

Brigade

summer 2014

Protecting lives
and property

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▼ Assistant Chief Officers get started



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COVER PHOTO: KEITH PAKENHAM

ASSISTANT CHIEF OFFICERS 08



Feedback on Volunteerism Strategy

During October and November, members had the opportunity to consider the CFA Board-endorsed draft Volunteerism Strategy, developed in collaboration with VFBV. The consultation period has now closed following a series of regional forums and discussion with CFA members. Feedback has also been received via post and email from a number of members, brigades and groups.

Members have talked about a wide range of themes and ideas which will help to shape the final strategy, including:

- the need to trust and *really* use volunteer skills and expertise
- improving the connection between CFA brigades and the communities they serve, including how we work with other organisations locally
- encouraging community-led planning on emergencies
- the idea of 'championing volunteerism' being best achieved if a number of agencies and organisations work together
- the importance of making sure that brigades remain capable in their own right, and not overly dependent on Headquarters
- connecting with our younger generation
- some members feel that the key performance indicators described seem too CFA focused and could better reflect multi-agency and local community measures
- thinking through what actions to take to make the strategy succeed.

Executive Director Operational Training and Volunteerism Lex de Man attended some of the regional forums.

"Hearing from CFA members has such a positive influence on how we think about our strategic future at CFA," said Lex. "Personally, it keeps me connected to both the great ideas and the current challenges of our people across a range of brigades and groups."

CFA's draft Volunteerism Strategy has been developed in response to the Victorian Auditor-General's Office report *Managing Emergency Services Volunteers* which identified strengths and weaknesses in the way we support our volunteers.

Five principles guide the strategy:

1. We are committed to community-based, sustainable volunteerism
2. We recognise, value and respect all members equally
3. We will actively engage volunteers in decision making
4. All CFA members have a responsibility to encourage, maintain and strengthen volunteers to deliver our services
5. Volunteers should be supported with appropriate tools and resources to carry out their roles effectively.

The strategy's three key objectives are to encourage and value the contribution of volunteers; maintain and enhance the role of the volunteers in service delivery; and strengthen connections between volunteers and communities.

All members' suggestions are now being reviewed, and ideas will be incorporated into the final Volunteerism Strategy. In particular, discussion on what successful achievement of the strategy will look like is shaping thinking about both the strategy and early implementation plans.

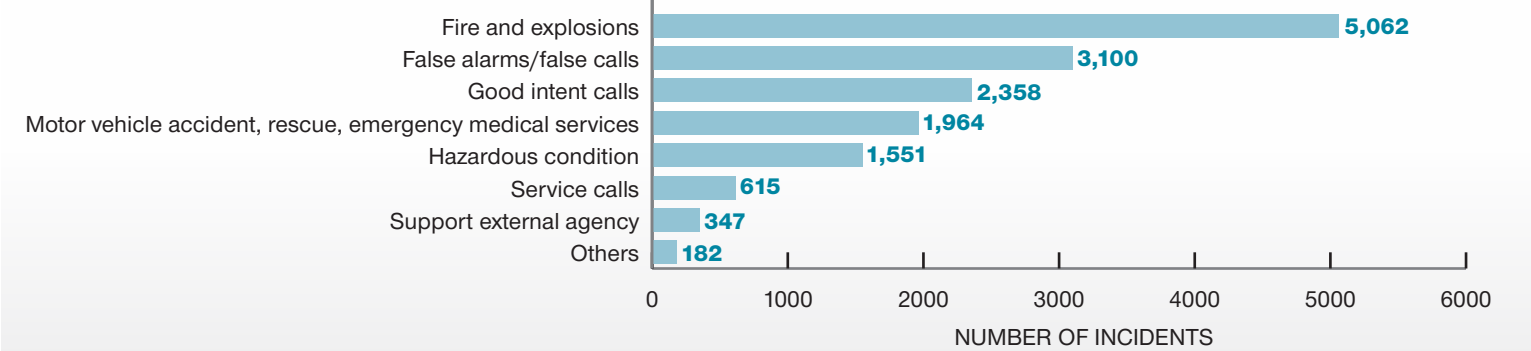
The final Volunteerism Strategy will be presented to the Board in early 2015.

Thank you to all members who have taken the time to share their experience and offer their views.

Incident summary

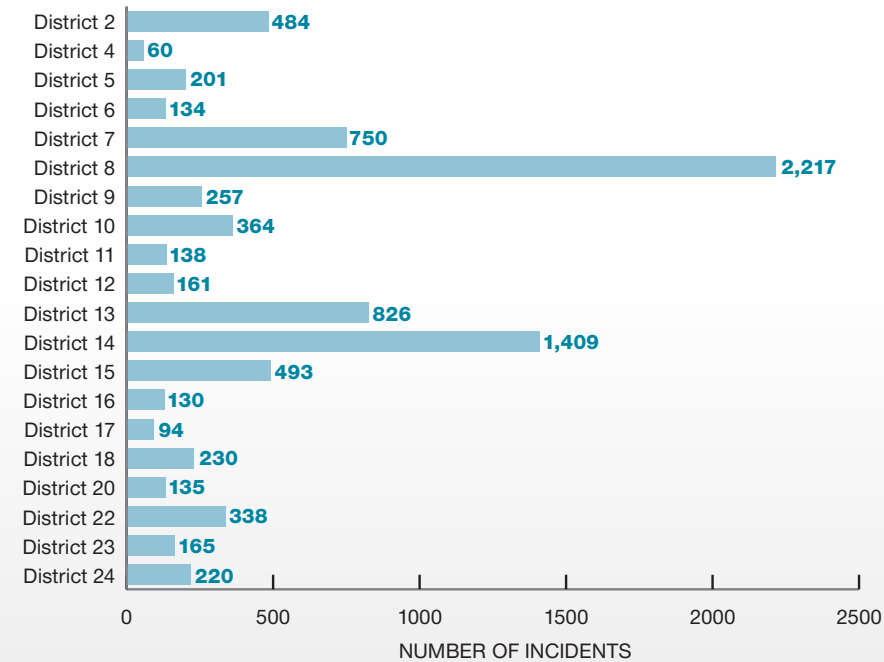
STATEWIDE INCIDENTS BY TYPE

1 July – 30 September 2014



STATEWIDE INCIDENTS BY DISTRICT

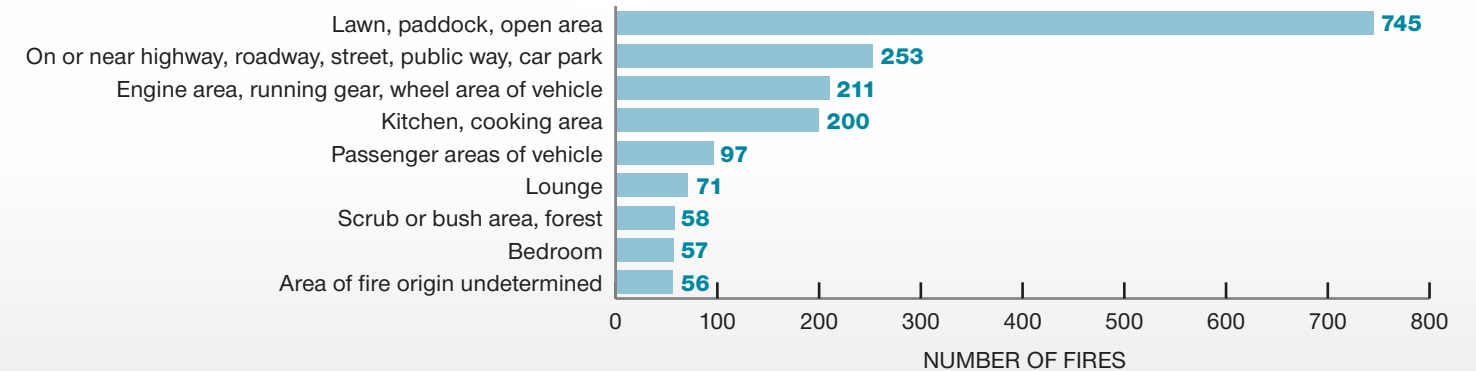
1 July – 30 September 2014



Brigades are reminded to submit their fire/incident report as soon as possible after attending an incident. Brigades on strike teams also need to submit a report. FIRS Call Centre, 1800 628 844, is open daily 8am-11pm.

ORIGIN OF FIRE

1 July – 30 September 2014

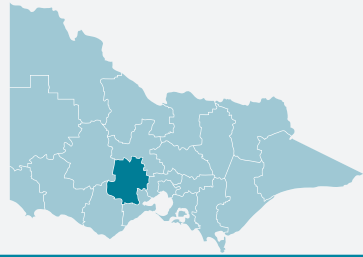


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For any social media queries, contact: c.ford@cfa.vic.gov.au; 9262 8317

Cliff rescue at Werribee Gorge

INCIDENT: High-angle rescue
DISTRICT: 15
DATE: 31 August 2014
BRIGADES: Geelong City, Ballarat City, Ballan



On the last day of August, a man phoned for help after he fell down a cliff at Werribee Gorge, between Bacchus Marsh and Ballan.

Firefighters from Ballan brigade went on foot to search for the man in the ravine and found him after more than 90 minutes. Finding the man was made more difficult because of limited phone reception, and Parks Victoria's knowledge of the gorge was very useful.

Crews from CFA, SES, Parks Victoria, Ambulance Victoria and Victoria Police, all worked together to rescue the man. The difficult task of winching the man to safety up the cliff was a joint effort between highangle rope rescue crews from Ballarat City brigade, Geelong City brigade and SES Ararat, with support from Victoria Police Search and Rescue and Ballan brigade volunteers.

It took around four hours to find and rescue the man, who was treated by Ambulance Victoria at the scene. He was very lucky to only receive bruises and a fractured wrist.



PHOTO: BLAIR DELLEMIJN

"We urge anyone that's going out doing high-risk activities to make sure you have someone with you at all times, as you can't always rely on mobile phone reception," said District 15 Rostered Duty Officer Archie Conroy.

STORY BLAIR DELLEMIJN

Fire threatens Hillside homes

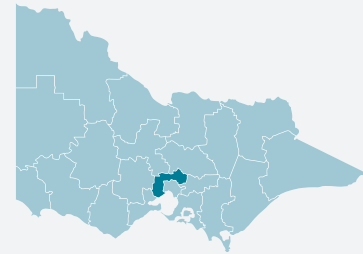
An early warning of a likely busy fire season came to Hillside, north-west of Melbourne, with a grassfire burning more than two hectares of paddocks next to Galli Court.

Crews were called to the blaze at around 2.15pm, where they found a fast-running fire burning under warm and windy conditions during the hottest day in Melbourne since April.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF CHANNEL 7

INCIDENT: Grass and scrub fire
DISTRICT: 14
DATE: 22 October 2014
BRIGADES: Caroline Springs, Melton, Rockbank, Toolern Vale, Truganina, Wyndham Vale, Hoppers Crossing, Werribee, Bulla, Eynesbury, Diggers Rest



CFA District 14 Operations Officer Trevor Roberts said CFA and MFB firefighters quickly doused the flames and controlled the fire in 20 minutes.

"There wasn't a blade of grass left in the area where the fire went through," he said.

"The fire damaged a couple of fences but didn't go beyond those fences."

CFA crews from 11 brigades, supported by MFB, were praised for their quick efforts.

"It was only a five-acre fire, but if not for the great work of crews it could have spread further.

"It's a timely warning for residents in high-risk areas on the urban fringe to formulate a plan before summer hits in earnest."

STORY ANGELA VALENTE

Helping our Canadian colleagues



PHOTO: WAYNE RIGG



From left: Wayne Rigg, Sherene Mounier, Arthur Haynes and Tim Wells

A Victorian-led contingent of 80 Australians travelled to Canada to fight a series of lightning-start fires that were exhausting local crews six weeks in. The Australian group comprised incident management team (IMT) personnel skilled in logistics, planning and operations, along with senior fireline personnel and aviation specialists.

CFA Aviation Officer Wayne Rigg took a role equivalent to Victoria's air attack supervisor during almost five weeks in British Columbia.

He worked the China Nose and Mt McAllister fires. The latter was burning in rugged country near the snowline and the key task was protecting wind turbines, a hydro scheme and electricity lines taking power to Vancouver.

"The dispatch of aircraft was impressive," said Wayne. "They send aircraft out in packs carrying from 3,000 to 14,000 litres each, ensuring sufficient weight of initial attack.

"We slotted into their operations after a half or full-day briefing which included information about bears. We joked that they might be like our legendary 'drop bears', but actually we had to buzz a sector to scare off bears and cougars. "There were very few water-carrying vehicles on the fireline. It wasn't unusual to see 15-kilometre hose lays with floating collar tanks and pumps to relay water from the abundant lakes, rivers and beaver ponds."

Huge trucks hauled in demountable buildings along forestry roads to form base camps within striking distance of the fires where ground crews and IMTs were housed for the duration.

This is where Officer in Charge of Mornington Fire Station Arthur Haynes was deployed as a safety officer within a team of 17 Australians representing at least eight agencies.

"I had to audit all crews," said Arthur, "but a different issue was dealing with people on the fireline with guns. Moose hunters were in the area – some of them were our contractors – and I got regular reports of gunshots heard."

With a lot of high humidity days and unburnt fuel within control lines, the fires were primarily slope rather than weather-driven. Breaches of control lines on the Mt McAllister fire were largely due to strong overnight katabatic winds.

"I had to get my head around the wind flowing the opposite way around high and low pressure systems," said Fire Behaviour Analyst Tim Wells. "They mostly look at thickness lines which show

the temperature of the lowest five kilometres of the atmosphere.

"With temperatures around 30°C with 20 to 50 per cent relative humidity, we saw sustained surface fire. Some spruce trees would flare and even sustain crown fire under relatively mild conditions.

"We train in a universal way to read fire behaviour. Some of the conversions had my head spinning but it also gave me heaps of confidence."

West Region's Manager of Community Safety Michael Boatman was deployed to the Chelasie River fire as a situations unit leader. While neither firefighters nor the IMT worked overnight, Michael emphasised the challenge of pacing yourself over 14 days living and working on a remote site.

"At home our work is more prediction, firefighting strategy and options analysis but there it was more about the current situation and mapping," said Michael.

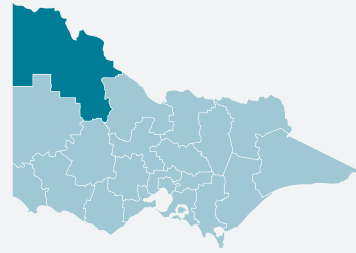
"There was a huge fuel load of dead trees ringbarked by pine beetles, and every fireline was assessed by a dangerous trees assessor and a tree feller."

"Not only have we started some lifelong networks with Canadians," said Wayne, "but we've cemented relationships with other Australian fire services personnel. Almost every state and territory was represented and you can't quantify the value of strengthening that bond."

STORY LEITH HILLARD

One out of the box

INCIDENT: Factory fire
DISTRICT: 18
DATE: 27 August 2014
BRIGADES: Red Cliffs, Irymple, Mildura, Nangiloc, Merbein, Carwarp



Ten CFA trucks attended Laurel Street in Red Cliffs early in the morning to find empty boxes on fire in a packing shed.

Officer-in-Charge of Mildura brigade Ron Shiner said the boxes, used to store dried fruit, were stacked about 10 metres high in an area of 30 metres by 20 metres.

"We estimate there may have been between 800 to 1,000 empty boxes stacked in the shed," Ron said.

"Crews did a great job and managed to contain the fire to the boxes and there was no threat to the factory or surrounding assets.

"A number of people living adjacent to the fire were evacuated due to radiant heat and falling embers but thankfully their house was not impacted."

There was also heavy smoke in the area and as a precaution an Advice Message was issued recommending people avoid the area.

Firefighters remained at the scene for some time blacking out and used the factory's forklift trucks to pull apart the boxes.

The cause of the fire was believed to be suspicious and CFA handed it over to the police.

STORY ANDREA MASON



PHOTO: GLENN MILNE

Pub destroyed but hot rods saved

INCIDENT: Structure fire
DISTRICT: 13
DATE: 25 October 2014
BRIGADES: Dandenong, Bayswater, Wandin, Healesville, Hillcrest, Yarra Junction, Seville, Yellingbo, Hoddles Creek

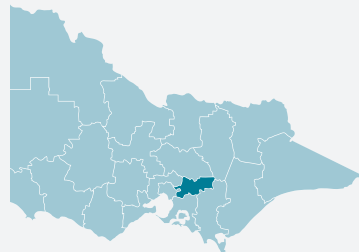


PHOTO: DAVE TANGY

More than 50 CFA firefighters from nine brigades battled a blaze at the Woori Yallock pub on the Old Warburton Highway in the Yarra Ranges.

