

# Brigade

winter 2017

Protecting lives  
and property

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▼ Private units blitzing it





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**Private units blitzing it**

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# Sally lets her photos do the talking

**Excellent photos of roadside planned burns in south-west Victoria by Sally Patterson have been appearing on the Lismore and District Group's Facebook page.**

Sally, an operational member with Lismore Fire Brigade and the secretary/treasurer of Lismore Group, is also a keen photographer.

"I love to capture a moment in time. Photography has made me look at the world in a different way," Sally said.

Much of her photography focuses on planned burning around Lismore, an activity she's passionate about.

The photo on the cover of this issue, the photos of the ultra-heavy tanker on page 7 and two of the shots in the private units feature starting on page 32 are Sally's.

"When I was a very small child, my mother left it too late to leave home in a bushfire and, when the wind changed, three firefighters perished at our front gate," Sally said.

"That made a big impact on how I thought of fire and I decided it was better to know your enemy, so to speak. Now that I have a better understanding of fire, I realise it can be worked with and used as a tool."

Sally hopes that, by capturing and sharing images of roadside planned burns, those who don't understand fire will be encouraged to think about how much heat and

smoke can be produced by a small fire in safe conditions, and then extend their thinking to what this same fire could be like in hot and windy conditions. She wants communities to realise that fires can be deadly and early preparation is essential.

"I hope the locals who see my photos think about how much time and effort the vols put in to keep the community as safe as possible," she said.

