information package delivered to brigades and each member can complete the quiz and answer sheet. The completed answer sheets and training attendance record sheet can be sent to district/region training staff for entry onto member records or entered as a drill onto the Learning Hub by the brigade training officer.

Brigade skills maintenance

Brigade training officers and group training officers can enter completed drill and skills maintenance activity details into the Learning Hub in the same way as it was entered into WebTRAIN.

FIRS data will also be uploaded into the Learning Hub, removing the need to manually enter incident details.

Information on entering drills into the Learning Hub is available at Brigades Online > Training > Resources > Learning Hub or from the landing page of the Learning Hub.

Operate Breathing Apparatus

Breathing apparatus (BA) skills maintenance drills in the Learning Hub are processed in a different way to the past. Instead of requiring BA to be worn four times in two years to remain current, wearers' currency will be automatically extended for six months past the last recorded wear date – this can be when a drill was completed or when BA was worn at an incident.

Brigade and group training officers will be able to enter skills maintenance drills of their brigade members into the Learning Hub.

The standard process for reaccreditation for members whose BA currency has lapsed still applies. Details about the BA reinstatement process are available at Brigades Online > Training > Resources > Learning Hub.

BOSP reports

The brigade operational skills profile (BOSP) reporting program can be accessed from the landing page of the Learning Hub. However, it's an external system and has different access requirements. To obtain access you must be allocated as 'brigade training' via your brigade's online profile. This access is usually only provided to brigade training officers, captains and selected brigade and group personnel with training responsibilities. Discuss access with your captain or group officer and contact your district administration or Learning and Development department to get access.

Need more information?

You can talk to your regional Learning and Development team or email the Learning Hub implementation team at learning-hub-questions@cfa.vic.gov.au.

Check out the frequently asked questions page or download the Learning Hub overview and user guide for CFA members on the Learning Hub landing page or at Brigades Online > Training > Resources > Learning Hub.



EM-SHARE

WHAT INFORMATION CAN I SHARE?

EM-Share allows you to share your observations/files from operational and non-operational activities. An observation is a record of a noteworthy fact or occurrence that someone has heard, seen, noticed or experienced as an opportunity for improvement or an example of good practice.

Observations/files can be submitted at any time convenient to you during or after a deployment, project, shift, incident or season.

Your observation could be a:

- success or situation that went well,
- good practice or a way of doing things in a more efficient or safer way,
- initiative or idea,
- unexpected experience or outcome, or
- area for improvement.

WHAT SHOULD NOT BE SUBMITTED INTO EM-SHARE?

- Any report of illegal activity.
- Any report of a workplace health and safety incident. These must be reported through your agency.
- Near miss reports, unless they have also been reported in your relevant health and safety reporting system.
- Any content that breaches privacy or other relevant laws.
- Internal human resources matters.
- Debrief or review reports that have not been approved by the relevant authority.

We encourage all personnel to share their observations, initiatives, debriefing outcomes and lessons to ensure the emergency management sector can learn from best practice and drive continuous improvement.



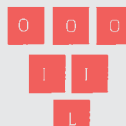
observe

emergency management personnel have experiences that should be sustained or improved



submit

observations are described and submitted through EM-Share



analyse

data is analysed using the model of observations, insights, lessons



share

lessons are shared with with the sector so we can learn as one

share.em.vic.gov.au or via EM-COP > Desktop
for more information:

Saving the spiny rice-flower

You would think protecting lives and property would be enough on the plate of our members, but brigades in western and central Victoria are also turning their hand at saving critically endangered plant species.

In a joint operation involving CFA, Landcare, DELWP, local government and TAFE students, the spiny rice-flower shrub population was given a much-needed boost near Marong in central Victoria.

The spiny rice-flower (*Pimelea spinescens* ssp. *spinescens*), a small shrub, is mainly a native grassland species only found in Victoria, and is one Australia's most threatened plants. It thrives when burnt every two to five years. When burnt, the aboveground foliage dies but it has a large lignotuberous root which stores energy

so that it can re-sprout post-fire. After a fire, flowering and seed production is prolific and the reduction of surrounding grasses and leaf litter helps germination.

Brigades in western Victoria had already been actively involved in conservation efforts for the maintenance, improvement and recovery of the spiny rice-flower for many years through their roadside and rail corridor burning. A rare woodland site near Marong was surveyed by DELWP and students from Bendigo TAFE who recorded 6,000 plants that were decades old but in need of a burn due to their condition. This is where our members played a part.

Marong, Lockwood, Eaglehawk and Golden Square brigades gave their time and expertise to burn the site to help the species.

Five patches were outlined, two for control and three for burning. The burns were conducted in conditions that meant minimum impact on trees, but provided sufficient fire to remove aboveground shrubs, grasses and fine fuels. This ecological approach to burning has resulted in vigorous re-sprouting of spiny rice-flower plants and, over the next six months, seed germination should begin.

Marong Fire Brigade captain Tim Scott said, "It was a great project to be part of. We don't always get to see fire used in this way, and contributing to saving an endangered species is a really good feeling for everyone involved".

STORY DANIELLE SCORER



PHOTO: COURTESY OF FFIM VIC

High fire potential this summer

Much of southern Australia has experienced drier and warmer-than-average conditions since autumn 2017. *The Southern Australia Seasonal Bushfire Outlook*, produced by the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC, looks at the potential for fires this summer.

September brought a strong drying influence across Victoria's north and the continuation of dry conditions in the east. October saw a resumption of drier-than-average conditions through central parts, including Melbourne's water catchments and foothill forests of West and South Gippsland, and on coastal areas between Warrnambool and Seaspray.

Significant fires occurred early in the season with an intensity normally experienced in January, including a fire near Buchan in East Gippsland in September that burnt around 8,000 hectares.

Large areas of Victoria are classified as above normal fire potential, including central, northern and eastern forested areas.

When we went to print, there was the potential of a late-forming, weak La Niña. If La Niña does occur, there's little prospect of high rainfall because of competing climate drivers from the Indian Ocean, and above normal temperatures are forecast through summer. Weak and late-developing La Niña events in the past have had various impacts on Australian rainfall.

Find out more about *The Southern Australia Seasonal Bushfire Outlook* at bnhrc.com.au/hazardnotes/43

STORY NATHAN MADDOCK



Learning fire safety through food

Individuals from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds have been busy learning cooking and fire safety skills as part of an eight-week cooking program.

CFA Multicultural Liaison Officer Nada El-Masri works closely with Chef Sharon Ramsay to deliver the program. She said it was not about telling them their cooking methods were wrong, but about teaching them how to make them safer.

"Many of the program learners are not used to using ovens and stoves so it's important for us to help with cooking skills and fire training in the home," Nada said.

"Another great positive of the program is that the learners are able to meet others and make new friends. Food breaks all barriers."

Sharon has been a part of the program for four years and said it was an important and rewarding opportunity.

"Nada attends all classes and focuses on teaching the learners a different fire safety topic each time, ensuring every cooking class has new fire safety messages and information," Sharon said.

"The program is funded by Dandenong Neighbourhood House and the food we use is from Foodbank. Everything we do is for free."

One of the ways fire safety is conveyed throughout the program is through role-play.

"We set up a mock fire emergency and teach them how to respond safely," Nada said.

"We teach the learners that a fire extinguisher and fire blanket should be stored within easy reach, but away from the cooking area.

"Everyone also receives a fire blanket to take home at the end of the eight-week program."

In December 2016, career firefighters from Dandenong Fire Brigade participated in one of the cooking classes.

"It was a full house and everyone loved it. The Dandenong firefighters have always been very supportive of the program," Nada said.

Nada also said the program has helped to break down uniform barriers for some of the learners.

"Some of the individuals are from backgrounds where they are afraid of people in uniform.

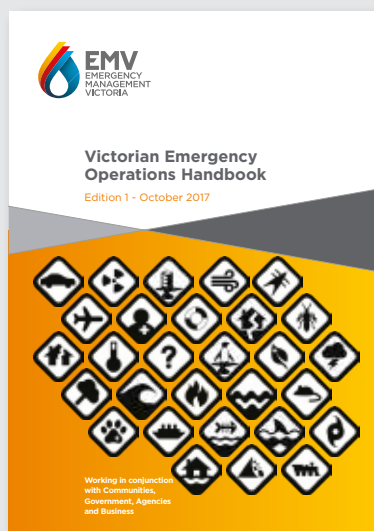
"With the help of Sharon and the Dandenong firefighters we were able to help break down the uniform barrier for some of the groups."

The program has now expanded to Warragul and Sharon and Nada are hopeful it will continue to expand throughout the state.

"We are getting a lot of people asking for it, so I really hope it continues to grow because it's an important program and people are loving it," Sharon said.

STORY RACHEL JENKINS

New Victorian Emergency Operations Handbook



Over the past few years, Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) has produced the *Victorian Bushfire Handbook*. EMV has now broadened its scope to include all types of emergencies, and replaced it with the *Victorian Emergency Operations Handbook*.

"It summarises the operational management structures and systems used by agencies and government departments for preparedness, readiness and response to major emergencies in Victoria," said Emergency Management Commissioner Craig Lapsley.

"It looks mainly at the management of major emergencies, though the principles and concepts can apply to all emergencies in Victoria."

This handbook is an important reference for people involved in managing major emergencies in Victoria. In line with the shift to an all-emergencies approach, the handbook includes chapters on specific hazards, discussing factors that are unique and must be considered in managing them.