CFA Incident Controller and Hillcrest Captain Fiona Burns said the two-storey pub was completely engulfed in flames when firefighters arrived at 3.15am.

The popular watering hole, the only one in the town, couldn't be saved despite the best efforts of firefighters who contained the fire after an hour and a half. No one was injured.

"It's a really iconic pub for all of us locals," Fiona said.

"Despite the loss, we've had a good save. We saved the adjoining garage which contained about \$2.5 million worth of hot rod cars.

"It was a great effort from all the firefighters on the fireground. It was a stellar effort and great cooperation by all. Everyone has worked really hard."

For the past seven years, the 100-year-old pub had been undergoing renovations.

Fiona said pub owners Doug and Mel Fraser were devastated by the loss of the hotel, but were committed to rebuilding it.

STORY ANGELA VALENTE

CEO

Mick Bourke www.cfa.vic.gov.au/ceoblog

It's been an exciting couple of months for CFA's new Senior Leadership Team. As part of our formal transition from eight to five regions, the Assistant Chief Officers started their roles as our new regional leaders in October. Bob Barry, Garry Cook, Mike Wassing, Trevor Owen and Peter O'Keefe are now responsible for the delivery of fire and emergency management services across the five regions covering planning, preparedness, response and operational recovery.

We also warmly welcomed three new skill-based board members in September. Katherine Forrest, James Holyman and John Schurink bring a wealth of knowledge and diverse skill sets to the Board and will help to strengthen and broaden CFA's emergency management arrangements. On behalf of all in CFA, I'd like to congratulate Katherine, James and John on their appointments.

As part of our culture and change journey, the Executive Leadership Team (ELT) visited districts across CFA's five regions in November, to give members a chance to provide their feedback about the culture survey. The meetings were a good opportunity for members to connect with ELT face-to-face and hear about CFA's strategy, direction and priorities.

On a related note, consultation for Creating Our Future Together (COFT) is currently taking place in a phased approach across our six CFA directorates – Business Services, Communities and Communication, Operational Training and Volunteerism, People and Culture, Performance and Strategy and Fire and Emergency Management.

We understand that all our members are keen to see the final structures and we are getting closer. The project team is working

to ensure the design complements CFA's structure as a whole. You can read more about progress on these changes on the intranet/ Brigades Online (cfaonline.cfa.vic.gov.au).

As part of our improvements to Brigades Online, our new electronic rostering system is currently operating at two integrated stations in District 8. Station staff at Dandenong and Cranbourne can now use the electronic rostering application (provided by Kronos) to access up-to-date information about members' skills and better manage their day-to-day staffing needs. Frankston and Hallam also began their training on the new system in November. Volunteers are also taking part in a rostering trial to fill strike teams.

This is an exciting development for CFA and, once fully operational, will ensure members have faster and easier online access to their rostering, availability, training needs and more.

This major milestone for CFA addresses recommendations in the report of the Victorian Auditor-General's Office *Managing Emergency Services Volunteers* relating to volunteer capacity. It provides brigade leadership with a tool to manage the availability of their volunteer workforce.

The new system will significantly reduce paperwork and provide on-time and accurate payment of staff entitlements. In future, it will also be used to fill strike teams and incident control teams during emergencies.

Implementation of the new system will be rolled out to all remaining integrated stations by the middle of next year. Following the pilot for strike team deployment in District 13 this coming Fire Danger Period, the intention is to roll out the rostering system to volunteer stations statewide. I encourage all our members to keep informed about the new system.

FIRS urges prompt reporting

Brigades must submit a fire report for all turnouts. They are a requirement under the CFA Act and are therefore legal documents which store an enormous amount of data.

"The more detailed your reports, the better the data," said Fire and Incident Reporting System (FIRS) Manager Chris Cowley. "It can be used for product recalls or proof of a brigade's need for specialist equipment as well as insurance claims and police investigations."

Chris reminds all brigades – including headquarters brigades – to get their reports in within the required 14 days, while acknowledging that campaign fires present the biggest challenge.

"Lots of strike teams, composite crews, changeover crews: it's a hamburger with the lot."

Major incidents are held open longer to allow brigades to submit all their data. Once a report is closed, however, it will not be re-opened for further data entry. It's also critical to record any injury to a crew member or potential exposure to a hazardous substance.

Strike team leaders should be aware that reports can be made while an incident is in progress. Their penciller could call FIRS

en route to the fireground or staging area to relay truck and crew details. This also applies to changeover crews.

Call takers may prompt brigades to get their fire reports in, but the onus rests on brigades to promptly submit a report that contains relevant and accurate information.

"The 'Comments' section of an incident report should include information about actions taken and details that could be used as evidence in court or to show a pattern," said FIRS Call Taker Deb Roffey. "If a fire is suspicious, we want our report to be consistent with the police and insurance reports."

"It's helpful to read very specific details, like an occupant was advised of burn-off restrictions, Sokerol was used at a diesel spill, or a faulty alarm has still not been fixed."

The sections for information about hazardous materials and casualties and evacuations should also be filled in when relevant.

"Incident reports are about brigade operational activity," said Chris. "We want to know you were there and what you did."

STORY LEITH HILLARD

CFA moves to five regions



Over the next 12 months, CFA is making a range of improvements to better support brigades across the state. CFA's first priority is keeping people and communities safe and we can achieve this by better supporting our frontline people to do their job.

One of the ways CFA is doing this is through the Volunteer Support Program, which gives firefighters the support they need to perform at their best. CFA is also upgrading its internet-based services to increase accessibility, empower volunteers and better connect them to their district. Throughout the year, there will be a number of improvements to online services to give members faster and easier access to their rostering, availability, training needs and more. These improvements are happening in stages and members will be consulted and updated along the way.

The planned introduction of Learning Management System (LMS) and Student Management System (SMS) through the Occupational Training and Volunteerism team will give volunteers greater access to their training records and upcoming courses. It will let members book materials or equipment, such as mobile training props, online.

The new five-region model is another initiative, part of the Creating Our Future Together process, which will allow frontline people to focus on delivering services to the community. The five regions welcomed their assistant chief officers (ACOs) in October – Bob Barry, Garry Cook, Mike Wassing, Trevor Owen and Peter O'Keefe. ACOs will help link the Chief Officer more directly to the field and be accountable for managing the people and resources in their region and districts. The ACOs will bring a clear chain of command to their regions and lead regional operational activities. All members with operational support duties will report to the Chief Officer through the chain of command.

CFA has a long and proud history, and we must continue to look ahead and keep pace with changes around us. The organisation is changing the way it does business to become more agile and adaptive. The change process will bring more opportunities for volunteers to lead local service delivery, such as community safety initiatives and education. Over time, a district will be able to access statewide support services and appropriate resources to support their needs.

While there will be some changes to the way we do business, CFA's main focus is on keeping people and communities safe. CFA is expecting another busy fire season and our first priority is making sure we are ready to respond.

Although the boundaries for CFA's regions have changed, the districts' boundaries are staying the same. The only exception is the formation of District 27 in the Latrobe Valley, which is expected to be fully established in April next year. CFA has kicked off consultation with members in the valley about the new district. Feedback from brigade staff and volunteers will help inform the allocation of resources, the development of response plans and how CFA can better integrate with industry.

District 27 was announced by the Victorian Government and is one of the many improvements being made in light of the lessons presented by the Hazelwood mine fire. The Latrobe Valley is home to key power infrastructure and associated industries and requires a specific level of fire and emergency management. District 27 will ensure that the best resources, plans and preparedness are in place to manage risks and protect some of the state's key assets.

STORY HOLLY LITTLE

Above

Our five Assistant Chief Officers (left to right) Trevor Owen, Mike Wassing, Chief Officer Euan Ferguson, Peter O'Keefe, Garry Cook and Bob Barry

PHOTO: KEITH PAKENHAM



Below:
Photo taken by CFA photographer Keith Pakenham using a Sony SLT-A77V camera on a tripod. F-stop f4.5, ISO 400, 20-second exposure, 55mm lens focal length.

Hazelwood inquiry praises firefighters

CFA's work to suppress and extinguish the Hazelwood mine fire without interruption to Victoria's power supply has been described as "a tremendous achievement" in the *Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry Report*, which was released in September.

The mine fire, which burnt for 45 days during February and March, was the largest and longest-burning mine fire in the Latrobe Valley. The report, prepared by the Honourable Bernard Teague and his staff, made 18 recommendations – 12 directed at the government and six for mine operator GDF Suez.

The report notes that CFA "responded quickly and effectively" to the nearby Hernes Oak and Driffield fires. No properties were lost in Morwell and CFA prevented fire from crossing the Morwell River diversion and entering the operating area of the Hazelwood mine.

Around 200 firefighting vehicles and more than 7,000 emergency services

personnel fought the fire, while hundreds of other CFA members provided support for the operation.

CEO Mick Bourke said it was pleasing that government has expressed its gratitude to CFA. The fire presented unique challenges and CFA firefighters faced a number of setbacks during the incident. "Thanks to the incredible efforts of our firefighters and partner agencies, there were no lives lost or serious injuries as a result of this fire," Mick said.

"The complex firefighting effort and the engagement with the local community was a great example of innovative, cross-agency fire management."

One of the outcomes of this fire was a decision to establish a new CFA district to lead and manage fire brigades within the City of Latrobe.

You can read the *Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry Report* at hazelwoodinquiry.vic.gov.au.

STORY DARREN GREVIS-JAMES

2014 COMMUNICATIONS SURVEY – WHAT YOU TOLD US

We received an overwhelming 2,730 responses to our 2014 communications survey. Thanks to all members who participated. This was 1,000 more than for our inaugural survey conducted in 2012, which shows CFA members value the importance of communication in our large and diverse organisation.

Most respondents were operational volunteers with a long-term commitment to CFA (20+ years), living in rural areas or small townships (70 per cent), and aged 45 years or more (more than 65 per cent).

The overwhelming majority of respondents (90 per cent) are online and believe it's the quickest way to get information (73 per cent). Of those who do go online, 74 per cent do so daily.

Email is the preferred channel that respondents want used by CFA leadership (76 per cent), followed by face-to-face meetings (42 per cent) and group briefings (32 per cent). Respondents want to hear about the latest upcoming offers, events or training opportunities via email (74 per cent) and via a mobile phone SMS (42 per cent).

Despite respondents' frequent activity online, there remains high demand for traditional print format media such as *Brigade* magazine (76 per cent read it in print format). Members also use local newspapers (42 per cent) and *The Fireman* (40 per cent) to obtain CFA news.

Respondents believed they generally received the right amount of information from CFA (53 per cent), and that communicating consolidated information weekly was the preferred frequency (42 per cent). However, feedback suggested members wanted messages to the field to be consolidated and better coordinated to avoid unnecessary duplication.

Compared with the 2012 results, more respondents are only interested in information from their local area (up 8 per cent), and more people want information that's essential to their role (up 5 per cent).

The person people most wanted to hear from was the Chief Officer (58 per cent of respondents), followed by operations managers (50 per cent), group officers (43 per cent); and operations officers (42 per cent). The CEO was also a respected voice at 29 per cent.

There was also a substantial amount of written feedback provided, which is being considered and will be used to form part of the actions we take to create communications to meet the future needs of our members. While one size won't fit all, it's our aim to create channels and processes to continually improve communications at CFA.

STORY CHRISTINA BUCCI



New field operations vehicles

PHOTO: KEITH PAKENHAM

Seven high-tech communications trucks worth more than \$300,000 each were recently deployed across the state to improve communications during major incidents.

CFA's new field operations vehicles will be set up at large scale incidents, such as bushfires and factory fires, to improve communications between the fireground and incident control centres.

Chief Officer Euan Ferguson said the state-of-the-art vehicles will relay high-quality information from anywhere in the state.

"CFA's new field operations vehicles will provide incident controllers with real-time information from the fireground, and decisions made in the incident control centre can now be fed back to the field instantly," said Euan.

"Our crews will be able to run their emergency response from the vehicle, or use it as a central communications point between the incident and control centres across the state.

"I have no doubt these new trucks will prove to be a great advance in fireground communications."

As well as improved communications, field operations vehicles will give crews instant access to CFA's computer networks, fire maps and printing facilities, and an on-board weather station. The versatile vehicles can also be used as a health monitoring station.

"Faster information leads to quicker decisions, from sharing information with our crews on the ground all the way to providing more timely warnings to our communities," said Euan.

"The vehicles have advanced technology on board but have been built with emergencies in mind – they're very easy to use. They can safely operate for over 12 hours on a full tank of diesel and another three hours on the emergency batteries if mains power isn't available."

The vehicles have been delivered to Bairnsdale, Golden Square, Inverloch, Mildura, Moe South and Wendouree brigades, and the Nillumbik Group.

STORY ANDREA MASON

Buller project is a winner

A joint-agency project which aims to make it easier for emergency services to locate triple zero callers on Mt Buller was named a Victorian finalist in this year's Resilient Australia Awards.

The Mt Buller Addressing Project – led by the Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority (ESTA) with strong involvement from CFA over a number of years – received a judge's commendation in late September, and was one of eight finalists named in the State Government category.

The new addressing system on Mt Buller, which has been operating since last winter, helps triple zero callers better explain their location.

CFA Operations Officer Paul Horton, who's stationed at Mt Buller during the winter months, said the Mt Buller Addressing Project would mean faster response times in an environment where time was critical.

"The idea is to help the caller – especially if they are a visitor to the area – be more specific about where they are, so that stress, fear and panic are minimised and the lead agency can better direct their resources," Paul said.

Under the ESTA project, hundreds of buildings, including each chalet, lodge and commercial premises, have been allocated a number and road name. In the past, emergency services have had to rely heavily on the local knowledge of responding crews to supplement information received from callers.

Paul said that wherever tourists gather in numbers and a need for triple zero arises, a similar system could be considered.



The Mt Buller model, which was developed from scratch, will be used as a best-practice example for the state's ski resorts and French Island.

STORY ANDREA MASON

Ten facts about the Wellbeing Pilot

The Wellbeing Pilot, which began last April, is part of the broader Volunteer Support Program. Here are some things you might not know about the pilot.

1. Six field officers work with brigades across the state to support members in managing factors that can impact on their overall wellbeing, mental health, brigade responsibilities and relationships.
2. You can request support by phoning 9262 8409 or emailing wellbeing.intake@cfa.vic.gov.au.
3. Services range from informal and formal case management to delivery of training and education programs tailored to a brigade's needs.
4. Training and education packages currently available include:
 - workshops to help leaders and members manage mental health
 - equal opportunity training
 - how to have a difficult conversation
 - dealing with conflict
 - social media and wellbeing
 - strengthening brigade relationships.

5. In the first six months, the Wellbeing Pilot has handled 171 cases.
6. During this time, around 2,120 people have had some form of contact with the pilot.
7. Half the referrals were for our training workshops.
8. An operations officer recently said that the 'Strengthening brigade relationships' workshop should be run for all brigades in his district to "reinforce values and early intervention processes". He went on to say, "this is how we can change culture".
9. After attending a recent Wellbeing Pilot training session, one brigade member said they would use "all the information, all the support documentation, all the support services".
10. The pilot forms part of a suite of support services and resources now available to help members manage their mental health and deal with difficulties when they arise.

Visit cfa.vic.gov.au/mentalhealth for more details.

STORY TANYA DI MICHELE

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Euan Ferguson

Let's talk about strike teams. Strike teams are a vital part of an organised firefight for a developing fire. They are often deployed in an environment that is rapidly changing. Strike teams are planned to be a complete force with embedded leadership, safety in numbers, weight of attack and a communication capability.

Volunteers sacrifice a lot of time and put in effort and skill to take part in strike teams, so we must learn to maximise the efficiency of strike teams and make sure they are effective at putting out the fire. Strike teams should only be requested if there is a clear task. Often, strike teams will be deployed to an incident via a staging area. It is crucial that they are tasked on to the fireground as quickly and efficiently as possible. Strike teams that are assembled but not actively working are a waste of time, effort and money.