STORY SALLY WHITE



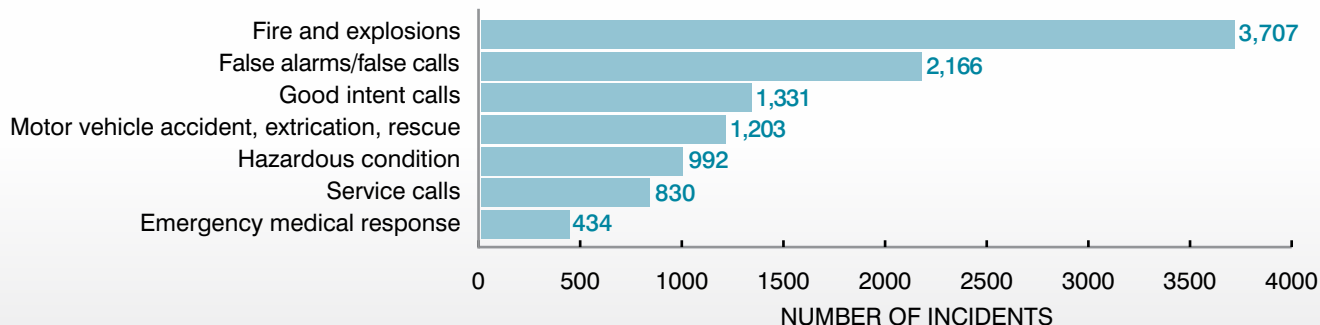
PHOTO: JOHN PATTERSON



# Incident summary

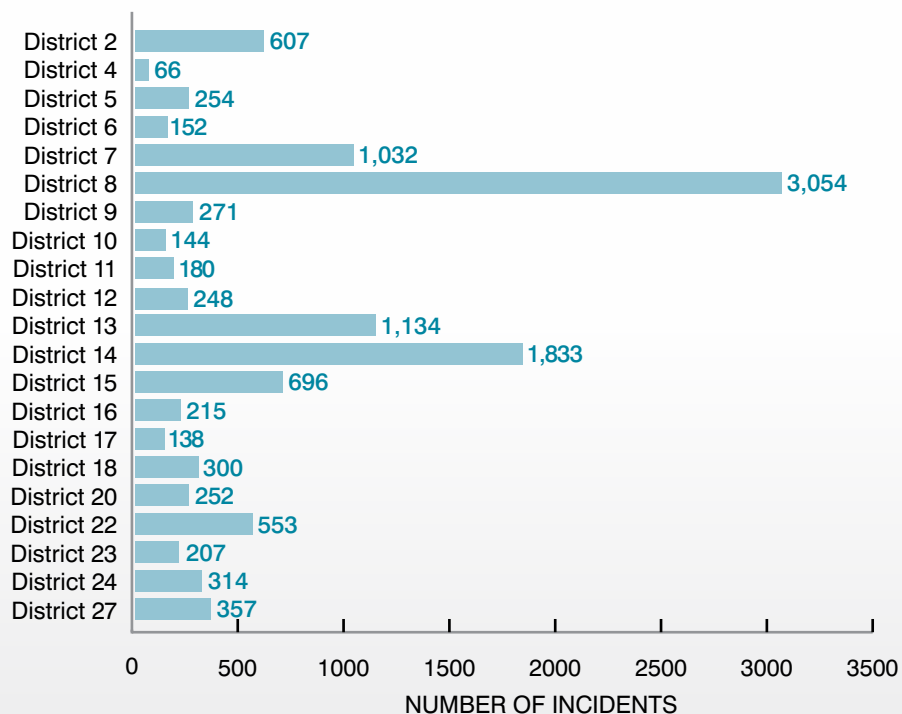
## STATEWIDE INCIDENTS BY TYPE

1 January – 31 March 2017



## STATEWIDE INCIDENTS BY DISTRICT

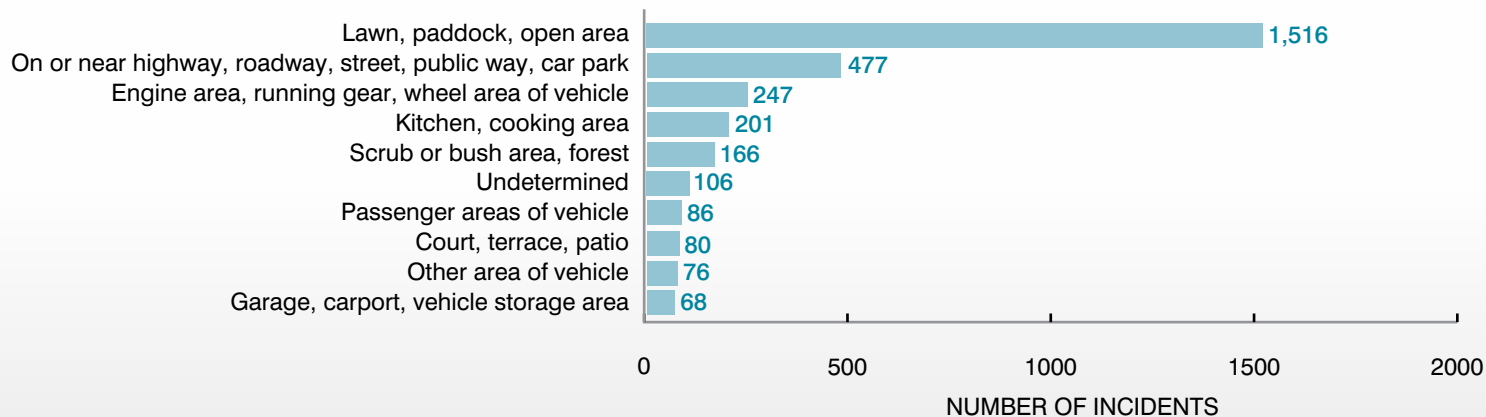
1 January – 31 March 2017



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 January – 31 March 2017



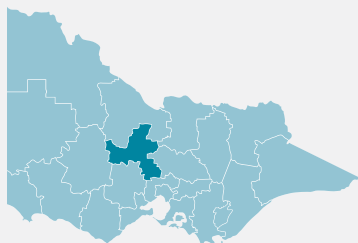
# ACO Sullivan helps man escape burning building

**INCIDENT:** Structure fire

**DISTRICT:** 12

**DATE:** 16 March 2017

**BRIGADES:** Seymour, Shepparton, Bendigo, Avenel, Hilldene



**North East Region Assistant Chief Officer Ross Sullivan had just left a meeting in Seymour when he noticed a group of people on the road and saw smoke coming from a unit complex.**

Before firefighters arrived at the unit on the upper level of a two-storey complex on Station Road, Ross saw a man on the first floor standing near the window with fire behind him.

"I yelled out to him and asked him if he could get out of the building any other way and if there was anyone else with him," said Ross.

"There was no one else. The man kept going back inside and coming back to the window and coughing. I said, 'You have to come out'.

"The unit had a large window and there was a shop underneath. I encouraged him to come out of the window and on to the awning.

"It took a lot of encouragement for him to come on to the awning. There were two young fellas who asked if a ladder would help. We needed to get him down somehow.

"By this stage, he was pretty distraught. The fire was extending very quickly through the building. I asked him to close any doors near to him, as that can help with smoke, and we were able to talk him down the ladder and to safety."

District 12 Operations Manager Rob Van Dorsser said the fire was difficult to access because of its severity.

"Firefighters predominately did an external attack due to the intensity of the fire.