To achieve a coordinated response to emergencies, all agencies must work together to understand each other's systems, structures, resources, capabilities and statutory obligations.

The handbook is available on the EMV website: <http://files.em.vic.gov.au/Doctrine/ManHand/VIC-EOpsHandbook.pdf>

Recycling plant fire, Coolaroo

Summary

MFB and CFA firefighters responded to a significant fire at the Coolaroo recycling plant. The fire involved several piles of recycling material including paper, cardboard, plastic and other waste materials. It took fire crews up to three days to control the blaze which burned for 11 days, sending clouds of smoke across Melbourne.

After MFB firefighters' initial size-up of the incident, they recognised the seriousness and potential complexity of the fire, and identified that health monitoring was vital for emergency personnel combating the fire.

Overview

On Thursday 13 July 2017 a fire broke out at the Coolaroo recycling plant. At 8.44am a call came through to CFA requesting assistance at the incident. The weather forecast was strong northerly winds of 35-45km per hour, gusting up to 60km during the day. With a large number of firefighters and incident management personnel on scene, there was a need for health monitoring for all.

CFA's Health Monitoring Team (HMT) manager was contacted by the MFB scientific officer, who requested CFA's health monitoring rehabilitation units. The Mernda unit arrived on scene at 11.23am and



immediately began setting up at the staging area using MFB's Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) equipment. The Mernda unit worked with Ambulance Victoria and implemented mandatory health monitoring at 11.30am on 13 July and continued until 5pm on 16 July.

The HMT provided 24-hour coverage in two shifts per day. The HMT manager reviewed the exposure risks and recommended mandatory health checks for all agencies that were present on the site which included MFB, CFA, EPA, WorkSafe, Victoria Police, Vic Parks, contractors and caterers.

Health checks were conducted at the start of shifts, the start of breaks and at the end of shifts. Extra health monitoring equipment was supplied to the teams, which meant health checks were done in a timely, professional manner.

What are the health monitoring rehab units?

In 2015, CFA introduced health monitoring rehab units to check the health of members while they were firefighting or dealing with hazardous materials. In the past two years, there has been a noticeable reduction in cases of heat stress and dehydration.

CFA currently has 16 HMT brigades with 230 health professionals, doctors, nurses, paramedics, other medical personnel and support members. The rehab crews and health professionals are trained CFA volunteers who give their time to assess fireground injuries and exposures, including measuring heart rate, oxygen saturation, carbon monoxide in the bloodstream and hydration levels. The units are now being used by other emergency services throughout Victoria.

Lessons identified

- Having the health units at the fire allowed for continuous medical monitoring and hydration to ensure firefighters avoided health issues. The health unit was set up within hours of the fire being reported and the crews were rotated continuously, giving them breaks for medical monitoring. This reduced headaches and lethargy and brought core body temperatures down.
- HMT and Ambulance Victoria crews successfully worked together over the four days and developed a good working relationship to ensure the incident was managed safely for responders and the community.
- CFA health teams are a very important part of response to an incident and have many benefits for emergency responders and the community. CFA is launching more health teams across the state and with this increasing number of health teams CFA can provide 24-hour coverage.

Conclusion

This incident showed that activating atmospheric monitoring and health monitoring early in an incident decreased the risk of exposure and possible injury. The need to escalate or reduce monitoring can be assessed as the incident progresses. Also, having these processes in place makes firefighters think about their safety.

Anti-theft fog machine incident, Officer

Summary

CFA crews have identified a new type of security alarm found in residential houses known as portable anti-theft fog machines or smoke security devices. They are hired to generate smoke/fog to deter potential burglars. The units expel dense fog in the protected area in a matter of seconds, forcing the intruder to exit the premises empty-handed.

There are many such devices on the market and they are being used more frequently across the metropolitan and outer metropolitan areas.

The use of these devices has led to safety concerns for emergency services responders. Two recent incidents that highlight these concerns are described below.

Incident overview

On 20 August 2017 at 3.46pm, Officer and Pakenham brigades responded to a reported house fire which was under construction in Officer. The Pakenham pumper was first on scene and the crew observed smoke issuing from the house through the roof. The incident controller requested an extra brigade to respond. When the Officer pumper arrived, it was tasked to provide two more breathing apparatus (BA) operators and help the Pakenham crew enter the house.

Within a couple of minutes, the Pakenham BA crew discovered there wasn't a fire and that the smoke was coming from a security device

placed inside the house. The smoke made its way through the roof because of holes in the ceiling meant for heating/cooling ducts.

The fog machine was unplugged and taken outside by the crew. A thorough search of the house was conducted in case there was anyone inside. Victoria Police was requested to attend because of the suspicious circumstances. Brigade members spoke with a representative from the building company, who could operate the smoke machine remotely. The machine was reset after the brigades left. Although it turned out to be a false alarm, the brigades didn't know this when they arrived.

The second incident took place in similar circumstances two weeks later on 8 September, next door to the house of the first incident.

Lessons identified

- When it has been identified that one of these devices is in use and is the cause of the smoke, it's important that Victoria Police is notified immediately.
- Crews should be aware there may be intruders in the area and the safety of firefighters is paramount.
- There should be signs on the outside of the building alerting people that an anti-theft fog machine is being used. During size-up keep an eye out for them.
- If available, use a thermal imaging camera to check for fire.
- The smoke produced by these devices is very dense and visibility is poor, so follow normal search procedures and be especially careful when using stairs.
- Bear in mind that these devices are common in new homes at lock-up stage prior to sale, and in display homes.



How anti-theft fog machines work

Smoke security devices are designed to fill the protected area with a dense cloud of smoke to significantly reduce visibility – you can't steal what you can't see. A device can fill a 10 metre by 10 metre room with an impenetrable wall of fog within 10 to 20 seconds.

The triggers for the device to activate are a break-in, when a door is opened, or when movement is detected by sensors in the building.

Most products are harmless, using a glycol vapour to produce the 'smoke'. A similar substance is used in theatres and discos. They leave no residue and are safe for humans, animals, food, clothing, furnishings, computers and electrical equipment.

Standard practice by companies installing a smoke security alarm is to provide warning signs on entry/exit doors to alert people.

Safety actions

- If CFA crews are inside a building and a smoke security device activates, they must exit the building immediately via the entry route and wait for the security company to arrive.
- CFA crews attending Triple Zero (000) calls for smoke issuing from a commercial/industrial or residential property should consider the possibility that a smoke device has been activated (before entering the building to investigate or before forcing entry).
- If a crew is responded by Victoria Police to investigate smoke issuing from a building and a smoke device is identified as the cause, CFA members mustn't enter the building.

CFA attendance at smoke security alarms

- When a smoke security device has been identified, CFA crews must request Victoria Police to attend immediately.
- If CFA crews are on scene before the security company or police arrive, and there are signs of a break-in, CFA crews mustn't enter the building.
- CFA crews mustn't undertake salvage operations to attempt to extract smoke from the premises.

For more information read Safety Alert No 24.

Health concerns

Skin contact and inhalation of the smoke/fog shouldn't affect a healthy person. However, it may cause mild eye and skin irritation. Wash the skin with water and soap and flush eyes with water. People with pre-existing respiratory conditions may be prone to respiratory irritation when exposed to this smoke. If irritation persists or recurs, seek medical attention.

Bear in mind that the biggest risk is the possibility that an armed intruder could still be inside the property when the crews arrive. This could pose a threat to firefighters working to ventilate the structure or determine the cause of a false alarm. It's even difficult at times for the police to ensure that the building is clear due to the limited visibility.

Conclusion

As more anti-theft smoke devices are sold and hired to deter theft, CFA members may also see an increase in call-outs for smoke coming through roof tiles or from houses. The smoke from the house definitely looks like the real deal and, as a firefighter, you will never know until on scene if it's a real job or not. A better understanding of these machines will mean better firefighting.



Fort McMurray wildfire evacuation, Alberta

Incident overview

In summer 2016, Fort McMurray in Alberta, experienced the largest in a series of increasingly disastrous wildlife/urban interface fires to occur recently in western Canada. Fort McMurray, with a population of 90,000, is the home of Canada's large oil sands production facility.

During April, Alberta had 329 bushfires and on 1 May the fires burnt near Fort McMurray. By 3 May the fire gained speed, was 90 metres high and was dubbed 'the beast'. Many city residents started to leave. At 6.20pm the provincial government ordered the evacuation of the entire city of Fort McMurray.

The rapidly-changing fire conditions, limited evacuation routes, and the short notice created a nightmare scenario for emergency management officials.

Tens of thousands of people fled south in bumper-to-bumper traffic, as the fire enveloped the only major road out of the bustling city. In the space of hours, Fort McMurray was evacuated. During the evacuation, fire brigade members ran door-to-door in an active search and rescue effort to make sure everyone had left.

Firefighters tried to maintain crucial infrastructure in the city including the only bridge on Highway 63, which was the only route out of the city from the south.

A total of 88,000 people were able to safely escape from the fire, though two people were killed in a car accident during the evacuation.

By June, rain and cooler temperatures helped firefighters contain the fire. Residents started returning to Fort McMurray in early June. The majority returned to unscathed homes, but more than 2,400 houses were destroyed. Another 2,000 residents in three communities were displaced after their homes were declared unsafe because of contamination.