It is essential that we integrate local knowledge into strike teams. Local knowledge may come from the local group, local brigade captains, the Department of Environment and Primary Industries or Parks Victoria.

Strike team leaders should monitor the workload of their crews and, if there is insufficient work, ask to be redeployed. After a fire has impacted on a community, it may be that any action – even blacking out or helping local property owners to protect farm assets – is valuable work that can be undertaken until strike teams are redeployed to a more critical part of the firefight.

We need to reinforce a culture of action and empower crew leaders, strike team leaders, sector commanders and division commanders to seek out the most effective work.

The principle and development of strike teams is recognised as one of the great achievements of CFA after the Ash Wednesday era. Volunteers go on strike teams because there is a job to be done. I ask that we all exercise leadership in ensuring that we keep our focus on putting the fire out and meeting the needs and expectations of disaster-affected communities. The intent is to minimise the impacts of fires and other emergencies and enable affected communities to focus on their recovery as early as practicable.

On a final note, much of Victoria has seen below-average rainfall in the past 11 months. Maximum temperatures are forecast to be higher than average. This means that the bush is drier now than it normally is. Grassland areas are curing rapidly. It may be an early start to the fire season. Now is the time to get ready for the summer season – bushfires and heatwaves. Check your gear, talk about your planning, carry out the burnover drill and make contact with other agency teams. I urge you to focus on the 'main thing' – our preparedness and readiness for the fire season.

ASSISTANT CHIEF OFFICER North West Region



Mike Wassing

I am extremely proud to be given the opportunity to lead the new CFA North West Region encompassing Districts 2, 14, 18 and 20. The new region – from Werribee to Mildura – is enormously diverse, with some of Australia's fastest-growing suburbs in the south, Victoria's food bowl in the north and pretty much everything else in between.

Having been out and about in recent weeks (yes, it is a big patch) one very important thing is very much the same – great people and great teams who are dedicated, loyal and committed to our mission. To give you some idea of our capability, we have a team of over 11,000 volunteers supported by 350 staff.

In addition to meeting many new people in CFA, local government and other emergency management organisations, I have been keen to communicate our immediate priorities.

These are to:

- focus on being ready for the summer season that has already begun in the north of the region and is going to be early in other parts of the state (that is community preparedness and our operations preparedness)
- maintain our daily readiness and response across the multitude of hazards which face our communities
- take the opportunities, when available, to begin to make progressive changes consistent with those occurring in CFA and the broader emergency management sector
- most importantly, support our people to feel confident and safe in the roles they perform.

I am looking forward to working with you across the districts and supporting our team as it delivers services to our communities.

And one final, but very important message. As an ambassador for 'Violence Prevention: it's everyone's business', I am asking you all for your support to create awareness and help remove this scourge from our communities. One in three women will experience violence from the age of 15. Domestic violence is the leading contributor to death, disability and illness in women aged 15-44 and responsible for 40 per cent of all Australian murders. These statistics have no boundaries, affecting women across all demographics, races and religions. Why is this our responsibility? Because to remain silent is condoning the violence. Bystanders have a shared responsibility across the community. It is not just the responsibility of the perpetrators or victims.

"The standard you walk past, is the standard you accept."

Lt General David Morrison

ASSISTANT CHIEF OFFICER West Region



Peter O'Keefe

It is with much pride that I reflect on being appointed to lead the West Region into a new chapter in CFA history. While not changing geographically, the new region will face changes and challenges as CFA positions itself to remain a highly trusted and respected fire and emergency service into the future.

In the past few weeks, I have met many passionate and committed members. It is great to be part of such a focused and energetic team. I also know that I have not had a chance to meet everyone. I look forward to catching up with you all as the opportunities arise.

I am always impressed at people's tenacity and their 'have a go' attitude. This is never so true as we move into a fire season that's earlier than normal. The good rains have not eventuated and the agricultural season has let us down. I say to you all, your spirit and commitment are to be admired.

There are many challenges as we reshape our business and build a viable future for CFA. To enable us to focus and harness our collective energies, these are our immediate priorities:

- Finalise our readiness for the summer season. The season will be early and, at the time of writing this column, in some parts of West Region it's already started. Our teams and the community must be ready.
- Understand our capacity and strengths but also recognise when we need a hand. This includes the very important issue of looking after ourselves, our teams, and our families. We need to take advantage of lulls and use them to rest and recover.
- As the season progresses, and when it's appropriate, we will change our business to move towards our new structure so that CFA has a strong and viable future.

I ask that, should the way forward become unclear, or if there is support or assistance you need, please contact your local district headquarters. The operations manager and district team are best placed to provide the required support.

I look forward to further developing my working relationship with the great team across West Region. As we move into the summer period, remember the mission: continue to protect lives and property. Give it your best, and stay safe!

ASSISTANT CHIEF OFFICER South West Region



Bob Barry

It is a privilege and an honour to be appointed as the Assistant Chief Officer for the new South West Region and I look forward to continuing to serve our community, volunteers and staff as we move into a new business and operating model.

My key responsibilities are:

- to be the Chief Officer's senior representative in the region and to speak and act on his behalf as required
- to drive the CFA Board's long-term outcomes
- to be responsible for the delivery of fire and emergency management services
- to provide governance across the business of the region
- to strive for a consistent standard of service delivery
- to provide high-level advice on risk and capability
- to be a visible and active leader both in CFA and across South West Region.

There are several challenges ahead for our region, the first being the forthcoming Fire Danger Period that's predicted to be long, dry and hot. Preparations are well underway with training, briefings and exercising being conducted at all levels.

Although our geographical region and district boundaries will stay the same, our focus will shift to providing enhanced service delivery through districts and catchments. As we move through the change we will continue to support our people. Above all, we want to better support brigades and groups to do their job.

We will enhance our service through the following key priority projects:

- New District 4 headquarters – works and modifications to the Casterton DEPI Office have been completed to enable a new DEPI/CFA shared facility. The new-look facility will be home to CFA District 4 staff, the CFA District Coordination Centre, DEPI office and works depot, and it will retain the status of a Level 3 incident control centre.
- Portland Service Delivery Centre – as demolition of the current Portland Fire Station/Service Delivery Centre (SDC) begins to make way for a new integrated station, the SDC will move to a leased building next door to the current site. This will enable the local command facility to be maintained in Portland.
- New Geelong Incident Control Centre – the Geelong ICC has moved from the CFA regional headquarters to the new VicSES facility in Furner Avenue, North Geelong. The new ICC has been elevated from Level 2 to 3. This multi-agency facility reinforces that "we work as one".
- Relocation of the Regional Control Centre (RCC) – following the relocation of the Geelong ICC we have relocated the RCC to the CFA regional headquarters.

I look forward to the challenges ahead and the opportunity to lead our region in a rapidly-changing environment.

ASSISTANT CHIEF OFFICER North East Region



Garry Cook

After seven years with Ambulance Victoria, I've returned to CFA and have been overwhelmed by the warm welcome I've received across the organisation. It's more than fair to say there have been a few changes in that time, but the heartbeat of CFA remains as strong as ever.

I'm looking forward to the next chapter in this great organisation as we establish the new CFA regional structure and, in particular, the North East Region. I am honoured to be leading such a great group of people across Districts 12, 13, 22, 23 and 24.

What is immediately apparent to me on my return is the vast amount of energy and focus being directed towards preparations for the 2014-15 summer period. I have attended a number of CFA briefings across the five districts – and also the broader emergency management team pre-season briefings and exercises with our partner agencies – and have been heartened by the level of passion and desire to succeed shared by all. We know that success will be driven by how well we work as a team at every level to ensure we are delivering the best service, and these briefings and IMT exercises are key to that.

My initial priorities since starting in mid-September – recognising there are the business-as-usual 24/7 requirements – have been to focus our energy on getting our people and the broader community prepared for the onset of the summer fire season.

At the same time, we need to make sure we look after our people. My assessment of the looming fire season, and professional intelligence from the Bureau of Meteorology, is we could be in for a long, hot and dry summer and that brings the risk of fatigue if we're not clearly focused on looking after ourselves.

The Regional Leadership Team will keep this front of mind. Much of what we do is cyclic and related to weather patterns. This is predictable and should guide how we manage and support our teams. We need to be taking measures at every level of our big team, from brigade members to incident controllers, and all roles supporting our people, by taking advantage of low levels of fire danger to recuperate and recharge so we're ready to go when the next rise in fire danger comes through.

Aside from readiness activities, I have also been fortunate to attend a number of brigade functions across the region and celebrate some outstanding community contributions made by members of our brigades and groups. National Medals, National Emergency Medals, life memberships and many CFA service awards have been presented to deserving recipients. I congratulate everyone who has received awards and recognition over the past few months.

Stay safe.

ASSISTANT CHIEF OFFICER South East Region



Trevor Owen

The consolidation of the former Gippsland and Southern Metropolitan Regions into South East Region in October has provided us with many opportunities to enhance our service delivery and work as one across Districts 8, 9, 10 and 11. I have been spending considerable time getting out across the region to meet as many of you as possible, and this will continue over the coming months. To prepare for the fire season, regional, district and group briefings have been completed. Our members were out and about conducting preparedness exercises using LCFs, DCCs and ICCs.

At the time of writing, underlying dryness is starting to show across parts of South East Region and, combined with a rainfall deficit, may contribute to the commencement of an early season in some districts. I encourage members to engage with their community now. Prevention and being prepared is the key to keeping our communities safe this summer.

For the first time, we will be operating from the new Emergency Management Complex for the Southern Metropolitan Emergency Management Region. The new facility is co-located with District 8 HQ in Dandenong South. The Complex will provide enhanced emergency response capabilities in the Southern Metropolitan Emergency Management footprint, and is the first of its kind to house an ICC, RCC and DCC in the same facility. Following the release of the report by the Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry at the end of August, the Deputy Premier announced the establishment of a new CFA district to lead and manage fire brigades within Latrobe City. District 27 will improve CFA's ability to work with industry and the community. Although there will be no change to operational arrangements until April 2015, members are working together to create the new district.

Two meetings have been well attended by members, both providing good opportunities to raise questions and seek a reply from the Chief Officer. It was pleasing to note the way forward in relation to changed group structures and the formation of a new district planning committee. I would like to thank members, brigades and groups for coming on this journey with us, and for their support and wisdom in guiding us to where we need to be in the Latrobe Valley.

Finally, I want to wish all our members a safe festive season. Take the time to reflect on 2014 and our many achievements. I look forward to the exciting times ahead as we step up and meet the challenges that will position CFA for a bright future. Keep up the good work.

To you and your family, stay safe this summer.

Twitter: @CFASouthEastACO

Fire Awareness Award winners

The 2014 Fire Awareness Awards received an excellent response, with more than 110 applications from across the state, and the judges thought the standard of applications was extremely high.

Bushfire Planning Workshops for Childcare Parents by Emerald brigade and Emerald Community House won the Community Preparedness Award and took home the coveted RACV Insurance Award for Excellence. The judges thought the project was the perfect example of grassroots planning which demonstrated behavioural change.

"This project will have a significant impact on the wider Victorian community and demonstrates best practice," said judge John Rampling from MFB.

"It would be great to see this rolled out to all childcare centres in Victoria and should be made compulsory," said judge John Handmer from RMIT.

The awards have been presented for over 30 years as a collaborative venture between Victoria's fire agencies and are supported by Emergency Management Victoria, RACV Insurance and ABC Local Radio.

The finalists were invited to a gala ceremony at the RACV Club on 4 December, where the winners were announced.

Dick Davies, President of the Warrandyte Community Association, and 2013 winner of the Community Preparedness Award, Media and Communications Award and RACV Insurance Award for Excellence said, "Winning the awards gave the people who were involved a lot of enthusiasm, confidence and excitement. It gave us the ability to raise the profile of the project in the local community and beyond."

For more information about the Fire Awareness Awards visit www.fireawarenessawards.com.au

STORY SASKIA VAN BEVER

AGED AND DISABILITY MFB

Smoke Alarms Project – advocacy and practice for at-risk groups

COMMUNITY PREPAREDNESS

CFA Emerald brigade/ Emerald Community House

Bushfire Planning Workshops for Childcare Parents

and

CFA/DOJ

Community Corrections CFA Bushfire Prevention Partnership (Gippsland)

and

CFA District 7/Surf Coast Shire Council/ Victoria Police/ Victorian Council of Churches Emergency Ministries/Department of Human Services/ DEPI

Surf Coast Shire Resilient Communities Project

EDUCATION

Association of Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres

Fire Safety and Computer Resources for Neighbourhood Houses

FIRE SERVICES

CFA District 22/ Strathbogie Shire Council SaferLinks (pictured)

INDUSTRY/SERVICE

Connections UnitingCare Connections UnitingCare Bushfire Season Outreach Visit Safety Program

and

CFA/Mornington

Peninsula Tourism/ Tourism Victoria Mornington Peninsula Tourism - Operators and Information

MULTICULTURAL

CFA/Parks Victoria/ Maroondah City Council/ Manningham City Council /Migrant Information Centre – Eastern Melbourne/Victoria Police/DEPI/MFB

Eastern Metro Burmese Communities Fire Engagement Project

MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS

VicDeaf Bushfire Emergency Interpreting Service

and

Wimmera Mail Times

A Summer of Bushfires

NEW AND EMERGING INFORMATION TECHNOLOGIES

CFA

Grassland Curing and Fire Danger Rating Project

PRODUCT DESIGN

Harcor/CFA Harcor Arm Core Cooler Harness

RECOVERY

CFA District 11/East Gippsland community Farm fencing recovery program (East Gippsland)

and

Australian Blacksmiths Association Victoria

The Tree Project

and

Financial Management Trainer/Market Gap

Investments/CPA Australia

Disaster Recovery Toolkit

RACV INSURANCE

AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE

CFA Emerald brigade/ Emerald Community House

Bushfire Planning Workshops for Childcare Parents



Ella's proud day

When CFA members in the then Eastern Metropolitan Region received their National Emergency Medals for service during the 2009 fires, there was one extra special recipient.

Eleven-year-old Ella Penfold accepted a medal from Chief Officer Euan Ferguson on behalf of her late mother, Lori Penfold, who passed away after a long illness earlier this year.

Lori was a much-loved member of the Eastern Metropolitan team, who started on a 12-month traineeship in 1999 and went on to serve as the region's training coordinator for four years. She was renowned both in the region and beyond for her consummate volunteer service and ethos.

During the 2009 fires, Lori responded in her home District 13, which was one of the hardest-hit areas in the state. Lori worked in the district command centre providing essential support during some of the worst days.

Lori's partner, District 14 Operations Officer Gavin Wright, who was on stage with Ella to accept the award, described the occasion as "bitter-sweet".

"I was so proud to watch Ella accept the award in front of so many colleagues and friends who loved Lori," Gavin said.

"Ella was very excited to be able to collect the medal for her mum and it will be a great reminder for her of just how much CFA meant to Lori and vice versa.

"Lori had such a big heart, always putting others before herself, and I know Black Saturday and its events had a lasting effect on her."

CFA Eastern Metropolitan Regional Director David Baker said Lori was much respected by staff and volunteers and described



A proud Gavin Wright and Ella Penfold

PHOTO: WARREN MITCHELSON

her as a perfect fit for the training coordinator position. He said her untimely passing was felt widely throughout the district.

David also recalled a very touching moment at Lori's funeral when her father came and spoke to him. "He said he was just totally blown away by the amount of love there was for Lori and he had no idea how highly respected within CFA she was, and how proud it made him."