"There is significant damage to the two shops underneath the units. While the complex is still standing, the integrity of the building could be compromised, so inspectors will need to look at that."

Rob said the fire was caused by unattended cooking.

STORY ANGELA PEACHEY

## Paraglider rescue at Bright



PHOTO: GRAHAM GALES

**Rescues used to be straightforward. People could be rescued from a car accident or a burning house; they could be dragged from flood waters or the sea, or lifted up a cliff face.**

But as people take part in new activities, the types of rescues have also changed.

One activity that has led to an increase in rescue responses, particularly around Bright, is paragliding. Paragliders can fall from the sky for a variety of reasons and come to grief across a large swathe of the hilly country around the town.

Recently, one paraglider encountered some trouble and fell from the sky near to town on to a steep hillside. Unlike most paraglider rescues, this pilot was on the ground and not stuck in a tree.

Bright SES unit was called to rescue the pilot. Working with Victoria Police and Ambulance Victoria, the pilot was found down a steep slope off a four-wheel drive track. Due to the steepness of the terrain and the distance to the track, the Wangaratta High Angle Rescue Team was requested to support the SES crew.

On arrival, the SES crew assisted the ambulance personnel to prepare the casualty for transport. The CFA team ran ropes down the slope and set up a system to haul up the casualty. Some members of the CFA team went down the slope to help the SES crew package the casualty into a stretcher. The long haul up the slope took some time as the casualty's injuries were quite serious.

A rescue that started in daylight ended in the dark, but it was a good outcome for the paraglider pilot and exemplified the successful teamwork between ambulance staff, SES and CFA.

STORY GRAHAM GALES

# Gone fishin', gone firefightin'

**INCIDENT:** Bonegilla grass and scrub fire

**DISTRICT:** 24

**DATE:** 22 February 2017

**BRIGADES:** Bonegilla, Wodonga, Baranduda, Kiewa, Bethanga



**The fire danger index was low and Bonegilla Fire Brigade Captain Brian Church headed out with his friend Dick Osmand at 6am to fish on Lake Hume.**

The pair had filleted their 30 redfin at Churchy's house and just put a pot of coffee on the table when a call came in from a neighbour. She had received a panicked call from a friend in the process of capsizing on the lake. A strong gust of wind had spun their four-metre craft around to face backwards into the waves which then swept over and engulfed the vessel.

Brian told his neighbour to call Triple Zero (000) while he and Dick shot down to the lake and jumped back into Churchy's 4.9-metre MakoCraft.

"We boated over to the Ebden boat ramp," said Brian, "and picked up an ambo. The capsize was about 1.5 kilometres from us and we could just see the white hull. It wasn't too choppy and we got there and found two adults in life jackets clinging to the hull. They were getting pretty tired. They'd been in the water for about 40 minutes by then."

The vessel was hanging perpendicular in about 60-feet of water according to the depth sounder on Nemo 2, with a water temperature of 24.5 degrees.

"We lifted the woman then the man in and were going to tow their boat," continued Brian, "but we saw a storm coming. It came out of nowhere with some of the heaviest rain I've ever seen around here; cold rain. Lightning was cracking into the water around us.

"We got back to shore about 300 metres away and looked back and could see the storm about the size of a footy field right where we'd been."

On the way in, however, Brian's pager went off for a fire at Mahers Hill just above the Ebden Reservoir. He could see the fire up on the relatively-inaccessible hill in Bonegilla brigade territory which causes them so much trouble. The initial fire he saw was about 10-foot round but, whipped up by strong winds, it was four times larger by the time they reached shore.

"I had the fire radio with me," said Brian, "and called for aerial support and Make Tankers 10. Victoria Police and Ambulance Victoria were at the Ebden boat ramp and so were the media to report on the rescue. The passengers were helped off my boat and I ran the fire from the boat ramp." In shorts and Crocs.

"I had to stay on VicFire and talk to our trucks that way. The media heard me talking and spun their cameras around and started filming the fire.

"Because of the inaccessibility, the Bomber 360 did four drops and that was 90 per cent of the job done. The Wodonga Group FCV arrived on scene and Alex Todd took over the job from me. They ran hoses down the hill to the fire and it was kept to about two hectares."

But Brian's work was not done. He and Dick again headed out in Nemo 2 alongside an SES vessel to tow the capsized craft. Brian jumped in and tied a rope to the boat and around it which rolled it back over. The rescued craft was towed three-quarters of a kilometre to shore where it was winched on to its trailer, then it was back out again to recover every last piece of gear – fishing lures, battery box, torches and sundry items. The reward for a day's emergency response? Redfin for dinner.