The fire spread across 590,000 hectares before it was declared under control on 5 July 2016.



Lessons identified

Many lessons were identified from this fire which government, non-government organisations, industry and communities need to address, including:

- the need to improve inter-agency communication. It was highlighted that municipal and bushfire firefighters were operating on different radio frequencies which created a number of issues when it came to communications interoperability and sharing of situational awareness. Training exercises have already been conducted to close gaps in future communication between different responding units.
- the early escalation of additional emergency services resources.
- the need for more escape routes. Fort McMurray basically has one road in and one road out. As a consequence of the fires, a second major entry/exit point is being planned.
- the power of social media. It was identified how valuable social media could be in deploying emergency resources. As the city's radio and TV stations shut down to save their people, Twitter spread the word about what was happening and what to do next.

Conclusion

The fires in Fort McMurray were beyond devastating, but valuable lessons were identified. It's been just over a year since the fires hit, and the Fort McMurray community is still in the process of rebuilding and recovering. Hopefully, their experience will help them prevent similar incidents and deal with any that do occur.

What are the similarities between this fire and what you have faced during major fires in Victoria? What can we learn from this incident? Discuss with your brigades and networks and use the lessons learned to assist decision making and planning in the future.





Sprains and strains

While sitting in the driver's seat of an FCV, District 5 Operations Officer Steve Cooper picked up some books that were on the front passenger seat, then leaned back awkwardly to put them on the back seat.

"Straight away this caused me pain in my left shoulder and I had to take some time off work," said Steve. "My doctor diagnosed my injury as a trapped nerve. I didn't realise how easy it was to get hurt as a result of an awkward posture. Imagine how much worse it could have been if I had been lifting something heavier than books."

The human body is an amazing machine capable of performing many complex tasks. But debilitating sprain and strain injuries can happen quite unexpectedly.

South West Region's Health and Safety Adviser Zoltan Goli (pictured below) investigated a number of incidents involving sprain and strain, and found it's common to see injuries associated with handling hoses.

"I've often interviewed members who've attended either structural fires or bushfires who have dragged a 38mm or 64mm hose line to attack the fire," said Zoltan. "They have had to pull a charged hose through trees, a fence and around the front of the house. It's a combination of elements that leads to an injury: the jet force of the water; the weight of the charged hose; the effort of dragging it along; and how the hose and nozzle are carried."

Leading Firefighter Brett Ferguson from Corio Fire Brigade told *Brigade* magazine about an incident that happened on a state spare pumper which was a different model to the one he was used to.

"We found that the hose reel was higher and took a fair amount of

strength to pull it and get the barrel moving," Brett said. "We asked the DMOs [district mechanical officers] to lubricate the reel, but that didn't seem to help. So we put a procedure in place to advise all members that pulling the hose reel requires two people and care is to be taken not to exert pressure on your back. After two weeks, our normal pumper was returned. However, to ensure safe practices we still recommend someone pulls the reel off as you go forward to the fire."

Having the correct equipment, training and following procedures are all important in reducing the risk of getting hurt. Here are some other simple tips:

- Keep fire station indoor areas, motor rooms and outdoor spaces free from clutter.
- When responding to incidents, be especially careful when working on wet or slippery surfaces, and when walking on uneven surfaces.
- When stepping off ladders or trucks, maintain three points of contact and always look where you are placing your feet before you put your full weight on them.
- Arrange storage areas to minimise risk by storing heavier items around waist height. The zone between mid-thigh and your chest is the safe lifting zone and you should avoid lifting objects outside this zone.
- Don't attempt to lift an object that exceeds your strength. Ask for help. When lifting, use slow and smooth movements, keep the object close to your body and avoid twisting your torso.
- Lift with your legs, not your back.





Putting a face to PTSD

Hamilton Fire Brigade volunteer Peter Green has a good idea of what the face of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) looks like. Peter, or Greeny to many of the people he knows in CFA, sees it every day when he looks in the mirror.

Unknowingly, Peter was struggling with the onset of PTSD for several years before it hit home hard. Attending a difficult car accident on the outskirts of Hamilton in February 2016 was the traumatic incident that tipped Peter's bucket over and has had him fighting a war with himself mentally and physically since.

As part of his recovery and strong desire to try to make sure other firefighters and brigade members don't go through the same difficulties, Peter has developed a presentation about his experiences. He has given his presentation to Warrnambool and Portland brigades and, in mid-August, he presented to members of his own brigade and neighbouring brigades Grange and North Hamilton.

"Although the idea and concept was easy to come up with, the delivery to a group of your peers was somewhat daunting to say the least," said Peter. "The medical fraternity has referred to me as very determined (my wife calls me stubborn) and with that in mind I was determined to try to make a difference to at least one person's life.

"I joined CFA to make a difference and, although I may not be able to do that on the fireground anymore, I can help others with what I have to say about mental health."

The presentation is quite in-depth and very personal. Peter holds nothing back.

"I've never been very good at sugar coating things or been particularly subtle, and I treat my story, message and delivery the same way. Unfortunately (or fortunately, depending on your viewpoint) some firefighter habits don't change."

Inspired and guided partly by District 4 Operations Officer Terry Heafield and with input from CFA's Wellbeing team, the presentation is more than just Greeny telling his story. It covers the 'how to' about support and finding the help that can sometimes seem so hard to find.

The icing on the cake and his key support in his journey and presentations is his wife Aimee. While Aimee stands back a bit during the presentation, she's happy to answer questions and provide a first-hand insight into a partner's viewpoint. As we know, it's often the partners and family of affected people who pick up on the issues first.

"You notice little things over time that change, for example behaviours and activities, and you wonder why they have changed or stopped altogether," said Aimee. "You can bring up these changes with the person, or suggest that you think something may not be right. However, it's not until they realise it, or have a feeling for themselves, that you can really help.

"I had mentioned PTSD to Pete a few times, knowing the trauma he had witnessed in the past. But it wasn't until we were on this journey and had more knowledge that we could really say, 'yep it's been there a while'."

Hamilton brigade Captain Mal Anderson was pleased to host Peter at the brigade's station. "It was obviously a challenge for Pete to stand up in front of the brigade and talk openly about what he and Aimee have been through since February 2016," Mal said. "I think we can all take something from his presentation.

"We need to recognise and actively work towards making PTSD, and mental health more broadly, part of our first-aid procedure during incidents and move away from not being able to discuss the area of mental health to ensure members can get support early."

As Peter continues his journey with PTSD and a new normal, he welcomes approaches from brigades and groups as well as other groups outside CFA who may wish to hear his story.

"If I can stop one person from having to go through what I do on a daily basis, then the efforts involved in doing this presentation will be worth it. Let's change the face of PTSD."

To arrange for Peter to give his presentation, phone **0457 855 369** or email **peter.green1@members.cfa.vic.gov.au**.

STORY DAVID FERGUSON

Is your mental health ready for summer?

- Be Thankful
- Be Active
- Be Passionate
- Be Connected - community
- Be Mindful - in the moment
- Smile/Laugh/Play
- Create Supportive Environments
- Fuel your body
- Fresh Air - time in nature
- Learn



When we think of the fire season, we think about pre-season briefings, preparedness training, truck inventories and checking our PPC is in good order. Pager messages will be sent out asking for people's availability to be on strike team duty, availability rosters will be planned for total fire ban days and then it will be a matter of waiting for the pager to go off.

During this busy time preparing, have you thought about your mental health and wellbeing? What can you do to look after yourself?

Think about this example. When you're on a plane, the pre-flight briefing always says to put your oxygen mask on first before helping others. Compare this with your own experience of being in a role that helps others – are you mentally ready to deal with the challenges of your role? You will be better able to provide help to others if you're looking after yourself first and foremost.

Some things that you might consider when looking after your own wellbeing may include: reading that book that has been sitting on the shelf for months; downloading a mindfulness app onto your phone and listening to it for 10 minutes a day; trying out a yoga class or getting your whole brigade involved in a session; or going out for a meal at a restaurant you haven't tried before or cook a meal with your family.

You could spend an afternoon playing board games, go for a walk or get back on that bike and go for a ride. Or you could do something that you wouldn't normally do such as going on a picnic, learning a new skill or visiting family or friends you haven't seen for a while.

If you are operationally busy, consider taking a couple of days off from responding to jobs, especially if you've been away on a strike team or attended a local job that you found particularly tough. It's important to be able to recover both physically and mentally.

It's OK to have a day here and there when you decide to relax and take time out to recharge your batteries. It's when these couple of days turn into longer periods that you need to take a moment to check in with

yourself; how are you feeling and how are you travelling? If you feel that you're a bit stuck and it isn't improving, visit your doctor and have a discussion about how you feel.

It's important to take action if you:

- are having trouble sleeping
- find yourself reliving a call-out over and over that you have been to
- avoid things you would normally enjoy doing
- are not looking after your personal hygiene
- have a decreased/increased appetite
- are feeling sad or teary
- are forgetting things
- are not leaving the house
- are experiencing issues with drugs and alcohol.

If you notice any of these behaviours in others in your brigade or work location, start a conversation with them with genuine care. Listen to them, encourage action and check in regularly after the conversation.

You may prefer to avoid these discussions, but is that the best option?

If you broke your ankle would you avoid visiting the doctor? Probably not. Your mental health is no different – if you notice a change in yourself or those around you, it's important to have a conversation about your mental health.