STORY ANDREA MASON

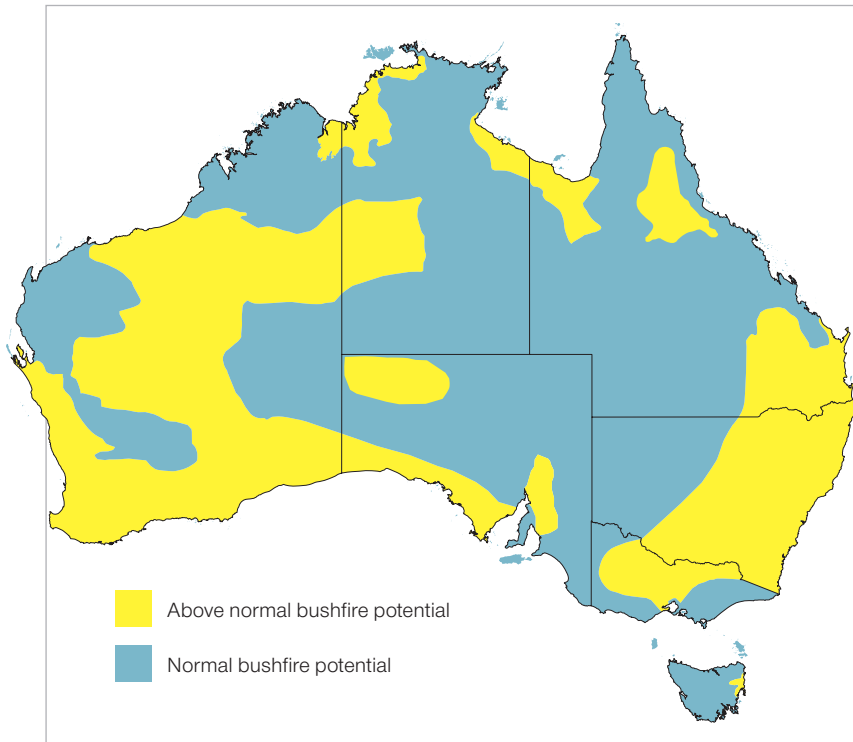
Fire season forecast

The Southern Australia Seasonal Bushfire Outlook, released by the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC, provides information to help fire authorities make strategic resource and planning decisions leading into the fire season.

Victoria can expect a fire season slightly more active than 2013-14. A preliminary analysis of factors affecting the fire season outlook for 2014-15 point to an above-normal season in many areas of central, north and western Victoria. Key factors are overall lower rainfall coupled with the potential for an earlier start to the season.

Areas with long-term rainfall deficits run from the west of Melbourne to the central Wimmera and also north through central Victoria into the Mallee. Another band exists extending from the north-east of Melbourne to the northern slopes of the Great Dividing Range. Shorter-term deficits are emerging in a broad band across much of the state's north, extending south to the northern rises of the Great Dividing Range.

Low rainfalls are also emerging in coastal and southern Victoria, though the exact pattern in these areas is not yet clear.



MAP COURTESY OF BNHCRC

Students of Fire search for understanding

A group of Victorian bush firefighters, trainers, educators and fire researchers have taken up a challenge left by the late US Forest Service Hotshot Superintendent and Wildland Firefighter Paul Gleason, by developing an innovative approach to learning called Students of Fire.

Paul Gleason spent his working life promoting fireground safety and the need for firefighters to study fire science to better understand fire behaviour. He wanted firefighters to become life-long learners or students of fire.

Working with the International Association of Wildland Fire (IAWF), Dandenong Ranges Group Officer Rod Stebbing and I formed the Victorian chapter of Students of Fire to help bridge the gap between research findings and firefighters' knowledge. Students of Fire is about searching for understanding. It's about learning from those with knowledge and experience, and learning from each other.

The Victorian Students of Fire group is inviting colleagues and friends from across the fire sector to join with us as financial members of IAWF, to extend the learning framework further. Learning can take any form that contributes to a better understanding of bushfire management, including sharing personal observations and reflections on experience. It could be a report on an activity undertaken by one or more Students of Fire, sharing with others what has been learned.

Talks are in progress to link two Victorian Students of Fire groups - with two groups currently forming in Canada.

For more information about Students of Fire, see the August edition of the IAWF magazine Wildfire. If you want to get involved with Students of Fire, join IAWF online (iawfonline.org) and go to Connections > Students of Fire to make contact with others. You can then pursue a fire project and organise an event.

STORY ROGER STRICKLAND, CFA Senior Instructor and Planned Burn Coordinator



PHOTO: DARLENE PENTLAND

Melton lighting the way

Melton brigade staff and volunteers are CFA's leading lights in improving environmental performance.

Last year, after it was recognised as a high user of electricity, Firefighter Damion Sloane and Station Officer Craig Kneeshaw led an initiative to find out why their station used more electricity than other similar-sized stations.

Staff carried out an energy audit, assessing energy use, greenhouse gas emissions and running costs of all appliances. With six fridges, three freezers and multiple printers and computers on site, there were some obvious targets for improvement. Some longstanding behaviours also came under the spotlight.

This simple checklist was developed to help reduce energy use:

- turn off lights when you leave a room
- turn off computers at night
- turn off heaters/air conditioner in dorms in the morning
- turn off TV when no-one is in the day room
- adjust the heater/air conditioner temperature settings - every degree increase in heating and decrease in cooling adds 10 per cent to usage
- unplug battery/phone chargers when not in use
- keep motor room doors closed whenever possible, particularly on hot and cold days.

Over the past 18 months, there has been a dramatic reduction in electricity use. The August bill this year was around 6,000 kWh less than the same time last year. In August 2013, electricity cost around \$75 a day at the station which dropped to just \$47 a day after the program began.

With station staff and volunteers committed to this program, including replacing older freezers with more energy efficient models, savings are set to continue.

STORY DARLENE PENTLAND



The first Students of Fire event at Ferntree Gully Fire Station

PHOTO: ROGER STRICKLAND

Bon Voyage to OO John Leben



As CFA enters another summer season, Seymour Operations Officer John Leben is preparing to take on a new challenge in a much cooler climate.

After a lengthy and competitive application process that began in 2012, John has secured a 13-month assignment at the Australian Antarctic Division's Mawson Station.

John will manage a team of 13 people on the self-contained base, including medical staff, emergency crew and scientists. He will be responsible for keeping the team's operations in line with the Antarctic Treaty – an international agreement about how the continent should be conserved.

John said CFA had been very supportive of the opportunity.

"CFA really prepares you for this type of experience," said John. "I see this as a progression and an opportunity to try something different that develops my leadership skills, especially the skills needed to lead small groups in isolated environments – much like some of our smaller CFA brigades."

John will embark on his journey to the icy wilderness in January 2015 from Hobart, and he'll spend 14 days aboard Australia's icebreaker, the Aurora Australis, before reaching Mawson Station.

Last year, John had the opportunity to travel to Antarctica on a re-supply mission

to Casey Station as part of the final stage of his application process. John reflected on the unpredictable nature of the job and the environment.

"Part-way through our re-supply mission we were called to rescue the Akademik Shokalskiy, a Russian research ship that was trapped in the Antarctic," said John. John considers the climate part of the challenge. "Learning how to operate when it's minus 35 degrees is part of the attraction."

John has more than 14 years experience with CFA and is one of only two successful applicants selected from 120 people who applied for the positions.

Scientific programs undertaken in and around Mawson include middle and upper atmosphere physics, seismology, biology and climate change studies.

STORY INEKE NEESON

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF JOHN LEBEN

Additions to the Template Toolkit

Some updates and improvements have been made to the Template Toolkit.

First, we've added in a new Events Materials Booking System (pictured), which has been designed to give CFA members the chance to put their best foot forward when hosting events such as local fundraisers and community meetings.

From banners, signage and electrical equipment, to kids' play tables and marquees, the Event Materials Booking System aims to cater for all your needs and will ensure your event looks professional and engaging.

If your brigade is holding a community event, check out the promotional material available in the Marketing Materials section. There are a range of poster, flyer and media templates to help you promote and advertise your event to the community.

We've also added new letterhead templates for the new regions and districts.

From visual and writing style guides to media release and agenda templates, flyers, program materials and 'how to' and help guides, there's something to help everyone communicate.

The Template Toolkit is a great place to start when you don't know where to begin and, with additions such as the Events Materials Booking System, it's a growing resource for brigades and the whole organisation.

Check it out on Brigades Online (cfaonline.cfa.vic.gov.au) by clicking on the Template Toolkit icon.

STORY NANCY THOMPSON



Reminder about female PPC

As a practical acknowledgment of diversity within CFA, female members have had access to specially-designed bushfire personal protective clothing (PPC) since 2012.

A better-fitting jacket is complemented by trousers with an elastic waistband, a draw cord and belt loops instead of braces.

These changes were introduced after evaluating user feedback and targeted trialling.

Chief Officer Euan Ferguson recently reminded members that this female PPC is available if they wish to exchange their existing gear. Enquiries should be directed to your local district offices.

A joint review with MFB and the Department of Environment and Primary Industries is underway to develop new-generation bushfire PPC. This review will consider alternate fabrics and designs in an acknowledgement that members now have higher expectations of their PPC – it must be comfortable, durable, look good and take account of vital safety factors such as being highly-visible and minimising the likelihood of heat stress. Prototype garments will be used in a limited trial this fire season.

STORY LEITH HILLARD



PHOTO: TRACEY MASTROPAVLOS

Regional radio dispatch project complete

All brigades not in outer metro districts 7, 8, 13 and 14, now have access to clearer, high-quality dispatch communications with enhanced coverage. The successful transition to the new Regional Radio Dispatch Service (RRDS) means all CFA members have around-the-clock reliable communication between vehicles and the state emergency communication centres operated by Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority (ESTA).

This project will make a major contribution to better emergency management and improve the safety of our members and the wider community.

RRDS ushers in a new generation of high-quality digital dispatch capability that's already used by Victoria Police, MFB and Ambulance Victoria in metropolitan Melbourne. The reaction from regional brigades has been overwhelmingly positive.

Matt Merchant, third lieutenant at Goughs Bay-Howes Creek brigade in District 23, is very enthusiastic about the improvements. "The digital radio signal in our area has drastically improved reliability of communications and the audio quality is sensational. If only the mobile phone coverage was this good!"

District 17's Rainbow brigade Captain Fred Saul remembers a fire earlier in the year where he used talkgroup 517 to talk to another local captain. "That wouldn't have been possible with the old network and unlikely even with mobile phones," Fred said.

Before we switched to RRDS, CFA crews in rural areas relayed important information about incidents via a local communications officer. RRDS reduces the dependence on group communications officers for day-to-day dispatch communication, though it's important to note that the role itself is still essential for incident management communications.

The project team is grateful to all the volunteers and staff who took the time to help, in particular the support received from District 12 staff and volunteers in piloting the service and change process.

STORY RACHAEL LEIGHTON



PHOTO: COL HERBERT

Goughs Bay-Howes Creek brigade's Matt Merchant

Improving our culture



Earlier this year, CFA conducted two surveys to measure the organisation's culture among our volunteers and staff.

The results from the 2014 surveys provided insights into CFA's strengths but also highlighted areas for improvement. People said they wanted a culture where they could work in a positive and supportive environment; where they felt they belonged and worked as a team; and they wanted to feel empowered and equipped to do their work.

"Often, we talk about culture being 'the way we do things around here', and we know we can do things better at CFA," said CEO Mick Bourke.

"Cultural change is challenging work and is not a simple task, but we've begun taking the steps to lead this change for our people," he said.

The first step in this process was a live stream event in early November hosted by Mick, Chief Officer Euan Ferguson and People and Culture Executive Director Fran Boyd. They shared the culture survey results with members across the state.

The volunteer survey found more than 70 per cent of members thought CFA was a great organisation to be part of, and 85 per cent said most people in their brigades get the job done. Seventy-three per cent were proud of CFA's successes and achievements and only four per cent said they intended to leave CFA.

However, the survey also highlighted areas for improvement. The statements volunteers most often disagreed with in the survey were:

- volunteers feel that they have a say in how CFA is run
- CFA consults with volunteers when making decisions
- CFA acts quickly to stop small problems becoming large problems
- there is high trust in senior management.

Similarly, the staff survey found many people felt CFA could do more to create a strong culture. Many staff said they felt

they needed to push decisions upwards, make popular rather than necessary decisions and rarely try new things.

To explore these results in more depth, the Executive Leadership Team (ELT) and the five assistant chief officers took part in a roadshow throughout Victoria to meet volunteers and staff face-to-face, and talk about how we can improve our culture.

"As CFA leaders, we know we play a key role in leading cultural change – a significant part of an organisation's culture is determined by its leadership – and I'm personally committed to driving this work," said Euan.

"But we also know we can't do this without our people, and we want to share this story with our members and involve them in culture change."

After analysing the results, ELT identified two key priorities: reviewing CFA's values and being accountable for decision making.

"Organisational culture is shaped by our shared values and beliefs, which guide us in how we approach and interact with each other," said Euan.

By reviewing our values, ELT hopes they will help to shape the overall culture of the organisation and provide a clear statement about who we are.

"We want a set of values that suits CFA, and we want you to hold us and each other accountable for upholding these values for the organisation.

"This isn't going to be easy and it will be quite challenging, but we're committed to leading the charge towards a high-performing, values-based organisation."

If you have any questions or feedback, email cultureandvalues@cfa.vic.gov.au.

STORY HOLLY LITTLE

Above

CEO Mick Bourke, CO Euan Ferguson and People and Culture Executive Director Fran Boyd present the survey results at Burwood HQ

PHOTO: LEITH HILLARD

Learning from incidents

Learning through case studies

A case study is an explanatory story based on a real-life incident that looks at what happened and why it happened. The aim is for people to learn from the case study so they improve their decision making in time-critical situations.

WARRANTYTE FIRE 2014

INCIDENT OVERVIEW

Warrandyte is in District 13, 24 kilometres north-east of Melbourne. It's in the urban-rural interface and many people in the community recognise and live with the risk of bushfire.

In early February 2014, Victoria experienced extensive periods of hot weather including a heatwave.

On 9 February the temperature at Melbourne Airport was 33°C at 8.30am, relative humidity 13 per cent and northerly winds were recorded at 30km/h with gusts to 60km/h. At 11am the Forest Fire Danger Index (FFDI) at this location spiked at 120 ahead of the south-westerly change. A maximum temperature of 40°C, relative humidity of seven per cent and a north-westerly wind of 50km/h gusting to 80km/h preceded the change.

At 12.19pm a fire was reported at Flannery Court/Amersham Drive, Warrandyte and it was contained by 4pm. On scene were 300 firefighters, 70 vehicles and two aircraft. Three houses were destroyed, one significantly damaged and around 11 others suffered minor damage.

An after-action review was conducted on 21 March 2014 at Warrandyte Fire Station. All agencies who responded to the fire were invited to attend the review, where a number of lessons were identified.

LESSONS IDENTIFIED

Initial control The senior brigade officer should consider attending the scene on the second truck instead of the first truck. Allow the first crew to start attacking the fire and the incident controller (IC) to concentrate on gaining situational awareness and setting a clear structure.

Operations officer deployment Prompt deployment of an operations officer to the fireground provided support to the IC with structure for control, media liaison and transfer of control.

Transfer of control Transfer of control should occur as quickly as possible to reduce pressure on the fireground. This allows the incident control centre (ICC) to get a comprehensive understanding of the situation and ensure timely warnings and advice. Transfer of control was completed successfully at 1pm with assistance from a District 13 operations officer, district control centre (DCC) and regional control centre.

Media liaison Ensure the ICC is aware of any locally-deployed media resources. Due to the officer being deployed from the DCC, initially the ICC was unaware of the presence of a media liaison officer at the fire. When this link was established, it worked extremely well.

Inter-agency liaison Inter-agency liaison was critical to this fire. When all key personnel are able to be present at the fire, having an inter-agency liaison officer at the operations point facilitates quick, local decision making. Those present at the Warrandyte fire also stayed in regular contact with their counterparts at the ICC to ensure they were kept aware of decisions being made and the current situation.

Resources It's easy to cancel resources that are not required. Resources including pumper and tanker strike teams were rapidly



PHOTOS: DAVE TANGNEY

deployed via the DCC without the fireground needing to request them. As the DCC was aware of the available resources nearby (including MFB) it was able to support the fireground by deploying resources rapidly.

In the initial stages of controlling a fire before a staging point has been established, trucks should start firefighting immediately rather than waiting to assemble. Assembly can occur while fighting the fire and the fireground will send the remaining trucks to join those which have already arrived.

Slip-ons are usually seen as more beneficial in rural areas, but they are a valuable resource for getting into pockets and around houses.

Warnings and Advice This fire reinforced the importance of timely, tailored and relevant Warnings and Advice. The community praised CFA over the timeliness of the Warnings and Advice, particularly about the path of the fire and the predicted wind change.

Welfare Having rehabilitation units at the fire allowed for continuous medical monitoring and hydration to ensure firefighters were fit and able to be deployed to other fires. The rehabilitation unit was set up within two hours of the fire being reported and crews were rotated continuously, giving them a 30-minute break for medical monitoring. This reduced headaches and lethargy and brought core body temperature down.