"The people from the boat came to my place the next day and dropped off a bag of chocolates," said Brian, "but I don't expect anything. I enjoy doing all this sort of stuff.

"It was quite an exciting day, but I should have had my fishing rod in the water while I was being the incident controller."

STORY LEITH HILLARD





## CHIEF OFFICER

Steve Warrington



## Let's start a discussion

**To ensure CFA remains as contemporary, agile and fit for purpose as every other emergency services organisation, there are a number of items we need to discuss.**

Broadly, CFA needs to look into capability, brigade viability and growth, our operational efficiency, how we educate the community and our inclusion and fairness.

Some of the matters I raise in this column will generate divisive opinions, but I believe they're concepts and ideas that we need to put on the table for discussion and contemplate implementation at some stage.

First item for debate is baseline capability, particularly targeting the classification 4 and 5 brigades.

By way of example, we are now able to ascertain actual numbers of operational members who respond in a particular brigade. If we were able to reach agreement with each of our brigades around the actual number of operational members required, it would allow us to ensure every operational member has the capability to respond.

So instead of 100 volunteers that some of our bigger brigades have, all requiring training, PPC, pagers and so on, CFA would be able to provide a guarantee that training, PPC and pagers would be provided. Let me be clear here – this is not restricting the number of volunteers, as brigades can still have more involved.

If we were able to reach an agreement around the number of active operational volunteers, I feel it would be reasonable to expect a degree of health and fitness of our people who perform the role.

Additionally, I think we need to consider prerequisites for being an officer, particularly at our classification 4 and 5 brigades. Again, by way of example, to be considered for election, officers would need to have been a crew leader or undertaken leadership training.

Obviously we would have to provide the training courses at different times and locations. However, we've identified that where we have strong and good leaders, we usually have good brigades.

We need to consider building community safety into the response stage. Previously, community safety has been looked at as something to address before or after incidents.

There is a real opportunity, particularly at some of the incidents we attend, to have a community safety presence at the site of the incident to educate members of the public who are checking out the incident as it occurs.

We need to consider making the brigade viability indicator tool compulsory, which is basically a diagnostic test to assess the viability and potential growth of each brigade. This will allow us to provide more targeted support to each and every brigade across the state. (See page 13 for more about brigade viability.)

We've already flagged a review of all our response arrangements to ensure that CFA is providing the best service delivery. That involves reviewing every assignment area to make sure we're maximising our service delivery to the community.

At all incidents, particularly Code 1, we must know which trucks can attend the scene quickest based on our road mapping network.

An important aspect of this broader discussion is inclusion and fairness at CFA. We must ensure we're doing everything we can to make CFA an organisation of choice for a whole range of people with different backgrounds and abilities. It must be ingrained within communities that CFA is accepting.

Finally, training. Through Deputy Chief Officer Gregg Paterson and his team, we are well and truly on the journey to improve training in CFA. We've had a significant focus on our competencies but we need a greater focus on proficiency. (See Gregg's column on page 8 for more about training.)

It is great that people have certificates and I understand that but, as Chief Officer, I want to know our operational members can wear breathing apparatus, can squirt water, can operate a pump and can deliver a community safety message.

Let's give it some thought and have the debate. It's my view that, if we're able to address some of these issues, we would be better placed to move forward as a contemporary, agile emergency services organisation.



PHOTO: PAUL TOWNSEND

# Firefighting ultra-heavy tanker test

**A New South Wales Rural Fire Service 9,000-litre heavy tanker with firefighting capacity was trialed south of the border, with great success, last summer.**

The vehicle was put through its paces tackling grassfires in the Wimmera, Mallee, south-west and north-east Victoria, with feedback sought from all participating drivers and crew.

It responded to incidents and took part in planned burns. The Lismore and District Group was impressed with its performance during break burning, while its arrival in District 24's Browns Plains Fire Brigade area coincided with a series of dry lightning strikes.

"A heap of fires dropped which kept the district busy," said Captain Matt Partridge. "We rolled this vehicle with a portable radio and it went out with our medium tanker. It was very well set up with the monitor on the front and an extra nozzle, so it could be driven to the fireline and the driver presses a button.

"It's such a useful thing to have in an agricultural area where there aren't so many people. We've got 16 to 20 active members but this vehicle can fight fires with just two or three people on board and the 9,000 litres means a longer time between refills. It was easy to shunt water into other tankers so that's a bonus when there's not a water source close by.