Your GP is a good starting point and can put you in touch with other medical professionals such as a counsellor, psychologist or psychiatrist.

CFA also has resources available to all staff, volunteers and their immediate families.

Member Assistance Program

Psychologists and counsellors provide professional support to staff, volunteers and their immediate family for work, volunteering, family and relationship issues. This service is free of charge for CFA members and immediate family.

Call **1300 795 711** (24 hours a day/seven days a week).



Peer support

Peers provide an initial point of contact for support and guidance. Based around each district around the state, they can help members work through issues or put you in touch with further support if needed.

Location	Contact number	Location	Contact number
District 2	0418 712 886	District 14	0409 042 258
District 4	0438 666 911	District 15	0428 312 495
District 5	0438 666 911	District 16	0429 619 102
District 6	0408 508 998	District 17	0409 092 478
District 7	0408 508 998	District 18	0418 712 886
District 8	0428 516 671	District 20	0418 712 886
District 9	0429 681 332	District 22	0408 981 406
District 10	0439 629 869	District 23	0408 029 078
District 11	0439 629 869	District 24	0408 029 078
District 12	03 5792 1983	District 27	0439 629 869
District 13	0428 534 393		

Chaplaincy support

Chaplains provide non-denominational pastoral care including spiritual, physical, and emotional care and wellbeing support. Call **1800 337 068** (24 hours).

Manager Assist

Provided by our Member Assistance Program, Manager Assist provides managers with confidential support and advice regarding people-based issues in a brigade or workplace (for example, mental health concerns or behavioural issues). Call **1300 795 711**.

Organisational wellbeing

Access to coaching, mediation, training and education around mental health and wellbeing. Call **9262 8409** or email: wellbeing.intake@cfa.vic.gov.au. Alternatively, contact the local member wellbeing adviser in your region.

Location	Member wellbeing adviser	Contact number
South West Region	Trudy Deller	0447 513 186
West Region	Michelle Taylor	0400 082 088
North West Region	Chris Bull	0429 072 413
North East Region	Simone Boyd	0429 078 404
South East Region	Anne Duff	0447 331 457

HeadsUP online toolkit

Information and advice on managing mental health and relationship issues. cfa.vic.gov.au/headsup

Would you fight a fire drunk?

Lack of sleep is the most common contributing factor to fatigue, and it builds up slowly over consecutive nights of shortened or interrupted sleep. Lack of sleep:

- puts you in a bad mood
- makes you think slower
- is connected to cardiovascular disease and high blood pressure (hypertension)
- reduces the immune system's effectiveness
- contributes to obesity.

Did you know that responding to an incident while sleep-deprived can be as serious as driving under the influence of alcohol? A study by the Adelaide Centre for Sleep Research found that someone who's been awake for 17 hours will perform similarly to a person who has a blood alcohol concentration (BAC) of 0.05g/100ml (which is over the legal limit for driving), and is twice as likely to have an accident than a person who is not fatigued.

A person who has been awake for 24 hours will perform similarly to a person who has a BAC of 0.1g/100ml, and is seven times more likely to have an accident than a person who is not fatigued.

When our community is under threat, we all feel the need to push boundaries to achieve our mission. However, your safety and your fellow members' safety must come first, and you may be putting yourself and others at risk if you're fatigued.

Managing the risks associated with fatigue is an important shared responsibility between you, your team and your leader. All members are expected to self-manage their fatigue where possible by aiming to get

at least seven hours of sleep in every 24 hour period, and advising their leader if they are at risk of fatigue due to poor sleep or shift work.

Leaders are expected to walk the talk and lead by example. They can manage fatigue by:

- looking for signs of fatigue in other members.
- understanding the risk of members being fatigued from previous work
- requesting relief crew changeovers early
- pre-planning responses to long-duration incidents
- planning transportation requirements after long-duration events
- ensuring member wellbeing requirements are met: catering, hygiene and sleep.



PHOTO: KEITH PAKENHAM / AFSM

Les Kelly, Headquarters Brigade, District 7

faces of
CFA



PHOTO BRIAN STEVENS

What are your CFA roles?

I'm the captain of the District 7 Headquarters Brigade. I've been a senior officer there since the inception of the brigade in 2008. We're an active group of long-time CFA members who are done with jumping on trucks but still want to be useful to our community. We have trailers for rehab, refrigerated drinks and staging areas and we handle logistics.

Before that I was foreman for four years, first lieutenant for six years, then captain for eight years at Lara Fire Brigade, and I'm a life member.

Why did you join?

I joined Mannerim brigade with my twin brother in 1961 but I was unofficially a member long before that. One of us used to drive the Land Rover to training when we were both about 12. Don't tell anyone.

We grew up on a cropping and sheep property. The farm was our livelihood so it was natural to look after your own interests and your neighbours.

What was the first incident you attended?

There was a fire burning down the driveway towards the homestead at Suma Park a mile from home and they rang us. I remember beating the fire down with branches from a tree.

Mannerim brigade didn't have a fire truck but the McDonald family had one tank on the back of a farm truck. That was it.

What incident has had the greatest impact on you?

The 1969 grassfire through Lara which burned people on the highway.

I was on a ready-mix concrete truck carting water and directing it to trucks around Lara. My twin was an ambulance officer and he attended to people on the highway.

There was so much devastation. The school and the Anglican church were burnt and more than five houses in a row.

CFA learned a lot of lessons from that fire.

What CFA training have you got the most out of?

I became a volunteer instructor at Fiskville in the 1980s and went there with our brigade and Anakie Group for live fire experience.

We'd light up flammable liquid fires and multi-storey building fires and watch the fire behaviour. You'd see, in a controlled situation, how much protection you had to give yourself and it really made an impression.

What lessons are you most keen to pass onto other members?

I'd say to the rank and file, make sure you ask questions and get the details right when you're given orders. If you're reluctant to go into a particular situation, give your reasons and talk it out.

I was in a crew asked to go down a road in She Oaks. I said, "I don't know how to get out of there. Can we turn around and get out? Is there a cleared area where we can defend ourselves? What do we do when we get there?"

In the end we didn't go down there and I was right: there was no room for turning around.

What has been the highlight of your time in CFA?

The achieving of 50 years in a great organisation with its camaraderie and good working relationships. CFA members all have one common goal. It's the way we all work together. Sometimes it might be with people you don't know, but by the end of the job they're friends and you trust them.

My late wife Jenny always supported me. I couldn't have done it if she hadn't been right behind me.

INTERVIEW BY LEITH HILLARD

How group officers plan for risk

All stories by Nicole Russo



PHOTO: ELLE ADAMSON

Jo Ussing, Lowan Group, District 17

This summer will be Jo Ussing's first as Lowan Group Officer, but she and her supportive team are more than ready.

"I was elected in July, so I'm on a very steep learning curve," Jo said.

"I'm lucky to have the support of four DGOs and I like to say I have four ultimate wingmen who've got my back."

Jo is a volunteer with Nhill Fire Brigade and has been a member of CFA for more than 13 years. Nhill is one of the nine brigades in the Lowan Group.

"The Lowan Group looks after parts of the Big Desert, parts of the Little Desert and all the farmland in between," Jo said.

Australia has had a drier and warmer-than-average winter, and forecasts for the summer point to a higher-than-average risk of bushfire in Victoria.

The Lowan Group is focusing its energy on preparing how they can best manage fires in national parks.

"It's very likely that lightning strikes will cause fires in both the Big Desert and Little Desert, and that becomes management of where and when the fire will come out," Jo said.

"We are very lucky that we have such a good working relationship with DELWP and we tackle these ones together.

"Last year we had no lightning fires in the Big Desert. That's only the second time ever on record. So, statistically speaking, there may be something out there this year.

"We will also have two 802 Air Tractors as resources that will be stationed at Nhill Aerodrome. They work on pre-determined dispatch, so when we get a call-out they do as well.

"They are often on scene faster than we are and can do a really quick knockdown of the fire.

"In terms of preparedness, we've been looking pretty hard at our response tables, how many brigades will be called out and which brigades will be called out.

"We are really struggling in this area with declining population. Farms are getting bigger; there are fewer people on farms, and that's a big concern for us as a group.

"We know that we will struggle with numbers and getting people on a truck, especially after harvest when people take their school-aged kids for a holiday. We've had a look at that and how we can best respond over that time.

"Our big fires tend to be in the national parks so it's a matter of us working with Forest Fire Management [FFM].

"Our concern is when those fires come out of the Big Desert, so we work alongside FFM and manage asset protection.

"Like many summers before we will also be managing header and crop fires. They are a huge concern for us and something we expect every season."

Although there may be concerns on the firefront there aren't any for Jo when it comes to the capability of Lowan Group members.

"I'm really happy to be a part of a team that works together for a common goal. I don't know it all, but I have the ability to ask for help."

Shane Scoble, Strathloddon Group, District 2

It's not just fires on the minds of Strathloddon Group members – every season they expect flash flooding.

"Fires and floods; we get a double whammy here," said Strathloddon Group Officer Shane Scoble.

"Every brigade in our group since about 2011 has had flooding in their area. Floods are a concern especially for Campbells Creek, Guildford, Newstead and Baringhup brigades.

"The Loddon River runs through the centre of Guildford, Newstead and Baringhup and the township of Campbells Creek is also prone to floods.

"We can never tell what kind of season it's going to be – we take it as it comes.