Incident objective The objective of the incident needs to be clear, logical and easy to understand. The initial incident objective was to protect houses, but after the wind change the objective changed to not letting the fire jump across Tindals Road. All crews that arrived on scene were told and understood this objective.

Communicating with municipalities It's important to ensure that the ICC has a link with all affected municipalities. Due to the particular ICC footprint covering the Warrandyte area affected by the fire, it was managed outside Eastern Metropolitan Region. This meant local municipalities were not able to call their regular regional contacts for information. This has been rectified for the 2014-15 fire season to ensure that the ICC footprints better represent the districts they cover.

WHEN YOU CAN'T FEEL THE HEAT

The current structural personal protective clothing (PPC) provides total skin covering and insulates the wearer from heat. This means firefighters have limited ability to sense how hot a fire is. They can enter areas which would not have been possible in the days of the woollen structural jackets, so don't realise they are at risk.

If you can feel the heat through your PPC and breathing apparatus (BA) it's probably too hot to remain there. Along with a sound understanding of fire behaviour, firefighters must employ methods such as short pulses of fog and/or thermal imagery to detect fire temperature. At recent structure fires, two of which are described below, BA and PPC were damaged by heat.

For a training package that supports this case study, go to Brigades Online (cfaonline.cfa.vic.gov.au) > Fire & Emergencies > Performance Improvement > Operational Reviews & Evaluations > Case Studies.

INCIDENT ONE

A brigade was paged mid-morning to attend a house fire. They were the first on-scene and took control of the incident. The house was a kit dwelling, clad in corrugated iron, which resulted in little ventilation other than through doors and windows. Firefighters saw flames and smoke coming from one end of the building, so two firefighters donned BA.

After assessing the situation, firefighters opened the door where the fire was located to allow for built-up gases in the room to ventilate. The firefighters then entered the room and began spraying water. They advanced into the room but, because of a lack of visibility and high temperatures, they decided to withdraw. The firefighters used an axe to crack the window panels in order to increase ventilation in the room. The ingress of air to the smoke-logged ceiling caused a flashover. When this happened, both firefighters were outside the structure behind the corrugated iron wall of the house.

Following the flashover, the firefighters went to the kitchen/living area using the branch on a fog pattern. Increased fire behaviour meant visibility was less than one metre, so they continued to fight the fire from the doorway. Firefighter One realised there was no opportunity to ventilate the gases from above due to the sealed nature of the cylindrical corrugated iron clad building. Both firefighters withdrew a short distance and Firefighter One informed Firefighter Two he was going to allow for more ventilation so would exit the dwelling to break the kitchen window from outside.

Another brigade arrived on-scene, enabling control of the fire and mop-up using a thermal imaging camera to locate hot spots. When Firefighters One and Two exited the building and removed their BA sets, Firefighter One observed some minor charring on the left and right BA shoulder strap, some heat damage along the top of the visor (which had been in the raised position throughout the entire firefight) and on the helmet torch (see photos, above right). There was also some charring on the flash hood, but the firefighter received no injuries or burns.

The firefighters don't know what caused the damage to the PPC and BA, but a possibility is that Firefighter One leant on a hot item which was not far from the doorway when they entered the house. There was no damage to Firefighter Two's gear.

INCIDENT TWO

A brigade was paged to attend an early evening house fire, and responded with a pumper and tanker. En route, Firefighter One (in the pumper) requested Firefighters Two and Three put on BA. On arrival, another brigade was donning BA. Firefighter One asked the crew to stand by while he did a quick size up where he noticed a window in the affected room had already blown out and black smoke was issuing. When Firefighter One returned, he found the



crew had already entered the building so he requested the tanker crew (Firefighters Four and Five) don BA and back them up.

Firefighters Two, Three and Four approached the house and saw the smoke level was around 1.5 metres above the floor level. A primary search was conducted when the affected room was located. Firefighter Two called out for the others, quickly opened the door and felt extreme heat. Firefighter Three grabbed the hose, got on to his knees and began to attack the fire. Firefighter Two heard a window breaking and the fire flared straight up to the roof. There was a lot of smoke and the water wasn't reaching the middle of the room. They fogged the room and shut the door a couple of times. When entering the room, they faced intense heat and limited visibility. The firefighters were unaware of the location of the fire but believed it was in front of them. They turned the branch off to try to hear the fire and saw the fire on the ceiling and in front of them. The fire was getting hotter so the firefighters continued to cool the room.

When the fire was contained, Firefighter Four suggested that a secondary search should be done using a thermal imaging camera. Some hot spots were found, but very little water was needed to knock down the remaining fire. Firefighter Four then left the building and advised Firefighter One that the fire was contained to one room. Firefighters Two and Three then exited the house. Their PPC appeared to be very black and closer inspection found heat damage to their PPC and BA.

LESSONS IDENTIFIED

How do you recognise when it's getting to hot, and what indicators, tools and techniques can be used? In both of these cases, the structural PPC and BA were worn in the correct way and performed as they're designed to do but firefighters were unaware of how hot it was getting in the fires and this resulted in damage to their PPC and BA. It's important to recognise that the PPC and BA continued to protect the firefighters, but it's the lowest level of protection and the least reliable of all control measures available. Understanding fire behaviour and reacting appropriately is more effective than relying on PPC and BA. Below, are three lessons that can prevent this type of incident from occurring.

Understand fire behaviour Building construction factors, smoke, air track, heat, and flame (B-SAHF) are critical fire behaviour indicators. Understanding the indicators is important, as well as being able to integrate these factors during size up and dynamic risk assessment. Predicting what will happen in a fire involves recognising the stages of fire development (see graph, below) and taking into account the fire behaviour indicators.

Building construction While many common types of buildings are not the focus of a formal pre-plan program, firefighters can examine common features and their influence on fire behaviour.

Smoke and air track (movement) Smoke conditions and the pattern of smoke and air movement are two of the most important indicators of fire behaviour.

Heat While heat cannot be observed directly, observing the effect of heat can be a significant fire behaviour indicator.

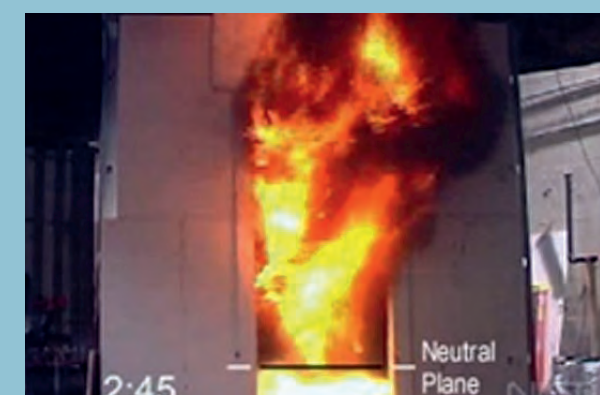
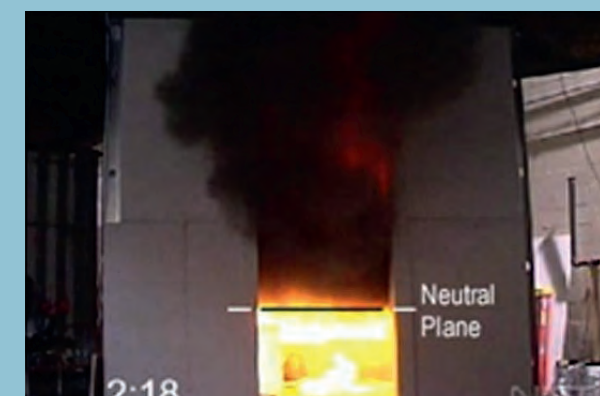
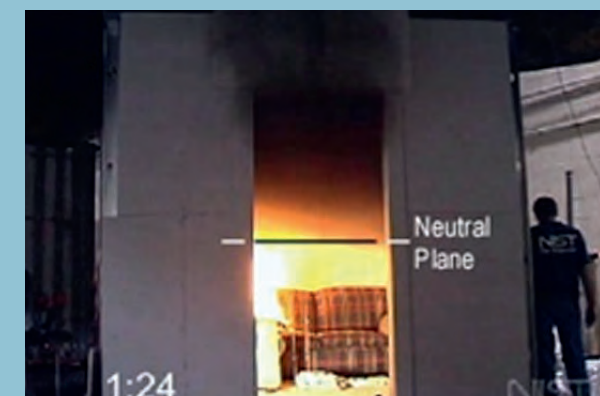
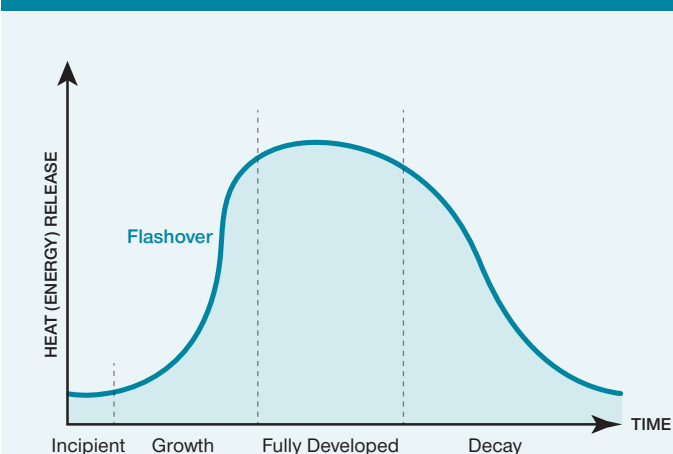
Flame Flaming combustion is often the most obvious or visible indicator observed by firefighters.

Ventilation is critical When conducting a size up of an incident, RECEO should be considered. As outlined in the Fire and Emergency Management Checklists, RECEO considers rescue, exposure, confinement, extinguishment and overhaul. It identifies ventilation and salvage as particularly important. Ventilation is a critical element for fireground controllers/commanders, because it allows them to successfully carry out safer operations and maintain their incident objective.

Correct application of ventilation can remove or reduce HOTS (high temperatures, oxygen deficiency, toxic substances and smoke concentration) that, if not dealt with adequately, may result in a rapid and unmanageable development in fire intensity and progression (flashover, backdraft). Ventilation must be carried out using the most appropriate method (vertical, horizontal) in a disciplined and coordinated way in line with the controller/commander's direction.

Understand the neutral plane (see right) The neutral plane is the boundary between the heated smoke and the cooler air. When the fire is burning with controlled ventilation, any increase in the supply of oxygen to the fire will result in an increase in the heat release rate. Being able to identify the neutral plane, together with the fire behaviour indicators, will allow firefighters to remain safe and understand the fire progression.

STAGES OF FIRE DEVELOPMENT



Help your community prepare for summer

Share your observations

Have you experienced any problems, shortfalls or successes that you would like to share: maybe something that went well or something that could be improved? Observations can be made on behalf of an individual, brigade, crew, team or district. The observation could be an unexpected experience or a close call, and may be specific to fireground operations, training, incident management, specialist response, brigade management, or day-to-day service delivery to the community.

Do you have a good idea or initiative that your brigade, district or region have undertaken? Your lesson could be a success, a way of doing things in a more efficient or safer way, a training initiative, rostering tips, fundraising idea ... anything operational or non-operational that others could learn from.

The Observation Sharing Centre has been developed so you can share your observations, lessons, ideas and initiatives while they are still fresh in your mind. It complements and is linked to our after-action review, debriefing and lessons identified processes, providing another means to capture your experiences. The internet-based application is available to members of all emergency management partner agencies and allows you to share your experiences at any time.

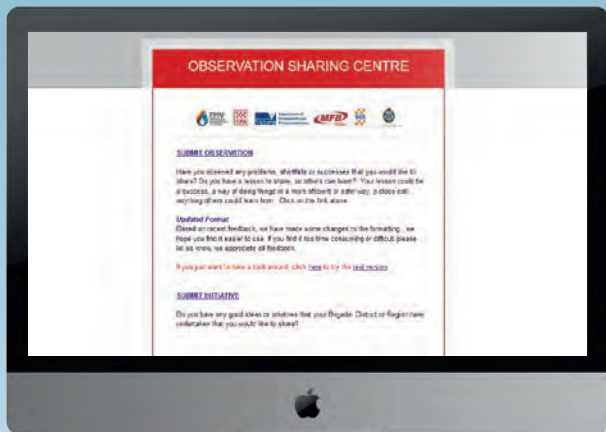
Sharing your experiences will ensure CFA learns from best practices across the state and continuously improves. Individual observations won't be actioned, so local issues still need to be dealt with locally. The information collected will be analysed and may inform formal reviews, debriefs, trend analyses, post-fire season reviews, pre-season briefings, case studies, insights or lessons from incidents.

ACCESS THE OBSERVATION SHARING CENTRE

You can share your thoughts online at surveygizmo.com/s3/1449131/observation-sharing-centre, by clicking the banner on the homepage of Brigades Online (cfaonline.cfa.vic.gov.au), by calling the FIRS Call Centre on 1800 628 844, or by using the Emergency Management Portal on the Emergency Management Victoria website (emv.vic.gov.au).

Brigade initiative – an example

While trialling the Observation Sharing Centre last fire season, we received information from across the state. One of the initiatives was submitted from a brigade in District 24. They described how, at the beginning of the 2012-13 fire season, district officers from District 23 and 24 met and discussed how to provide an improved response regarding turnout time, personnel and equipment. The outcome of this discussion resulted in a decision being made that for all incidents which occurred between particular brigade response areas, both brigades would be paged to respond. This arrangement has enabled a quicker response time with more people and equipment.



Did you know that 97 per cent of fatalities inside houses during a bushfire occur within 150 metres of the forest? And around 70 per cent of Victorians living in high bushfire risk areas will wait until fire threatens before taking action. As brigade members, you can appreciate the consequences of residents fleeing at the last minute in dangerous situations.

As a result, CFA has produced maps and address lists of residents living in these specific areas and has developed the Property Advice Visit Service (PAVS) to help get CFA messages to the people who need them the most.

According to a 2014 survey by *Reader's Digest* magazine, firefighters are seen as the most trustworthy group in the community and therefore the public is likely to respond well to any advice that comes from a local CFA member at their front door.

The PAVS process is a local doorknock that alerts residents to their current situation and provokes action – to enable them to plan and prepare for bushfire.

PAVS is a great opportunity for those who want to get started in community safety, or for a support or associate brigade member to contribute to the community without jumping on a truck.

PAVS equips brigade members with materials and messages to give advice to residents. Members interested in helping to make their local community more knowledgeable receive:

- an awareness session to get members ready to deliver the service
- mentoring/support to address any on-the-job questions or concerns
- maps showing properties most at risk in their brigade area
- materials including simple, clear checklists, information sheets and forms.

Jo Tully from Melville Forest brigade has been doing PAVS visits for around four months and can see the benefits for the community and her brigade.

"Through delivering PAVS, I've become aware of the neighbourhood networks (such as school runs, identified vulnerable people and also made people aware of other services CFA offers," said Jo. "There may be an opportunity to recruit new members and it's encouraging to see the level of preparedness in the local community.

"After receiving training, I conducted visits at my neighbours' properties to develop my own style of delivery. The materials help to keep you on track and the content was easy to explain. The majority of people have been receptive, well prepared and happy to listen. Getting this advice at the front door from the local brigade makes a big difference."

Tallygaroopna First Lieutenant Jeff Gleeson is also enthusiastic about this new initiative.

"The local residents were very welcoming and appreciated us taking time to visit and chat about their situation," said Jeff.

"It was good to see people taking interest in the advice we gave them. For some, it was a reminder of what they need to do to prepare for the fire season; for others it was things they hadn't thought of.

"The doorknock had a whole lot of other benefits: water access and residents relying on electric pumps are just two of the things we found out. Plus we got the opportunity to remind people of how to register their burn-offs. We also found a couple of people who are interested in joining the brigade – they'll come to our next training day to have a look around.

"This offered a whole lot of opportunities and allowed us to tick off a few to-do items on the brigade list."

For more information or to register your interest in PAVS, email Neil Munro at n.munro@cfa.vic.gov.au or phone 9262 8501.

STORY NEIL MUNRO

Above left: Tallygaroopna brigade members (left to right) Adrian Moule, John Rhodes, Angela Joy, Tom Preston and Jeff Gleeson

Above right: Jeff Gleeson and Angela Joy give advice to a Medland Estate family
PHOTOS: ANDREW ARNOLD

Get on board this summer

The summer roadshow will again be rolling into holiday hot spots. The mobile education buses will be targeting tourists and travellers to give them advice about their personal fire safety and the risk of fire while they enjoy their holiday in Victoria.