"It's patchy all the way along; some areas have a lot of grass, some loose grass at a reasonable length and others barely any. But we can say it's definitely drying off.

"We've already had a couple of small fires mainly from burn-offs that people have started on the weekend and left burning."

Every brigade in the Strathloddon Group

participated in their usual pre-season training exercises.

"We recently ran a group exercise which involved a round-robin of activities including map reading, pumping and relaying. We even had some live fire and hay bales on fire. We also focused on draughting water from tanks and tankers to get people back in order of how to draught water from stationary sources.

"We will also be involved in LCF [local command facility] training. It will be a refresher for those who work in the LCF over the summer season."

The Strathloddon Group prides itself on its strong relationships with emergency services counterparts in the area, as well as the Mt Alexander Shire Council.

"We have a very strong Emergency Management Municipal Committee as well as a Municipal Fire Prevention Committee.

"The Mt Alexander Shire supports us strongly with bulk water tankers, graders and backhoes.

"We all work together and we're all on the same page."



PHOTO: MEGAN CARROLL

Darren Hoggan, Heywood Group, District 4

Heywood Group Officer of 11 years, Darren Hoggan is more than ready for the season ahead. With a wealth of knowledge behind him and a proactive group of brigades by his side, Heywood Group is as prepared as ever.

"Most of our brigades are training together, trying to get across the hazardous trees training and working on the burnover drills," said Darren.

"Heywood Group brigades are pretty proactive, which is great especially when it comes to getting ready for summer."

The Heywood Group can be found in the bottom south-west corner of Victoria, and includes a coast guard brigade. Like many other areas, last year was a quiet fire season.

"It was a very, very, very quiet bushfire season in 2016 and at the moment we've got green grass everywhere. But that could change overnight.

"We usually have one decently-sized grass and scrub fire every few years. We haven't had one of those in a while.

"The last big one we experienced was the grass and scrub fire in Cashmore a couple of years ago. In saying that, all brigades are prepared as much as they can be, and we have the strike team roster worked out already so the fireys can be ready.

"I'm also very proud of the relationship we have with our firefighting counterparts, Forest Fire Management Victoria.

"We exchange notes and assist in burns along rail lines. We work together on prescribed burning and an invitation is sent to our members. We try to provide as many personnel as we can.

"It's a relationship that works."

The Heywood Group is home to a lot of blue gum plantations and infrastructure such as the Port of Portland.

"Port of Portland is the second largest port, which can create a fair few calls. It has created the need for a fully-manned station which will be running 24/7 after this December.

"We also have a switch yard and multiple chip mills, which is a lot of infrastructure for a small town."



John Barnard, Wangaratta Group, District 23

“Signs are telling us that we’re going to be in for a hot, dry extended summer period,” said Wangaratta Group Officer John Barnard.

“At the moment we’ve got plenty of grass growth, and once that dries out we’ll have a significant grass fire risk across the group area. We also have some bush with the Walker Ranges, which is always a significant area in the summer time.

“Touch wood, we’ve been very lucky regarding major fires in our own group area, but over the past 18 years we’ve supported other areas a lot with major bushfires.

“We’re a very active supporting group, especially with the fires in 2003, 2006, 2007, Black Saturday and the fires near Wallan a couple of years ago.

“We’re best prepared as we can be. I’m confident that if we get the call to support somewhere in the state, we’ll be able to fulfil the commitment.”

Brigades in Wangaratta Group are also preparing for common incidents they attend during the summer period.

“There’s a fair bit of lightning activity in the north-east which can result in a few fires. We ran a training session this year in the evening for something a bit different. We ran a scenario of a tree fire which was caused by a lightning strike.

“Brigades have also done their preparedness, including annual roadside burning and clean-up works, and undertaken the burnover drill and hazardous trees training packages.

“The group will be running a Minimum Skills weekend in early December, which will be the last opportunity for the brigades’ new recruits to do the training.

The group runs a roster with the group management team, so there’s always somebody on duty during summer who can respond with an FCV when there’s a job.

“As part of our roster we run a group duty officer who assumes the operational side of things of the group as well, and we have a team ready to go in the local command facility when required,” said John.



PHOTO: TESS BARNARD

Bob Bassett, Tambo Group, District 11

It was a very early start to the season for the Tambo Group. In September, a large bushfire near Buchan tore through areas across Gippsland because of unseasonably warm, dry weather and high winds.



PHOTO: LOUISE HAUGHTON

“We had a baptism of fires at the end of September,” said Tambo Group Officer Bob Bassett, pictured with his son Geof. “The weather conditions caught everyone by surprise.

“We had about 12 fires start in one day. Firefighters reacted quite quickly to this one and caught it before it could escalate to a level three.

“The early start to the season didn’t surprise me, but the intensity of these fires did. It has definitely been the driest season I’ve experienced in the past 40 years.

“Each year we make sure we review our jobs look at what we did well, review our strike teams and make sure we have the right crews and vehicles. We tune that up throughout the year.

“We also look at incidents like the California fires and incidents in the fire-prone states we have here in Australia. We use them as a benchmark and look at the possibilities of similar bushfires happening here and we gear ourselves up and prepare.

“We have the township of Lakes Entrance to care for, as well as the coastal town of Metung and we hope our community is prepared – we put notices up all the time.

“The community is fairly used to our seasons here, so when we’re getting active they prepare too.

“Like one of the catchment officers down here says, ‘expect the unexpected’. There’s no telling what we might be in for.”

Combating rural decline



PHOTO: CLAIRE FLANAGAN SMITH

Rural decline and retraction is a major concern for many of our CFA communities across rural Victoria.

One of the major issues faced by these communities is the increasing reliance on volunteers to support essential community services. As an organisation supported by a large number of volunteers, we're aware that further decline, coupled with ageing populations in rural areas, presents a challenge to the current service delivery model.

Rural decline has the potential to reduce the viability and effectiveness of rural brigades.

At the end of October, Minister for Agriculture and Regional Development Jaala Pulford opened a stakeholder workshop at Bungaree with a focus on collaboration between organisations to tackle the problems associated with this decline.

The workshop was the second in a series of consultation activities being done by the recently-formed steering committee established to look at the impact of rural decline on CFA brigades. The committee has staff and volunteers from North West and West regions, with a focus on the Wimmera and Mallee areas.

District 20 Operations Manager Peter Taylor leads the way as the chair of the steering committee and brings extensive experience working in rural areas.

"I'm determined to see a strong organisational focus on actions to ensure our volunteer brigades are viable into the future," Peter said. "At the conclusion of these activities we expect to see organisational change where our CFA volunteers are the drivers behind creating a fire service that's responsive to the individual needs of their own communities."

"This has to be a top priority not only for CFA but all other stakeholders."

The October workshop included representatives from Victoria Police, Queensland Fire and Emergency Services, Department of Health, Department of Education and Training, Victorian Farmers Federation, local councils, SES, Regional Partnerships, RMIT, Birchip Cropping Group, EMV and CFA. Participants shared their organisations' experiences in the rural sector and explored opportunities to work together to implement significant change.

Regional Manager for Volunteer Sustainability in West Region Raelene Williams highlighted the importance of working across agencies both within emergency services and externally.

"In rural areas, our volunteers wear many hats in the community. It makes sense that we look at working closely with other organisations that have the same priorities in supporting community resilience in areas facing rural decline," Raelene said.

"Collaboration is definitely the key to build and create resilient communities, which in turn will support ongoing brigade viability and social inclusion for our volunteers."

Further highlighting the importance of collaboration, Blythe McLennan, a Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC researcher with RMIT, said of the stakeholder workshop, "It was a great day all round and I'm excited to see what comes out of it with the framework for CFA."

"We are in a better position now to more thoughtfully consider rural decline and retraction in our research on volunteering."

In late July, the first CFA workshop was held in Swan Hill, where a diverse range of staff and volunteers considered how CFA can better support our volunteers in areas impacted by rural decline. More than 30 participants provided great insight into the pressures affecting our volunteers, as well as ideas to consider as we look to address the issues.

Following these consultation activities, an action plan will be developed. This will include the development of pilot projects in CFA and more broadly across organisations in targeted communities.

We acknowledge and thank GrainCorp for a donation that was used to run these workshops.

STORY MICHELLE CANNON

Harvesting workshops build safer communities

CFA District 17 Headquarters Brigade Captain Kevin Bolwell and West Region Community Education Coordinator Jenny McGennisken are helping to build safer communities through workshops that advise farmers about the fire risks associated with harvest machinery.

This safety initiative, which originated in the Wimmera, is now in its second year and expanding into other regions across the state. The 2017 workshops ran from September to November.

The workshops share important information about:

- mechanics
- weather conditions
- tiers of emissions
- heat sources
- CFA and the Victorian Farmers Federation's *Voluntary Grain Harvesting Guide*
- recommended practices for operators
- property owners' responsibilities
- insurance
- harvest fire planning
- burning off.

Kevin said last year hundreds of people came along to workshops, taking on board the content and asking lots of questions to make sure they were well prepared.

"It was great to see such a strong turnout. I'd spent a number of months researching and preparing content for discussion so I'm pleased I was able to share it with so many people in the community," Kevin said.

Jenny said that Kevin's knowledge was the key to the success of the workshops and it was no wonder they're so popular with Kevin doing extensive homework in the lead-up to the sessions, working with the farming community and discussing prevention strategies with a range of experts.

After retiring, Kevin did a lot of research, including reading reports from the US and Europe.

"I also reflected on my personal experience of harvest fires on my land and my neighbours' properties, with more than 40 years' experience as a farmer and CFA volunteer," he said.

"I then got to work with the farming community, trialling techniques and equipment I'd been researching.

"We tried harvesting in paddocks at different angles and speeds, depending on wind direction, and I rode in the back of a header to watch the interaction between dust and the manifold.

Jenny said the workshops were about encouraging people to have a harvest plan.

"A lot of people have a farm fire plan but not always a harvest plan, or any fire plan, which is an uncomfortable thought," she said.

"We just want to raise awareness and build safer communities. Hopefully, these educational workshops will result in fewer farm-related fires.

"We've had really positive feedback about the workshops, saying they provide valuable information and strategies for farmers to reduce fire risk while harvesting. This is testament to Kevin's incredible hard work in bringing this concept to life."

The workshop has been filmed so the knowledge and advice can be shared across other CFA districts.

STORY GRACE QUINN



Fireys raise over \$500,000 for mental health

It was an emotional finish to an amazing journey on Saturday 2 September when the Damien Burke Mildura to Melbourne Memorial Relay (M2M-2) and the Melbourne Firefighter Stair Climb (MFSC) joined together at Crown Metropol.

This year, both events stepped up to fight depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and suicide, and raised much-needed funds and awareness for mental health at the Black Dog Institute and Lifeline. The participants smashed the half a million fundraising target by raising more than \$514,000.

Event Manager, Sorrento Fire Brigade volunteer and MFB Leading Firefighter Steve Axup said over the seven days and 653 kilometres of running from Mildura, they were stopped countless times on the highway by people wanting to donate to the mental health cause.

"Ballarat really came out in force to support the runners of Burkey's M2M-2. As they ran through the town in honour of CFA firefighter Nathan Shanahan, they were joined by many members of his family," said Steve.

Nathan tragically took his life in December 2016, after a long battle with PTSD.

"Again this year, Burkey's M2M-2 received some amazing hospitality from CFA brigades en route – Mildura, Ouyen, Sea Lake, Charlton, Inglewood, Bendigo, Daylesford and Ballarat City.

"It was great to unite the four badges, three services for the one cause – mental health. We were able to spread the mental health message and create some incredible bonds between the emergency services."

Steve said he was thrilled that the stair climb, now in its fourth year, had representation from a huge number of fire services from across the country and the world.

"Fireys travelled from Tasmania, New South Wales, South Australia, Queensland, Darwin, New Zealand and even Washington State in the US," Steve said.

"We were exceptionally happy with the breadth of support from CFA, whose members very much form the backbone of the event with almost 450 firefighters from 142 volunteer and integrated stations taking part."

CFA members got creative with their fundraising by selling lamingtons, running movie nights and recycling scrap metal before donning 25kg of structural gear and breathing apparatus to climb the 28 floors of the Crown Metropol.

"While massive congratulations must go to the fundraising efforts of Wodonga brigade, which finished on top of the fundraising table with \$17,209, you have to acknowledge Bairnsdale brigade with a population of 12,000 raising \$12,489. But most of all Paynesville brigade, which raised \$6,865 with a population of only 3,000 – they raised more than \$2 from every man, woman and child in the town," said Steve.

"The significance of the event and the gravity of its mental health cause really hit home when, in his welcome speech, Chief Officer Steve Warrington said, 'what you people are doing here today, in raising awareness and removing the stigmas associated with mental health, will save lives. More lives than you will ever drag out of a burning building'.

"This was a very humbling moment for everyone involved.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF MFB

"The funds raised for Lifeline will help supplement their volunteer call takers for a whole year, during the high demand periods of Friday and Saturday nights when people are at their most vulnerable.

"The funds raised for Black Dog Institute will help them further to support and research high-risk groups that include emergency services workers, middle-aged men and our Indigenous communities.

"A huge thank you to everyone who donated and to those who 'stepped up'. Bring on 2018."

STORY GRACE QUINN



New start for Gapsted

PHOTO: LAURIE LARSEN

It's hard to believe that just two years ago Gapsted Fire Brigade in District 24 was experiencing trying times.

The brigade was facing issues such as dwindling membership, a small leadership group and the current captain not willing to continue in the role. This left the brigade facing a possible closure.

But all that changed at the 2015 Gapsted Annual General Meeting (AGM), where members banded together and pledged to save their brigade.

District 24 Operations Manager Paul King attended the AGM and said it was the start of numerous positive changes for the brigade.

"I'm not in the business of closing down fire brigades, but Gapsted was in dire straits," Paul said.

"A lot came out of that meeting, in particular Lieutenant Laurie Larsen's decision to nominate himself for the role of captain. Laurie really stepped up and the viability of the brigade is much stronger and the culture has completely changed."

Laurie said that at the time he wasn't 100 per cent sure of his decision that evening, but now he's very glad he made it.

"I remember sitting up the back hoping I wouldn't be noticed," Laurie said.

"As Paul called for captain nominations for the

third or fourth time I knew that if Gapsted was going to survive as a brigade, someone was going to have to stand up – so I did."

Since that day, the brigade has gone from strength to strength and become an important pillar in the community.

"We recently had our service awards night and we asked everyone in the community to attend," Laurie said.

"I went on a letterbox drop around town inviting everyone to come down and join us.

"A few local businesses provided us with some raffle prizes and we asked everyone who came to bring a casserole. It was a night to be proud of, as both brigade captain and a member of the community."

As a previous Richmond football player and football coach, Laurie said he often applies his sporting values to his captaincy.

"I treat my role as captain the same as I do as a coach. You have to lead by example, be proud of your team and, most importantly, thank your crew after each job.

"You are a leader, be proud of that."

Two years in and Laurie is enjoying his role as a leader of the brigade.

"In the past two years, I've not once felt alone in my role. There's always been someone to guide me and teach me along the way.

"I've learned you can't be afraid to step up and help out. There's always someone there to listen, and if you need help make sure you ask for it."

STORY NICOLE RUSSO



Tahara brigades unite

After two years of discussions, Tahara and Tahara West brigades in District 4's Merino Group amalgamated in July.

Tahara West brigade formed in 1948. Its last captain, Rod Nolte, confessed that his previous brigade "was basically Noltes". He's now second lieutenant of the strengthened Tahara brigade which has two stations and a truck in each.

"It's a good news story," said Rod. "We were a small brigade with a small brigade area while the farms got bigger as we moved away from soldier settlement. We turned out about three or four times a year to grass and scrub fires.

"Our members were ageing and there wasn't much chance to get new members and fill all the positions in a brigade management team [BMT]. It was the same two or three people filling all the roles."

Following the Section 29, the brigade faced being closed down with their truck removed from the group.

"We didn't want that," continued Rod. "We could bury our heads in the sand or get proactive and talk about viable options for us and the group. We had discussions with



Left: Left to right, Geoff Nolte, Devan Robertson, Ian Robertson, Vivian Cox, Gordon Nolte, Kevin Nolte, Rod Nolte, Barry Hay

PHOTO: VICTORIA PULLEN

Group Officer Wayne Munro and the Volunteer Sustainability team."

There were three options: stay as they were (which, everyone agreed, was no option); share the BMT with another brigade; or amalgamate with either Tahara or another brigade.

"Amalgamation would mean keeping two sheds and two trucks, pulling two areas together, filling all the BMT positions and sharing the workload. Win, win, win.

"Tahara was happy to take us on but it was an

involved process. We sat down with members in their homes and had community meetings in both brigade areas. Both communities were happy to accept change and move forward and the submission went to the [CFA] Board.

"It's a terrific outcome which hasn't been forced on anyone. We've had ample opportunity to own the change and demonstrate that, if you keep a level head, you can get a great result for your community."

STORY LEITH HILLARD

Mansfield extension and facelift

Mansfield Fire Station is keeping up with the times and the demands of its local community, with a major renovation due to be completed by February 2018.

"Mansfield has grown quicker than expected over the past 10 to 15 years and is a very popular retirement paradise and tourism destination, and the brigade has needed to grow with it," said Mansfield brigade Captain Andrew Peachy (pictured with District 23 Operations Manager Stewart Kreltszheim).

As part of the renovation, a new truck bay will be built into the existing south side car park, along with new female and male change rooms, a larger storeroom and other minor works.

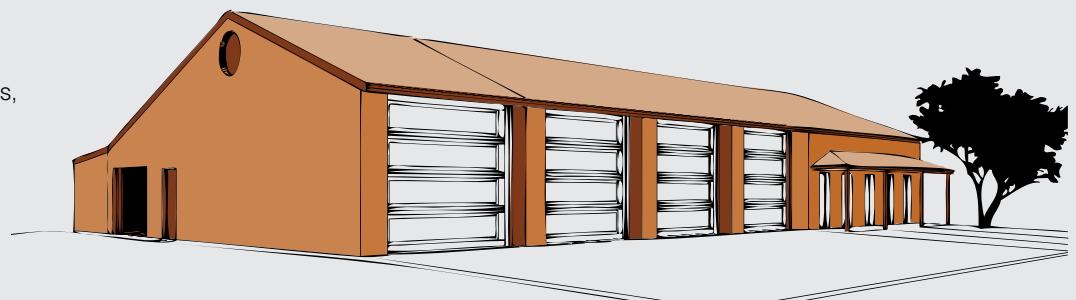
"We have 20 active members, including six women, with ages ranging from 18 to 70-plus, which is a great cross section.