In the past two years, the roadshow team has spoken to almost 20,000 holidaymakers in 90 locations throughout Victoria. The team has been able to influence the behaviour and decisions people made on days of high fire danger.

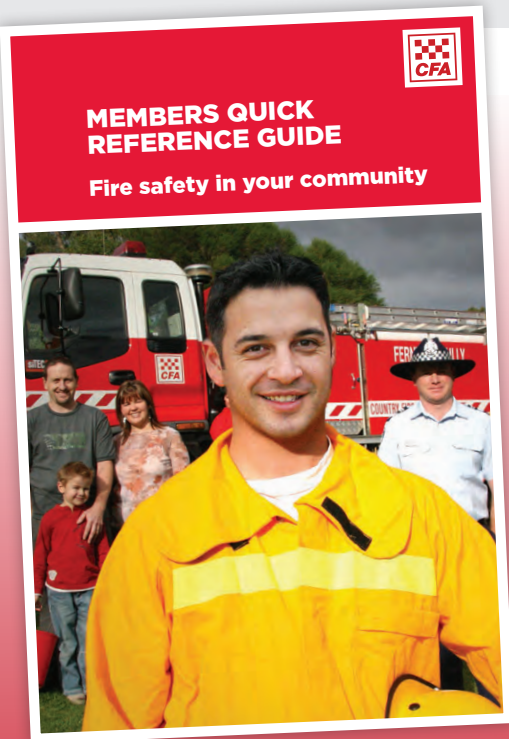
The two buses will also be out and about supporting fire operations in Victoria this fire season, as it has done for the past two years.

Today, where there are constant news updates on TV, radio and the internet, and social media drives conversations and trends, information is critical. In the absence of timely, accurate and reliable information, people will source information from whoever is providing it at that moment to satisfy their curiosity.

The buses have the capability to provide timely, accurate and real-time information to those communities impacted by fire and other incidents. They can be set up in seven minutes, engage with a community and then move on to the next location.

This summer, we've made improvements to the program so if you're holidaying and you see the buses in their new livery, drop in and say hello. If we visit your town, your brigade will be invited to come down and help. Please join in and get on board the summer roadshow.

STORY TRAVIS HEARN



The Members Quick Reference Guide – Fire safety in your community pocket-sized publication has been updated to help brigade members answer questions from the community about their fire safety. You can obtain copies by contacting your community education coordinator.

Get informed, stay connected

CFA is taking innovative steps to reach communities living in high bushfire risk areas.

The MyCFA service is embracing new technology to help CFA improve communications with both residents and CFA members. The aim is to ensure we provide information that's personalised and relevant to a resident's local area and tailored to their risk profile.

The initial focus of MyCFA is to target properties within 150 metres of the bushfire hazard in extreme and very high risk communities, as determined by the Victorian Fire Risk Register. It will supplement regional services to create a more locally-focused approach, reinforce key fire safety messages, encourage participation in local events, and increase the number of people who understand the likelihood of a disaster in their community and the level of risk based on their property.

Following the 2013 Summer Fire Campaign, a postcard was sent to residents living in the most at-risk areas,

to reinforce their personal bushfire risk and encourage them to register for MyCFA. More than 7,000 homes now have a registered person who will receive personalised risk advice, preparedness information and be linked to local fire educational opportunities via MyCFA.

After community members have registered online to join MyCFA at cfa.vic.gov.au/mycfa, they will be kept up-to-date with fire safety information throughout the year through email and the MyCFA website. To avoid confusion with official OSOM, Emergency Alert and FireReady App messages, this service doesn't include warnings or any communications about incidents.

It's likely that MyCFA will appeal to the broader community, not just those within 150 metres of a bushfire hazard, and CFA members can encourage these people to register online (cfa.vic.gov.au/mycfa) or phone 1800 240 667.

STORY STEFANIE RUSSELL

Reporting an incident or hazard on the fireground

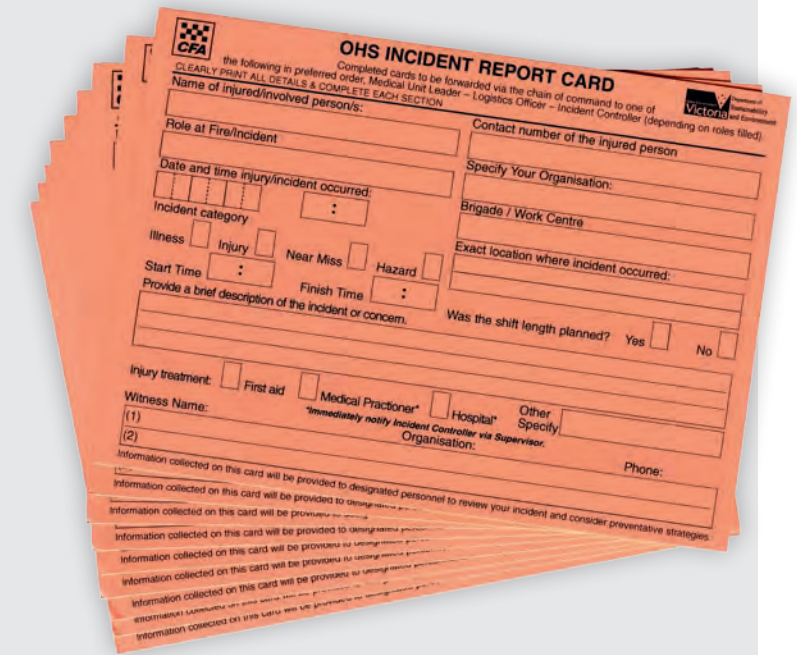
At all times on the fireground it's important to be aware of hazards and to report injuries, near miss events or hazards. Reporting these events enables all levels of management at the incident to review the circumstances and, where possible, implement steps to prevent a recurrence.

If an injury, near miss or hazard occurs, you should initially report it to the crew leader. At major campaign fires, details are recorded on the OHS Incident Report Card (pictured) and handed to the staging area manager or whoever has been nominated by the incident controller.

If an injury, near miss or hazard is considered to be serious, it must be reported immediately to the incident controller via the chain of command. A serious event is one that results in a person needing specialist medical treatment (not first-aid) or hospitalisation. In the worst case it can lead to death.

The information provided in these reports helps to improve risk management strategies and may prevent you or one of your fellow CFA members from being seriously injured.

STORY TEAGAN KNIGHT



Watch for fatigue this summer

Being fatigued is similar to feeling tired, but it's not the same thing. When you're tired you yawn and stretch and feel like taking a break. When you're fatigued your brain begins to lose its ability to think straight. You can lose track of what you are doing and start to make simple mistakes. If fatigue levels get very high, you may start to have small, unintentional bursts of sleep called micro-sleeps.

The main cause of fatigue is not getting enough sleep. Generally, fatigue levels increase when someone has less than around six hours of sleep a night. Fatigue can creep up slowly if, day after day, you fail to get enough sleep. This is referred to as a sleep debt.

High levels of fatigue can also develop in less than 24 hours through a prolonged period of wakefulness, or through excessive and sustained physical or mental activity.

The consequences of fatigue are increased reaction times and a reduced ability to solve and respond to routine problems.

Signs of fatigue include:

- bad mood
- excessive yawning
- long blink times or double blinking
- memory lapses
- eyes rolling



- head nodding
- micro-sleeps
- becoming easily distracted
- making silly mistakes
- a lack of alertness
- reduced awareness of surroundings.

If you think you or a team member is fatigued, you should inform your crew leader or superior and consider which steps should be taken to manage the problem.

Tips for managing fatigue include:

- increasing the frequency and duration of breaks

- drinking and eating at optimal times
- rotating tasks
- implementing 'double checking' of important tasks
- switching to low-risk tasks
- taking a power nap
- drinking coffee
- standing down.

These measures can help delay fatigue and reduce the risks associated with fatigue, but it's important to note that only adequate sleep can cure fatigue.

STORY TEAGAN KNIGHT

Alan Stuart Mt Taylor Fire Brigade District 11

faces of
CFA



PHOTO: LEITH HILLARD

How long have you been with this brigade?

I joined in about 1956. I was captain for 10 years. I'm now a life member and my brother Ken is captain.

Why did you join CFA?

Dad was a member since at least 1947. He was the apparatus officer when we had knapsacks full of water left in boxes on roadsides. I helped Dad and became involved in the demos too.

Have you been affected by bushfire on the home front?

In 1965 a fire that started at Licola burnt in the bush for two weeks then hit our property. We used fire as one of our farming tools but that day everything exploded. Forest bordered us on two sides. I saw a fireball hit and the whole hillside went up. The fire came in waves and lasted on our property for 14 hours until we had the edges down.

Stock losses always affected me. I remember one lot of Hereford cattle running past – they looked like Murray Greys, they were so badly singed and distressed.

How involved are you now in fire response and recovery?

In 2003 a lot of our friends at Wulgulmerang and Benambra were impacted by fire and Laurie Lind and I thought we'd help. We talked to farmers and put crews together. We worked about 1,700 hours after those fires, mainly repairing fences. One early trip we went to a burnt-out property and packed up a woolshed for scrap. A woman there said they hadn't known where to begin and our help made them feel they could make a new start. That comment has been repeated many times.

What has that one job led to?

Mt Taylor brigade and friends moved on to removing or repairing fences in other recovery programs. I now organise working parties with people from their early teens to 81 years old involved. After the 2009 fire in Callignee, we spent most weekends for 14 months camping there and fencing. My daughter Margie was there for about 37 of those weekends. We helped after the 2011 Tostaree fire and did flood recovery fencing in 2012. We've removed 140 kilometres of fencing at Glenaladale in 2014, and are now working at Buchan and Tubbut. We all get great satisfaction from helping.

Does your work begin and end with fencing?

Being burnt out is daunting. We can't go in and just take over. We are locals, mostly farmers ourselves, and we meet affected farmers on their level. I have a cuppa and talk – and listen. One farmer told me that he didn't know if he could cope. We got stuck in and he saw seven of us do a week's work in one day. It was a big lift for him.

How is this work supported?

People volunteer to help on the fence lines, and donate money too. Lindenow Lions Club donated \$30,000 for wire. Telstra donated equipment and workers for a day. After the Glenaladale fire, East Gippsland Shire asked us to coordinate recovery. They said, "Use your own discretion". There was money to pay local contractors for clearing the lines: local people for local jobs was their intention, and we have worked on that principle. I've just been given a regional achiever award [2014 Victorian Regional Achievement and Community Awards], but knowing I've helped means more.

INTERVIEW BY LEITH HILLARD

Out and about with ACO Cook



At Wesburn-Millgrove Fire Station (left to right) Operations Officer David Renkin, Second Lieutenant Michael Belling, Third Lieutenant Tony Lewis, Captain Adam Pelling, DCO Garry Cook and brigade President Brian Halit

PHOTO: KEITH PAKENHAM

In early November, Garry Cook, Assistant Chief Officer North East Region, took a trip in District 13 to discuss two new fire stations with local brigade members.

At the site of the Silvan Fire Station, Garry met with a number of brigade officers who are excited about watching their new station rise from the concrete slab.

"They are currently in some makeshift facilities which have worked out very well for them, but they are looking forward to getting into the new station," said Garry. "There have been a couple of minor delays but it should progress very quickly and they will be in there by the middle of next year.

"It's a three-bay station that will allow all the vehicles to be housed in one location complete with a meeting/training room and kitchen facility."

Garry then visited the site of the Wesburn-Millgrove Fire Station where construction hasn't yet started.

"It will be quite unique for the area as it will be a community refuge as well as a new station built on the existing site," said Garry. "The aspect of the engine bay will swing around 90 degrees and face the roadway. The brigade is still in the old building while the final plans and details are being completed. It's very exciting for the community.

"It's also great that the brigade is so supportive about the concept of being involved with a refuge for the general public and it will be the first in North East Region."

STORY KEITH PAKENHAM

Below left:

At the site of Silvan brigade's new station
PHOTO: KEITH PAKENHAM

Below centre:

Architect's drawing of the new Wesburn-Millgrove Fire Station and community refuge
PHOTO: COURTESY OF BAADE HARBOUR AUSTRALIA

Below right:

Garry Cook discusses Silvan's new station with Captain Shane Peacock
PHOTO: KEITH PAKENHAM



Members who wear two hats



PHOTO: BEN WHEELER

Double duty in Wodonga

When Wodonga Fire Brigade Station Officer David Brown started as a volunteer at Plenty about 20 years ago, "it wasn't in my wildest dreams that I'd be paid to do the job".

David's straightforward 20-year wish "to do something for the community and meet some people" remains as relevant today as he balances CFA work, family and volunteering at Wodonga West Fire Brigade.

"When I started volunteering here 11 years ago, there was no loo, no running water and 20 to 30 calls a year," said David. "Now we have more than 200 turnouts a year and our own Type 3 medium pumper. We're a young, vibrant brigade with a lot of members in their 20s just starting families."

When a call goes out, David might turn out as an incident controller from Wodonga or a volunteer from Wodonga West.

"Wherever I am, I'm part of the skills mix," he said. "The skills I bring to a volunteer turnout are complemented by the skills of the farmer and the building surveyor and we all work under the crew leader. They might say, 'Brown, what do you think?' but other times I hang on the hose. It's what hat you're wearing and the maturity you bring."

"I respect that I work with 16 dedicated people at Wodonga who have this as their career, and I respect that I work with a volunteer workforce."

"Most of the training of the Wodonga volunteers is done by the career firefighters as part of the integrated model. Our work gives us plenty of training and opportunities to use those skills in real life. As custodians of that knowledge, it's important we empower the next generation of firefighters. We'll look at our work calendar and see if it intersects with volunteer training and take the truck along so the volunteers can get familiar with it."

David gives credit to two influential leaders: Captain Max Maclean from his days volunteering at Plenty, and former Wodonga Station Officer Ron Boland.

"Max was a very fair captain but a disciplinarian," said David. "He did things the right way. The tyres had to be blacked. It stood me in good stead for being a career firefighter."

"Ron taught me everything I know as an officer and he was also a Kergunyah Fire Brigade volunteer. His inclusiveness and his ability to walk that fine line was a model for me."

David also expresses his gratitude for the support of Wodonga West Captain Ross Coyle and the gratitude comes right back at him.

"David extends our experience," said Ross who is also a CFA Board member. "We acknowledge his skills but he's not the kind to stand over others and lecture."

"We have a great relationship with all Wodonga staff. Their station is very integrated with the whole Wodonga Group. There's not a huge fence up. It's positive that people who volunteer want to be career fireys and vice versa."

Meanwhile, David will keep working to get the balance right.

"But most things can be brought back to what's best for the community," he said. "That's the moral compass. I volunteer because of the camaraderie but also I live in that area and we're a fire prone part of Victoria. If a fire burns into Wodonga, the west will be the first area hit."

The inter-agency firefighter

When Stuart McCall says "us" and "we", it's an exercise to work out who he's referring to. This MFB commander with a 36-year career under his belt has also been the captain of Montrose Fire Brigade for 11 years and a CFA member since 1984.

His experience has been one of healthy cross pollination – both inter-agency and between career and volunteer positions.

"There's a cultural shift from career to volunteer but there's also a skills transfer in both directions," said Stuart. "I'm a qualified Wildfire Level 3 with MFB from a course taught by CFA. I've worked in incident management with MFB and CFA; and with CFA I'm a Level 3 operations officer, strike team leader and sector commander."

"MFB gave me good core firefighting knowledge but CFA is where I learned my bushfire craft and about risk in my local area. In turn, I've taken my MFB structure firefighting skills back to CFA. That inter-agency transfer is the ideal model."

Stuart is stepping down next year from work at MFB and the Montrose captaincy. "It's been an extreme level of commitment but I've loved it," he said. "Being a captain is a privileged position. You're a leader in the community and what you say about fire is really listened to."

"Discipline on the fireground is first class, chain of command is done very well and the training level is very high."

And the greatest change Stuart has seen in his years in the fire services?

"The involvement of more women. We have more skilled people across the gamut and women have changed our culture out of sight in ways that it needed to change."



PHOTO: LEITH HILLARD

Staying hands-on

Paul Marshall started as a volunteer at Ballarat Fire Brigade more than 30 years ago. The skills he learned there in road accident rescue were sharpened over two 15-year stints as a career firefighter at Ballarat City then Warrnambool fire stations.