"As a group, we've been planning and fundraising for the renovation for the past six years through fire equipment maintenance,

raffles and social nights, and we now have enough to significantly contribute to the upgrade."

The total cost of the renovation is close to \$375,000, with \$150,000 being contributed by Mansfield brigade and the rest coming from CFA.

STORY GEORGINA HILL



PERSPECTIVE BY IPS BUILDING SERVICES

Historic trucks on display

In mid-September, the inaugural **Wangaratta Historic Motor Show**, held at the **Wangaratta Saleyards**, attracted around **2,500 people**.

"Many of us travel to truck shows down south and to other locations, but there isn't much up here," said Richie Gardner, chair of the Historic Commercial Vehicle Club of Australia, pad supervisor at VEMTC Wangaratta Campus and a CFA volunteer.

"The organising committee wanted the day to be all about family, so we thought it would be great to have old fire trucks as a theme. Everyone likes old fire trucks."

Steve Doig, an Oxley Flats brigade member, was given the task of hunting down old fire trucks.

"We thought we might get about 10 but we ended up with 22 trucks of all shapes and sizes," said Steve. "They came from all over Victoria. There was even one in transit to Sydney from Melbourne that stopped over for the show."

Some of the firefighting vehicles on display were:

- a 1906 horse-drawn fire cart from Bowman-Murmungee brigade
- a 1928 Chevrolet tanker from Rutherglen
- an Austin front-mounted pumper
- Wangaratta brigade's 1938 Dodge
- a 1953 Mack pumper
- CFA's F350 4x4 ute.

In addition to the fire trucks, the visitors checked out old cars, various types of trucks, tractors and stationary engines brought along by a range of local clubs.

Some of the money raised was donated to the 4 Kids Future Fund to help the four Wangaratta children whose parents tragically died earlier this year.

Thanks to all the CFA volunteers who helped to make this a successful event.

STORY DUNCAN RUSSELL

Right: From top, left to right.

1830 hand pump, Melbourne Fire Services Museum

1952 Austin front-mounted pumper, Melbourne Fire Services Museum

1928 Chevrolet tanker, Rutherglen Bush Fire Brigade

1927 Dodge pumper, Melbourne Fire Services Museum

1906 fire cart, Bowman-Murmungee brigade

PHOTOS: SUPPLIED BY STEVE DOIG



Seniors support their brigade

Not many brigades have a group of seniors like the Mt Martha Brigade Support Team, known locally as the BST.

The BST, which has around 20 members, began 20 years ago for members of the community who wanted to help their local brigade in ways other than attending incidents. They quickly learned there was a lot more to do for the brigade than just fundraise and clean up around the station (though they still do this as well).

The BST meets every Thursday morning where its main goal is to reduce the load on operational members so they can concentrate on training and turning out to incidents. They ensure all fire hydrants in the area are kept clear and functional. They also run the brigade community safety programs including the Property Advice Visit Service and Fire Safe Kids, and visit kindergartens and local events to promote fire safety.

The brigade also has a lighting/staging area vehicle that the BST operates at large fires around District 8.

Pat Richardson (pictured right in the photo) has been a member for around 18 years. She enjoys “the company of like-minded people. They are a fantastic group to be around. I also enjoy being involved with younger people; it keeps me young.

“I’m very involved in the community safety programs, organising and facilitating the Fire Safe Kids and kinder visits. FSK has changed a lot over the years and it’s very rewarding work.”

At 87 years old, Margaret O’Doherty (pictured left in the photo) is one of the oldest members of the support team.

“I’m involved with Meals on Wheels, but I heard about the BST and thought I could help the community in another way,” said Margaret. “I’ve



PHOTO: MEGAN ANGEL

gained a lot since I joined. I really do love this work and it keeps me busy.”

CFA is well known for its volunteers who want to protect their communities, and the Mount Martha Brigade Support Team is a perfect example of how you can do that at any age.

STORY MEGAN ANGEL

Back from the brink

Warrayure-Moutajup Fire Brigade is between Hamilton and Dunkeld on the Glenelg Highway. Over the past five years, many local farmers have retired or farms have changed ownership and the brigade lacked firefighters and a succession plan.

The brigade has burnt the Glenelg Highway roadside reserves and shire roads almost every year for the past 70 years. All phalaris growth on the road reserves is slashed by farmers to reduce flame height and increase safety. This is one of the major strategic fire breaks in the district.



PHOTO: JACQUIE CHAPMAN

In late 2014, CFA’s Brigade Sustainability team held several meetings with the brigade to generate enthusiasm within the brigade and improve its sustainability. However, renewed interest was not forthcoming and the brigade was in a situation of not being able to fill all the office bearer positions at the next election.

In April 2016, it was decided to visit people in their homes to increase support for the brigade.

“There are about 30 houses within the footprint, so there was a very limited number of people available to join the brigade,” said Volunteer Sustainability Team Member Jacquie Chapman.

Now, there are eight new members (pictured) including a new secretary, a fourth lieutenant community safety, a health and safety representative, several firefighters and brigade support members.

“For a brigade that was looking at either merging with another brigade or even facing closure, to be able to recruit eight new members is a fantastic achievement,” said Jacquie.

New members are in the process of basic training at the VEMTC Penhurst campus in time for summer and other emergencies. Also, experienced members think it’s important to communicate often with the newer members to encourage them and discuss new ideas.

Many thanks to Operations Officer Andrew Barry for encouraging the brigade.

STORY EVERARD LINKE, WARRAYURE-MOUTAJUP BRIGADE



1

Brigades welcome their communities

Between September and December, CFA brigades across the state have once again opened their doors to their communities. When we went to print, around 250 brigades had already held, or were planning to hold, an open day.

Open days continue to be a fantastic opportunity for CFA brigades to engage with their local community and have fun while also showing Victorians how to protect life and property all year round.

Open days also allow brigades to show their local community what CFA does and

to discuss topics specifically relevant to them, including recruitment, fundraising and Junior programs.

Last year, more than 340 brigades hosted an open day with 3,336 CFA members participating and reaching over 26,000 community members across the state.

If you want to register your brigade's events, including an open day, go to the 'What's on' page on our website: cfa.vic.gov.au/about/whats-on.

STORY GEORGINA HILL



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4



5



6

- 1 Springfield Fire Brigade
PHOTO: MAREE MARSHALL
- 2 Springfield Fire Brigade
PHOTO: JAMIE SHEEHAN
- 3 Coldstream Fire Brigade
PHOTO: SARAH STERRETT,
RED KITE PHOTOGRAPHY
- 4 Coldstream Fire Brigade
PHOTO: SARAH STERRETT,
RED KITE PHOTOGRAPHY

- 5 Keysborough Fire Brigade
PHOTO: LORETTA BINDER
- 6 Keysborough Fire Brigade
PHOTO: LORETTA BINDER
- 7 Hastings Fire Brigade
PHOTO: TYSN DENSLY
- 8 Hastings Fire Brigade
PHOTO: TYSN DENSLY



8

Working together in the north-west

At the Mid Murray Group training exercise in mid-September, participants were “expected to work as part of a team of trucks, working with other crews, and helping them with their tasks,” according to Second Deputy Group Officer Mick Blackmore.

Forty-five members of the group, from Swan Hill, Lake Boga, Goschen, Beverford & District, Woorinen South, Piangil and Ultima brigades, gathered at Woorinen South Fire Station to take part in a series of round-robin exercises surrounding the station.

“Rather than practising specific elements in isolation, each task was presented to the crews as a desired outcome, and the crews had to use a range of skills to achieve the outcome – just like a real job,” continued Mick, who’s also the group’s training officer and a firefighter with Swan Hill brigade.

For many participants, this was the first practice since last year and, “despite members having a wide range of skills from recent recruits to experienced veterans, they all worked together and completed many tasks during the session.”

Tasks included blacking out, a burnover drill, branch and hose techniques, draughting water, using the quick fill pump, practising radio skills and basic firefighting.

Participants also had the opportunity to practise being strike team leaders.

“Sector commanders were appointed, and they liaised with the strike team leaders based in the field command vehicle. The strike team leaders briefed crew leaders about the tasks.”

To make sure the exercises followed the procedures of real incidents, crew leaders radioed progress back to the strike team leaders, and strike team leaders radioed sector commanders with up-to-date information.

One benefit of this training was that brigade members had the opportunity to work with a range of vehicles, not just the one owned by their brigade.

The final exercise, a fireline attack, involved all the trucks working together. Trucks in formation attacked the fire one after the other.

During the debrief and mandatory sausage sizzle (organised by Woorinen South members)



PHOTO: MEREDITH BLACKMORE

Mick encouraged participants to pass on what they’d learned when they returned to their brigades, and practise the skills.

Supporting Mick was First Deputy Group Officer Lindsay Birch, who’s also a CFA instructor in North West Region.

“He was invaluable in helping to plan and run this training session,” said Mick.

District 18 Operations Officer John Breaks was also present to encourage the volunteers.

STORY DUNCAN RUSSELL

Strzelecki Group prepares for summer



The Strzelecki Group of fire brigades conducted its annual bushfire training exercise in early October in conditions that are already drying out in District 9.

Held at Leongatha Airport, volunteers participated in practical exercises aimed at familiarising themselves with the equipment used by 12 brigades.

The morning training included:

- draughting water from a collar tank
- using techniques to extinguish a running grassfire
- electrical pole fires
- using fire extinguishers on a car fire and on flammable liquid
- radio procedures
- using a drip torch for back-burning
- a turnover drill.

The exercises were also an opportunity for the brigades in the group to get to know each other, as these are the people they will be working alongside this summer.

Members from Allambee, Hallston-Mt Eccles, Kongwak, Koonwarra, Korumburra, Leongatha, Leongatha South, Loch, Mirboo North, Nerrena, Poowong, Ruby and Thorpdale brigades, plus HPV firefighters took part.

"It's predicted we will have an earlier and more intense fire season this year, so we've been diligent in getting our brigades and volunteers ready," said Strzelecki Group Officer and Leongatha South brigade member Gary Williams.

"We're prepared. Now it's up to our community to be prepared."



Junior brigade update

AUSTRALIAN FIRE CADET CHAMPIONSHIP

In the first week of October, 12 eager Juniors, three excited Junior leaders and a staff member (pictured below) boarded a plane for NSW to compete in the biennial Australian Fire Cadet Championships, hosted by NSW Rural Fire Service. Selected from across the state, the two CFA teams first met in September for a team building day.

The competition, held in Myuna Bay, saw the Juniors compete in eight practical firefighting events and create lifelong friendships with cadets from across Australia. Although the CFA teams didn't place in the final standings, we congratulate them on their amazing efforts and for behaving in such an exemplary way throughout the trip.

"The competition was an amazing, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity which taught me key methods of firefighting, but also teamwork and perseverance," said Billy, a Junior member at Bayswater Fire Brigade.

2017 JUNIOR LEADERS FORUM

The Junior Leaders Forum in September was the first time since 2011 that Junior leaders from all over the state had gathered for personal development and networking. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive.

The 90 Junior leaders who attended represented all our districts. In total, 53 Junior brigades were represented which is a third of CFA's Junior brigades.

Keynote speakers included Ashley Fell from McCrindle Research, who spoke about changing demographics and strategies for engaging Gen Alpha and Gen Z, and Peter Kenyon from the Bank of IDEAS, who spoke about the importance of finding fun ways to engage young volunteers.

Workshops and panel discussions covered a range of topics, including youth participation, child safety at CFA, resources, recruitment and retention, program planning and the principles of marketing to young people.

The highlight of the forum seemed to be networking with other Junior leaders. A number of new networks were formed by leaders who wanted to stay in touch to combine fundraising efforts, share resources and exchange ideas and strategies.

DUKE OF EDINBURGH INTERNATIONAL AWARD

Throughout CFA's long association with the Duke of Edinburgh International Award (available to 14 to 25-year-olds), many brigades have allowed award participants to complete their Community Service unit while undertaking brigade activities. However, District 13 has taken its commitment to the award one step further.

The Kalorama and Mt Dandenong Junior brigade has become an Award Unit – or host – of the Compass Award (available to 10 to 14-year-olds). Junior Leader Gavin McNamara recently presented the first round of award certificates at the brigade's annual dinner.

Meanwhile, District 13 headquarters invited local high school student Amelia Cimo to carry out her Community Service unit by volunteering at district headquarters. Amelia helped admin staff with record management and acted as a CFA media representative at an Eastern Metro Air Flight Operations training event, where she conducted interviews and helped put together a video.

NEW MARKETING AND RECRUITMENT MATERIAL

In October, CFA released new Junior Volunteer Development Program (JVDP) recruitment materials. The package includes brochures, postcards, posters and adverts – most of which can be edited, personalised and printed by brigades. There are also new social media tools, such as a Facebook banner and Instagram tile.

However, the highlight of the new package is a video that showcases the Junior member experience and the training and activities our Junior brigades run. Members who attended the Junior Leaders Forum got a sneak peek at the video and couldn't wait to use it on their social media pages, at training and brigade open days.

Printed marketing materials can be ordered via the online ordering system where Junior brigades order their uniform items, while the social media and editable materials can be found in the JVDP Resources section of Brigades Online.

STORY LAURA BRACKEN



PHOTO: SENIOR CONSTABLE JAMES ETCHES

Disaster resilience education in schools



PHOTO: PETER FOSTER

As emergency services agencies across Victoria face challenges including increased community demands and limited capacity to deliver community and school education programs, many are looking at opportunities to develop a shared responsibility approach to the delivery of disaster resilience education (DRE) in schools.

Current disaster risk reduction research shows that educating children and youth about natural disasters not only increases resilience and reduces vulnerability, but also positively impacts households and communities, helping them to prepare, respond and recover from emergencies.

CFA and VICSES Community Development Program teams recently conducted a DRE pilot project in Victorian schools in areas with a recognised risk from fire, flood or storm, to trial innovative models for the effective delivery of DRE in the classroom. This project, called the School Curriculum Natural Hazards Resilience Package (SCNHRP) was funded by the Natural Disaster Resilience Grants Scheme, Victoria.

Throughout the SCNHRP project, CFA and SES staff worked collaboratively with

teachers and students from participating schools to design, develop and implement a DRE program that addressed local natural hazard risks and facilitated the development of disaster resilience strategies with the students.

The SCNHRP project engaged students in five web-based lessons which encouraged hands-on participatory learning and decision-making challenges which helped students to actively reduce their local hazard risks.

Lesson activities included mapping exercises to assess local hazard risks and group discussions to develop possible actions to reduce hazard risks. These lessons were facilitated by teachers who had participated in a content-specific professional development session run by CFA and SES staff.

A comprehensive evaluation of the SCNHRP project will be completed in December 2017. Parts of this evaluation will look at how effectively the project increased student learning, and the capacity of schools and the emergency services sector to replicate the project on a larger scale in the future.

STORY MATT HENRY

“The professional development was very, very helpful, because it was something we had never seen before and because Matt went through every lesson step-by-step saying, ‘This is the website, this is the resource, this is where you can go’.

Teachers are very time poor. We probably wouldn’t have had time to go through and look at all those resources. Matt showed us where you can find all these things and what you can do. When I came to delivering it, I could just scan it for a minute and just think, ‘Yep, this is what I’m going to do for that’.

Year 8 teacher

“Young people can be a lot more open to learning and a little bit less stuck in their ways sometimes, and they can bring a fresh perspective to the environment.”

Year 8 student

“The program helped me to be more aware of disaster resilience and to know what to do if something big happens like a storm, bushfire or flood. Now I know how to be prepared and what to do if it happens.”

Year 8 student

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- Exclusive discounts and unique offers through the **JB Hi-Fi Family & Friends Program**.
- Discounts on pre-purchased **Gift Cards** including Woolworths, Coles, Myer, Kmart, Target, Supercheap Auto, Rebel Sport, JB Hi-Fi, Ray's and BCF.
- Corporate pricing on the entire range of vehicles at **Rex Gorell Geelong**.
- 15% discount off lunch and dinner at Melba Restaurant or high tea at Aria Lounge at **The Langham Melbourne**.
- Nine months free property management services through **Little Real Estate**.
- Government rates across Australia with **Choice Hotels Asia-Pac**.
- **Searoad Ferries** offer 10% discount on ferry travel between Sorrento and Queenscliff.
- 15% off the best rates of the day with **Thrifty** car rental.
- 20% off all food, beverages and retail items at **Zambrero Restaurants** across Victoria.
- \$50 off your next booking when you spend over \$1,500 at **Flight Centre**.
- Save money on pre-purchased **movie tickets, theme park and attraction tickets**.
- **RSEA Safety** offers 15% off full-priced items.
- Discounted passenger fares on **Spirit of Tasmania**.
- 15% discount on dash cameras and action cameras and 20% discount on all accessories at **Today's Computing**.
- **Mantra Group Departure Lounge** has savings of up to 50% on accommodation at Peppers, Mantra and BreakFree properties.
- Exclusive access to trade prices through **Harvey Norman Groups & Associations Division**.
- Save 40% on **AIG Travel Insurance**.
- Free medium soft drink, medium orange juice or small McCafé coffee with any purchase over \$3 at **McDonald's** restaurants in Victoria.
- 10% off at **Tradelink Plumbing Centres**.
- Commercial pricing through **The Good Guys Commercial Division**.
- **Nissan** Partner Program pricing on a range of passenger cars, 4WDs and SUV vehicles.
- **Balgownie Estate Vineyard Resort & Spa** offers a 10% discount on Cellar Door and Rae's Restaurant.
- **Hi Voltage Karts Indoor Racing** offers members a free race valued at \$30.
- No joining fee and 10% off membership rates at **Snap Fitness**. A \$49 access card fee applies.
- Subscribe to **Magshop** and save up to 53% on popular magazines such as Australian Women's Weekly, Australian House and Garden and Wheels Magazine.
- Discounted rates and reduced insurance excess on car hire with **Avis**.
- 20% off Bath House bathing Tuesday to Thursday outside of public and school holidays at **Peninsula Hot Springs**.
- 10% off best available rates at **Best Western Hotels**.
- Up to 20% off **Lenovo** PCs, laptops and notebooks.
- **Skydive Nagambie** offers 10% discount on all skydives, tandem or first jump courses.
- 25% or \$25 off your meal (lowest applies) at **Taco Bill Mexican Restaurants**.

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