He's now enjoying being a CFA operations officer, "but you don't get to use your practical skills in a command role and that's something I miss," said Paul who became an SES volunteer four years ago.

"I was already in a network with SES from rope rescue jobs and road accidents. They have the same ropes and pulleys but the big adjustment has been using the Z-pulley system rather than CFA's four-to-one mechanical assist. They both achieve the same thing but I have to be mindful."

Paul's CFA role takes priority. When he's the rostered duty officer, he doesn't attend an incident with SES. What he's most aware of, however, are the benefits of the twin roles.

"If there's an SES question within CFA or vice versa, I might be able to answer it," he explained. "Bringing the services together also gives me a better idea of where everyone sits under the Emergency Management Act."

Front and centre, however, is Paul's satisfaction in maintaining hand-on skills.

"Road accident rescues challenge individual and team skills," he said. "When you perform a successful rescue, it's very satisfying."



PHOTO: ROZ MARSHALL

"You're in the emergency services because you like the work, so it's not hard to find enjoyment in volunteering. I encourage anyone who has a genuine interest to become involved in SES or another community organisation. What you put in you get back in bucketloads."

STORIES LEITH HILLARD

Seaton's new station and 625 years of service



PHOTO: EMILY HAALA

Seaton community members came together in mid-October to officially open their new fire station and pay tribute to members of the township's fire brigade. Guests and members celebrated a combined total of 625 years of service to the Seaton community.

The station opening was a great day for the future of the brigade and allowed for recognition of the people who have

built this brigade into what it is today.

Seaton brigade, originally called Dawson Seaton Rural Fire Brigade, has been serving the community for more than 65 years. The community and brigade were significantly impacted by, and played a vital role in, the 2006 Coopers Creek fire and 2013 Aberfeldy fire.

Funded through CFA's rural fire station program, the new station replaces a 35-year-old building. It has improved meeting

and training facilities to enhance the brigade's relationship with the community.

"The official opening was a very successful day," said District 10 Operations Officer Peter Barr. "The new facilities are a vast improvement and have increased morale within the brigade and the community."

STORY EMILY HAALA

A century of service to Crib Point

Two members of Crib Point brigade are celebrating after collectively clocking up 103 years of service to their local community.

Geoff Watson and Jeff Fletcher both signed up in the 1960s and have been volunteers ever since. The pair's dedication was recently recognised at the annual Crib Point dinner where they both received Third Class National Medals.

Geoff Watson, 66, said volunteering has been a big part of his life.

"It was just something I wanted to do to help the community and help other people in their time of need," Geoff said.

Over the past five decades he's been involved in many major campaign fires in Victoria and interstate, but it's the friendships that have made the biggest impression.

"You build up a lot of friendships over the years and meet a lot of people along the way from all different walks of life. When you join CFA you get another family – it's a great organisation to be involved in."

Geoff's long-time friend and fellow colleague Jeff Fletcher also considers CFA to be his second family.

"It was vastly different back then. Our first fire truck was from the navy, we had tin helmets from World War II and we wore blue overalls and our own boots," Jeff recalled.

Jeff is just as passionate about helping the community as he was when he joined in June 1961.

"Over the years I've got a lot out of it – I've made so many friendships and I wouldn't leave it for all the money in the world," he said.

Jeff faced the biggest challenge of his career when fighting the February 2009 fires.



PHOTO: ANDREW BARTELS

"We were on the Nilma South Highway trying to stop it from going into Warrigal, and that's when I believed in divine intervention – it was coming at us so fast and it was just all thick smoke and heat. You couldn't see anything.

"After it just stopped everyone looked at each other in disbelief."

"I keep doing it because it gives me a good feeling – I do it to help people and my community."

Despite more than 53 years of service, Jeff won't be leaving the brigade any time soon.

"I couldn't leave it now – they'll have to carry me out in a pine box," he quipped.

CFA congratulates both Jeff and Geoff on their outstanding achievements to help protect the community.

STORY HOLLY LITTLE

Clunes Fire Brigade's milestone



PHOTO: SAMANTHA PLATER

Clunes brigade has served the residents of Clunes and district for the past 150 years. To celebrate this significant milestone, the brigade invited all current and past members to the Novotel Creswick Resort for a presentation dinner in early October.

CFA Chief Officer Euan Ferguson was a guest at the dinner to acknowledge current members' service. He presented service medals ranging from five years to 55 years and Australian National Medals.

Firefighter Robert Campbell, with help from fellow brigade members, created a history book about the brigade called *Buckets to Pagers*. It documents how the brigade started and its journey to the present day. Robert and Euan Ferguson officially launched the book on the night.

The following day started with a street parade led by Creswick Brass Band, followed by Clunes brigade and the Chief Officer. Behind those marching were 23 vintage and current trucks.

The parade continued to the station on Alliance Street where the brigade opened its doors to the community and to current and past members of the brigade. Locals enjoyed the sun and kids' activities while looking at the trucks, listening to the brass band and getting some advice on fire safety.

Chairman of Clunes brigade, Richard Burt, said they received great support from the community.

"We got a couple of letters saying how well run the events were and the RSL, local primary school and the Country Women's Association all helped with catering," said Richard.

"It was also great that the Chief Officer acknowledged our brigade and showed such a strong interest in volunteers."

Overall, it was a fantastic and memorable weekend for the brigade celebrating the achievement of 150 years.

STORY SAMANTHA PLATER

Six trucks for District 6

On a sunny winter's day in Colac, six new medium tankers were handed over to six District 6 brigades: Colac, Cororooke, Larpent, Birregurra, Forrest and Apollo Bay.

All these brigades protect townships in areas with large bush coverage and grasslands. Apollo Bay, Cororooke and Larpent brigades are part of Corangamite Group, and Birregurra, Colac and Forrest are in the Beeac Group in the Otways region.

Polwarth MP Terry Mulder, who met around 30 brigade representatives on the day, said the new tankers were helping to support CFA by "ensuring its members have the facilities, equipment and resources they need to do their job safely and effectively". Colac Otway Shire Mayor Lyn Russell also helped celebrate the delivery of the new tankers.

"I am thrilled that these new medium tankers, each valued at \$335,000, which have been funded through CFA's vehicle replacement program, have been distributed to the district," said Operations Manager Dean Manson. "Not only will these tankers increase the safety of our extremely dedicated volunteers; they will enable brigades to better protect the lives and property within our district and provide inter-region support when required."

Thanks to all the volunteers who attended the handover.

STORY AMY BOYD



PHOTO: COURTESY OF COLAC HERALD

Emerald's diary takes off

Emerald brigade has launched its 2015 fundraising and community safety diary and a large number of brigades have decided to sell these diaries in their communities. Bacchus Marsh brigade used its Facebook page to pre-sell the diaries to its local community and other brigades have partnered with local schools and retailers to sell the diaries on their behalf. If you're interested in using this diary to raise funds, go to emeraldcfadiary.org, as there are a few copies left.

Register for parade

On 28 February 2015, around 25 brigades will take part in the Knox Group torchlight parade. After the march, the brigades and bands will return to Ferntree Gully Fire Station to continue the night's celebrations. If your brigade would like to take part, phone Cate Evenden on 0419 407 148.



Fired up to help at-risk young people

District 8 firefighters donated their time in late August to mentor vulnerable young people by hosting a day of hot fire training at CFA's Bangholme Campus.

As part of a program run by schools in Melbourne's south-east and Dandenong Fire Brigade, more than 20 students aged 14 and 15 tried their hand at fighting fires and took part in realistic search-and-rescue drills.

The program, called Operation New Start Casey, is aimed at vulnerable students at risk of becoming disengaged from school. Dandenong brigade Senior Station Officer Darren Padgett said the training day helped at-risk teenagers learn new skills and build confidence.

"We are passionate about getting involved because we don't want to see kids on the streets or fall through the cracks at school, and we want to try to keep young people out of trouble," Darren said.

"The kids get a lot out of it. I think the program starts to give them hope and shows them they can do something really positive with their life if they make the right choices.

"I'd like to thank the firefighters who put their hand up to help out today, including Sam Webb, Leigh Schnerring, Daniel Lee, Chris Morrow and Alec Draffin."

Hampton Park Secondary College Principal David Finnerty can see the benefits. "These are essentially good kids who, for all sorts of reasons, didn't get the break they deserve," he said. "This gives them that break and provides them with critical life skills."

If any CFA members are interested in participating in the next program, contact Darren Padgett: d.padgett@cfa.vic.gov.au.

STORY HOLLY LITTLE

PHOTO: JAMES SEEARY

History of the Wangaratta Group

A book titled *Make Tankers 10: a History of the Wangaratta Fire Brigades Group* is being compiled by a team of CFA members to record the history of the group's formation and major events.

Members of the community are encouraged to contact the book's compilers if they have family information or photographs of significance they would like considered for inclusion in the book, which is planned to be published by December 2015.

The book will detail the events leading up to the formation of the Wangaratta Group and acknowledge the significant contribution of CFA members and their predecessors. A timeline that goes back



PHOTO: COURTESY OF WANGARATTA GROUP

to 1876 will reflect on major events, photographs of historical significance and factual and anecdotal stories about the blazes fought to protect the lives and assets of the local community.

Each of the 16 brigades in the Wangaratta Group will have a number of pages dedicated to their history, their significant events and how these impacted on the local community.

There will also be a register noting the office bearers of the Wangaratta Group and its member brigades.

If you have information, questions or would like to order a copy of the book, please contact Vanessa Grant on 0427 811 908.

STORY VANESSA GRANT

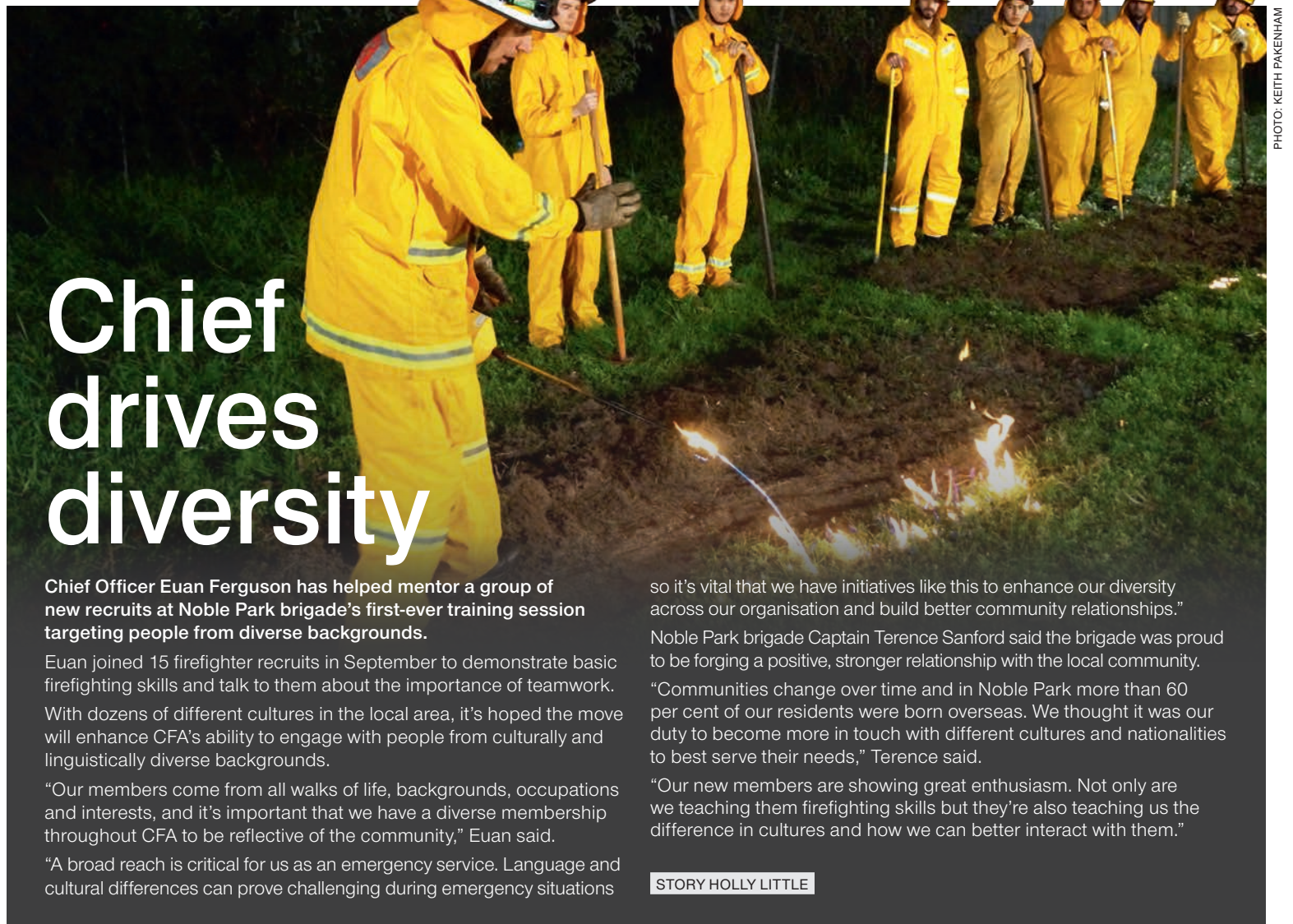


PHOTO: KEITH PAKENHAM

Chief drives diversity

Chief Officer Euan Ferguson has helped mentor a group of new recruits at Noble Park brigade's first-ever training session targeting people from diverse backgrounds.

Euan joined 15 firefighter recruits in September to demonstrate basic firefighting skills and talk to them about the importance of teamwork. With dozens of different cultures in the local area, it's hoped the move will enhance CFA's ability to engage with people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

"Our members come from all walks of life, backgrounds, occupations and interests, and it's important that we have a diverse membership throughout CFA to be reflective of the community," Euan said.

"A broad reach is critical for us as an emergency service. Language and cultural differences can prove challenging during emergency situations

so it's vital that we have initiatives like this to enhance our diversity across our organisation and build better community relationships."

Noble Park brigade Captain Terence Sanford said the brigade was proud to be forging a positive, stronger relationship with the local community.

"Communities change over time and in Noble Park more than 60 per cent of our residents were born overseas. We thought it was our duty to become more in touch with different cultures and nationalities to best serve their needs," Terence said.

"Our new members are showing great enthusiasm. Not only are we teaching them firefighting skills but they're also teaching us the difference in cultures and how we can better interact with them."

STORY HOLLY LITTLE

Cornishtown's new station



PHOTO: ALEX TODD

Cornishtown, north-west of Wodonga, has a population of just over 100 people and, in mid-September, around 50 of them attended the opening of their new fire station.

The station was officially opened by Mr Bill Tilley, Member of Parliament for Benambra. He, along with Operations Manager Paul King, also presented service medals representing over 500 years of service.

The new rural fire station was built next to the existing station, which will be refurbished to house the brigade's quick fill and other equipment. The new station is a single-bay motor room, with an automatic roller door, toilets, external drying rack, and a 15,000-litre water tank that will enable the brigade to fill its tanker without going off site.

Cornishtown brigade was formed in 1952 after a significant fire started in the area that burnt through Barnawatha, around Wodonga and stopped at Baranduda. Three original members – Vin Shelley, Brian Shelley and Anthony Gillman – were at the station opening to receive their 55-year service medals.

"It's an important community asset that we hope will allow the brigade to attract more volunteers," said Cornishtown brigade Second Lieutenant Paul Shelley, who received his 35-year service medal.

"We want to encourage people to join who have a range of work or life skills that are useful to CFA."

Captain Brad Schmidt thanked all those involved with building the new station, highlighting the cooperation between the local community, District 24 headquarters and members of the brigade.

STORY ALEX TODD



PHOTO: DOUG STELEY

New stations for District 10

The Glengarry East, Cowwarr (pictured) and Valencia Creek communities paid tribute to members of their towns' fire brigades as they officially opened their new fire stations in late September.

The opening of all three stations was a great day for the future of each brigade and the region, and was deserved recognition for the people who built the brigades into what they are today.

Memorial plaques were unveiled by the three captains: Glengarry East Captain Scott Langley, Cowwarr Captain Andrew Iseppi and Valencia Creek Captain David Montague.

The new stations have improved meeting and training facilities which will strengthen the brigades' relationship with their communities, as well as lifting the morale in each brigade. The stations were funded through the rural fire station replacement program.

"The official opening of each station is a significant moment for each brigade and for the district," said Operations Manager Allan Rankin. "It allows us to better support our volunteers with new or enhanced facilities that recognise the significant contribution they make and time they commit in their service to local communities."

"The opportunity to present many long-service awards to members of the three brigades, as part of the official proceedings at each location, enabled us to recognise the dedication of brigade members to their communities over many years. This is an outstanding achievement for all involved."

Glengarry East brigade acknowledged over 680 years of combined service to the community and 70 years of the brigade; 435 years of combined service for Cowwarr; and 285 years of combined service at Valencia Creek.

STORY EMILY HAALA

Casterton brigade celebrates 125 years



PHOTO: COURTESY OF CASTERTON NEWS

A weekend of events was held in mid-September to celebrate Casterton brigade's 125th anniversary and the auxiliary's 50 years of service.

More than 150 firefighters from 15 brigades took part in a torchlight parade on Friday night, led by a vintage fire truck from Horsham and a colour party. In the party were Victorian Emergency Management Commissioner Craig Lapsley, Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria State President Hans van Hamond, Assistant Chief Officer Bob Barry, SES's Chief Officer Operations Trevor White, District 4 Operations Officer Gary Harker and Casterton brigade ex-Captain Peter White.

On Saturday, Casterton Fire Station hosted an open day where the brigade's current equipment and memorabilia were on display, and the community could have a cuppa.

In the evening, the brigade held its annual dinner at Casterton Town Hall. Around 130 guests, including past brigade members and District 4 staff, joined in the celebrations, which included the presentation of long service medals by Chief Officer Euan Ferguson.

"The weekend was a huge success," said Casterton brigade Captain Glenn Kerr. "The torchlight parade was well supported by neighbouring brigades, both rural and urban, and the band was excellent."

"Our community organisations and businesses were also extremely supportive and the colour party was a highlight. We look forward to attending the next torchlight at Stawell."

The weekend finished with a brunch and farewell on Sunday at the Noss Road Running Track.

STORY WENDY KERR



PHOTO: CHRISTINE HENDERSON

Climbing for a cause

On Father's Day, 7 September, CFA members travelled from as far as Swan Hill, Sorrento and Horsham to take part in the inaugural Melbourne Firefighter Stair Climb at Crown Metropol.

The event, organised by the Firefighters Charity Fund, saw participants climb 28 floors wearing 25kg of full structural turnout gear and breathing apparatus.

The aim of the event was to raise \$100,000 to upgrade the Alfred Hospital Burns Unit and we are pleased to say the final figure was more than \$127,000.

"The phenomenal efforts will help us provide all Victorians with the highest level of burns care

and access to the best facilities," said Dr Heather Cleland from the Burns Unit.

Before the race, the 182 firefighters paused to honour the 343 New York firefighters who climbed the stairs of the World Trade Center, and lost their lives on 11 September 2001.

Representatives from 42 CFA brigades took part in the climb alongside colleagues from MFB, Airservices Australia, New South Wales Rural Fire Service and New Zealand Fire Service. The overall race was won by MFB's Mike Ward in a time of three minutes 21 seconds and the third-placed woman was CFA's Connie Schroeder from Berwick brigade. The team category was won by Dandenong

brigade which pipped South Melbourne MFB by one second. Well done to Brendon Siinmaa, John Francis and Damien Mclean.

Mount Evelyn brigade won a trophy for raising the most money (\$9,196) and Beaconsfield brigade Captain Paul Hayes won the award for the most raised by an individual – an incredible \$5,255.

The event was an outstanding success – a wonderful gathering of services to share camaraderie and a little bit of competitive spirit for a great cause. Planning for next year's stair climb is well underway and will be bigger and better. Check firefighterclimb.org.au for the latest news.

STORY CHRISTINE HENDERSON AND STEVE AXUP



PHOTO: BLAIR DELLEMLIN

Emergency Services Project Expo

A special kind of magic happens when passionate people get together to talk shop. Project Expo was an opportunity for project teams to not only connect with each other, but also showcase their work to the wider emergency services community.

The event brought together 65 project teams from CFA, Department of Environment and Primary Industries (DEPI), SES, MFB and Emergency Management Victoria at Darebin Arts and Entertainment Centre in mid-September.

For project managers working intensively – often over many years – to get their project up and running, this was about showing off their 'baby' among like-minded colleagues, while working out where knowledge could be shared.

CFA members, many of whom had travelled a long way with their families, made the most of the opportunity to see the latest in vehicles, equipment, technology, training and health programs. Many Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria members also enjoyed the expo, as their annual general meeting took place in the same building.

Interactive exhibits included wildfire burn table demonstrations from the mobile training props team, free health checks, a giant 'Mental Health Tower' game and infra-red camera displays from DEPI's Aerial Intelligence Gathering project.

STORY SONIA MACLEAN

Training campuses upgraded



CFA members around Victoria have better access to vital practical training thanks to recent upgrades of the Victorian Emergency Management Training Centres at Wangaratta, Longerenong, Peshurst, Huntly and West Sale.

The \$825,000 upgrade at Wangaratta includes a larger training and meeting room, first-aid room and breathing apparatus storage facility, in addition to the existing hot-fire practical training area.

The new addition, called the Lawrence Building, is named after retired Hume Region Training Manager Brian Lawrence, who has been associated with the centre for 40 years. Brian has made a substantial contribution to the development of the Wangaratta site, where thousands of people have trained over the years.

A new breathing apparatus facility at the Huntly campus has been named after well-known CFA member Norm Bowen but, as Norm tells it, the training ground was a labour of love for the whole community. In the early 1990s, Norm, in his capacity as group officer, led local volunteers to realise his vision to establish a dedicated training ground for the Bendigo area. In 1996 the ground opened under budget and ahead of schedule.

Norm said that before Huntly training ground existed, CFA used an old mud brick house which was donated by a farmer. "We wanted to go one better," Norm recalled. What's most remarkable is that the work done in those early days was of such a high standard that 18 years later the ground still requires minimal maintenance.

Following the upgrade, Huntly can now accommodate larger groups, specialist training and three or more groups doing different training exercises concurrently.

Upgrades at other campuses include new fully-equipped breathing apparatus facilities, classrooms, amenities and change rooms, first-aid rooms, dirty mess areas, drying room, staff rooms and offices. Longerenong also got a new kitchen.

"Local facilities, such as the Wangaratta campus, are vital to ensure emergency services volunteers have the skills and experience needed to protect their communities," said Executive Director Operational Training and Volunteerism Lex de Man.

Lex said the \$7.75 million package of upgrades, which includes a new facility at Mildura in 2015, also ensured the majority of Victoria's emergency services volunteers wouldn't have to travel hours to access training.

The improvements follow recommendations of the 2011 Jones Inquiry into CFA's arrangements with its volunteers, which urged better access for volunteer training.

Above

The breathing apparatus facilities at Longerenong campus and the new Lawrence Building at Wangaratta campus

PHOTOS: LIZ LOWE AND WARREN MITCHELSON

Grape escape in Seppelt exercise

The bottling hall and barrel warehouse, rotary fermenter gantry, and the warehouse escape tunnel and coolroom at Seppelt in Great Western presented a challenging obstacle course during an October breathing apparatus (BA) exercise.

The scenario was a major explosion resulting in fire and damage throughout the site with many people unaccounted for.

Rotating through three sectors were 28 brigade members in BA from Great Western, Ararat, Stawell, Beaufort, Willaura and Snake Valley brigades with support from two Ballarat City fireys in their protective equipment van.

"All BA brigades in District 16 were invited," said Ararat member and PAD operator Dale Pagram. "We've got two urban brigades – Stawell and Ararat – surrounded by rural brigades, so this was about skills maintenance and we needed to keep it unpredictable."

"It's also a meet and greet," said organiser and Ararat Lieutenant Peter Hannan. "It's giving the smaller brigades that impetus to enhance their skills."

While the two indoor scenarios were carried out in total darkness, Peter oversaw crews searching for victims on the outdoor gantry, a complex scaffold of various levels some 25 metres tall.

"The scenarios ran well but communications were an issue," said Peter. "We didn't have enough portable radios. We had about four teams going through each scenario at a time and tried to give each team a radio."

"Crews were using the radios quite well but they were let down on the command side. We had UHF portable radios but they weren't loud enough. BA control was letting people know where they were up to with air – that ran well."

Some really useful mistakes were made in the search and rescue and an exercise is the ideal time to iron them out.

"One of my bugbears is people moving too far away from their partner during a search," continued Peter. "If you're more than a few feet away in a real-life incident, you're likely to not be able to hear each other and could easily become separated. It's vital to stay only a step away."

"The other thing to impress on people is that they must search the whole area. We had some areas not searched well while other areas were gone over more than once. While it would be unusual to have that many searchers, you need one team within that larger group to place themselves in charge and coordinate the search."

Dale oversaw crews searching the escape tunnel, where an important part of this task was to communicate effectively with those following: pass on what you have found so others don't have to discover it anew. How long is the tunnel? Does it turn to the left or right? Are there stairs? Does the ceiling dip?

Seppelt Winery was happy to host the evening. On site was Mark Kindred who is both Seppelt site manager and first lieutenant at Great Western brigade.

"We've had ammonia leaks," said Mark, "so the added benefit to this exercise is site familiarisation and identification of hazards for brigades that would attend any incident here."

Peter described himself as "a happy organiser" at the close of the night.

"The idea is to move it to an annual round robin so we can learn about community threats and assets in different areas."

STORY LEITH HILLARD



Volunteers train at Craigieburn

Dozens of CFA members from North East Region became our first batch of volunteers to train at the Victorian Emergency Management Training Centre's (VEMTC) newly-opened Craigieburn campus in mid-October.

The state-of-the-art training ground, managed by MFB, opened its doors earlier this year and includes training props that simulate real-life emergency scenarios. CFA firefighters from Wallan, Kilmore, Wandong and Broadford had the opportunity to practise and improve their skills in realistic environments with simulated smoke while using breathing apparatus.

North East District PAD Supervisor Richard Gardner spoke about the real-life and collaborative approach of the training.

"The atmosphere for the day was great. MFB operated their props, including a block of flats and an underground car park, and our CFA volunteers worked side-by-side with them all day," Richard said.

"The props were filled with simulated smoke. Inside, we put dummies throughout the building for volunteers to search for and rescue – similar to a real-life situation."



PHOTO: WARREN MITCHELSON

Kilmore Fire Brigade volunteer and training officer Hayden Dally said the experience improved the confidence of brigade members.

"It's a fantastic, brand new facility with very realistic search-and-rescue scenarios. Instructors were accommodating and extremely helpful for everyone present on the day," said Hayden. "They helped volunteers to stay calm in challenging situations."

District 12 Operations Manager Peter Creak said the new facility gave CFA members enhanced access to multi-agency training and skills maintenance.

"Volunteers can test their skills in a realistic environment fighting simulated house and

building fires while using breathing apparatus," said Peter. "Creating an environment as close as possible to the real thing allows our firefighters to build their experience and confidence in a safe but challenging way."

Another 24 new recruit career firefighters also recently completed the first combined CFA/MFB recruit course at VEMTC Craigieburn. Aimed at improving interoperability, the recruits began the 10-week course in August, with the remainder of their training taking place at VEMTC Fiskville. CFA and MFB firefighters will graduate together on 12 December.

STORY INEKE NEESON

Women in the thick of it

In late August, 23 women from the Eppalock Group met at Huntly Training Ground to refine their firefighting skills.

This is the second time a women firefighters' training day has been organised in District 2 by Axedale brigade volunteer Karen Shedden.

"The aim was to provide women with an opportunity to come together in a relaxed and comfortable environment," said Karen. "When women train together, it really helps them gain confidence."

The women took part in a range of exercises including a car accident, power pole fire, service station fire, car fire and the use of fire extinguishers, under the guidance of CFA instructors. Mt Camel Captain Mick Hall, Axedale Captain Peter Harkins and his son James,

and Deb Monti from Junortoun brigade helped in mentoring roles.

Newly-appointed Assistant Chief Officer Mike Wassing also took part.

"It was a privilege to be part of the day and be out on the training ground with such capable firefighters," said Mike. "I look forward to seeing where we can take this to encourage more women to be part of CFA."

Norm Bowen from the Peer Support Program gave a talk to the group about managing mental health. "It's important that we support women as they have skills that are well suited to both peer support and firefighting," said Norm.

STORY DEBRA SALVAGNO AND TRACEY MASTROPAVLOS



PHOTO: WARREN MITCHELSON

Multi-agency TEWT at Port Fairy

A mock evacuation of Port Fairy Hospital following a gas leak as a result of nearby excavation works gave CFA members the opportunity to work alongside six local agencies.

Taking part in the tactical exercise without troops (TEWT) were CFA brigade members from Belfast Group, SES, Ambulance Victoria, Moyne Health Services, Moyne Shire Council, Red Cross and Port Fairy Lions Club.

Belfast Group Officer Max Humphrys said that the aim of the exercise was to familiarise the group with procedures for inter-agency liaison at a developing incident.

"This was a great chance for us to get to know all of the various roles and responsibilities and how they fit together," Max said.

The exercise was facilitated by District 5 Instructors Ray Downes and Mark Price and Operations Officer Paul Marshall, who encouraged attendees to discuss command and control, immediate priorities for those initially responding, and the evacuation process.

"The exercise was a good opportunity for leaders of the various community groups to identify how they could assist at a prolonged incident," said Paul Marshall. "This could include anything from



PHOTO: MELISSA MUEGLITZ

Photo above: (left to right) CFA's Belfast Group Officer Max Humphrys, Port Fairy SES Controller Steve McDowell, Ambulance Victoria's Mike Cornett, Moyne Health's David Lee and District 5 Structural Instructor Mark Price

catering for evacuated residents, door knocking the affected areas or implementing traffic control measures."

The exercise was followed by a light supper where many of the attendees could be heard discussing various aspects of the evening. "Hearing people talking about how they could improve their assistance or response should such an incident occur, be it by reviewing their pre-incident plans or changing an evacuation procedure, shows the session was a success," said Paul.

STORY MELISSA MUEGLITZ

Pub in trouble in Orbost



PHOTO: LEITH HILLARD

With the street outside the Orbost Club Hotel teeming with emergency services and the ladder platform heaving into action, the owner of the pub lamented, "What a terrible weekend. The Swans lose and now the pub burns down!"

The scenario for the exercise organised by Orbost Captain Dick Johnstone was a kitchen fire and gas leak which affected at least eight patrons upstairs in the pub.

"The goal was to get new breathing-apparatus-qualified members through," said Dick, "and bring the emergency services together. Look at us and SES. We're in different-coloured overalls but they support us at fires and we support them at rescues."

"We started off with a briefing from me then worked three sectors: BA, rescue and hose lay. We had seven from Marlo and five from Mallacoota helping SES with patient removals. We got six from Orbost, four from Mallacoota and one from Marlo through BA and they went through between 16 and 18 cylinders. That went very well."

Traralgon brigade attended the exercise not only with the ladder platform, but also its BA van manned by three keen volunteers.

The willingness to undertake a 400-kilometre round trip for Traralgon members and 300-kilometre round trip from Mallacoota really demonstrates the emphasis given to inter-agency exercises, the commitment of members and, perhaps, the pleasures of a Sunday drive.

"We don't get the opportunity to see much of the Bronto," continued Dick, "so this gave us all a kick along. Newmerella pumped into Orbost and we pumped into the Bronto. It's quite a thing to see it go up and carry out a rescue and it creates an interest in the members."

STORY LEITH HILLARD

Through the ages – Maffra



Emergency Memberlink



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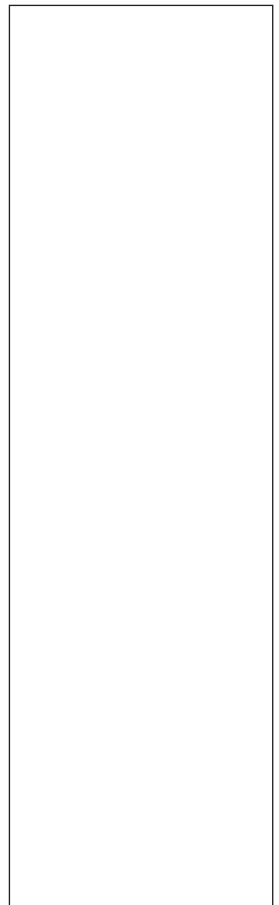
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