"It's a much bigger vehicle so be mindful where you take it, but most of our members drive heavy machinery all the time so that's no stretch for us."

CFA has committed to building two of the 22.5-tonne vehicles although changes will be made based on the trial feedback. Not being changed, however, is the bullbar-mounted remote control monitor which performed so well under pressure. The crew protection system will be altered to meet CFA standards. Those trialling it were impressed by the rear deck which allowed crew to deal with blacking out any fire the front monitor missed.

"District 6 would be very, very keen to be involved in the build and trial process," said Instructor Mike Evans. "Many people see this as the future of grassland firefighting in rural areas with the declining availability of volunteers to operate multiple smaller tankers.



PHOTOS: SALLY PATTERSON

"The longevity of the water for knock-down and wet-down for burning was a big feature and this would also apply to mop up. There's also the possibility of using the tanker as a bulk water carrier and mop up truck to support bushfires or planned burns."

The trial also visited metro South East Region where a forum at Pakenham Fire Station was attended by 30 to 40 volunteers who provided further feedback.

District mechanical officers around the state maintained the vehicle which was driven between locations by project officer Toddy Small. Operations Manager, Wildfire Planning and Forestry Industry Brigades Gary Weir oversaw the trial and welcomed all feedback.

"All districts were extremely supportive and mentioned the gap in the current fleet with water-carrying capacity," said Gary. "There was a definite feeling that it filled a void missing within the current CFA fleet."

STORY LEITH HILLARD AND GORDON KING





## CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



## Frances Diver

**Many people across Victoria might expect our hard working volunteers to be spending the months after the summer season getting some well-earned rest, but that is to underestimate the spirit of the men and women who make up CFA.**

As proof there is no off-season when it comes to dedication to the Victorian community, CFA volunteers and staff raised more than \$1.7 million for the Good Friday Appeal. This builds on a strong legacy of our organisation supporting the Royal Children's Hospital through the Good Friday Appeal – a legacy that now spans close to seven decades.

What started in 1949 with brigades dotted across the state rattling tins for shillings and pence, has become a partnership that has raised \$17.6 million over the years.

This year, it was wonderful to see District 10 Operations Manager Allan Rankin and his father Jimmy present the 2017 cheque of \$1,711,604.22 on live television. Jimmy has been involved in raising money for the Good Friday Appeal for more than 50 years, and we know there are countless more men and women throughout CFA just like Jimmy.

The Good Friday Appeal involvement is an example of the many ways CFA brigades, volunteers and staff engage with the community. (see page 15 for more about this year's Good Friday Appeal).

At the MCG as part of the country game, Essendon versus Geelong, a sea of yellow paraded around the ground as part of National Volunteer Week. This was a wonderful presentation of our volunteers at a nationally-televised event, with one volunteer operating the air-raid siren as the Bombers' players entered the ground.

Outside, a team of CFA people presented home fire safety messages to a large audience at Australia's greatest sporting stadium.

CFA plays an important role beyond fighting fires. Whether running education programs at schools, taking on rescue roles at accidents or participating in fundraising events for other organisations, our CFA brigades always put the needs of their communities first.

We perform tasks and engage with communities at so many different levels and everyone who is part of CFA should feel proud.

## ACTING DEPUTY CHIEF OFFICER



## Gregg Paterson

**Our Chief Officer made a strategic decision to move the learning and development team into the Fire and Emergency Management (F&EM) directorate to ensure that front-line service delivery was the focus for all F&EM portfolios.**

Charged with implementing this change, I'm extremely proud of our training team for the way it has embraced this direction at state, regional and district level.

A key commitment of our Learning Action Plan is "front-line learning develops confident, safely-trained CFA members ready to perform critical roles aligned to risk and the Chief Officer's service delivery priorities". We need to provide up-to-date, relevant and timely training and assessment. Effective immediately, training materials for strike team leaders, crew leaders, incident controllers (Level 1), maintaining safety at an incident, suppressing wildfire, AIMS 4 and low structure will be reviewed and updated to ensure they reflect current CFA operational requirements. They will then be placed online.

We will make sure CFA offers access to training at times and locations suitable for most CFA members. In early 2017, we changed the way we identified front-line training priorities. The introduction of 'bottom driven' training plans that reflect what our brigades, groups, districts and regions need, when and where they want it, and how many people they want trained, has given us an overview of training priorities. The focus for training delivery for the 2017-18 financial year will be based on these priorities. On- and off-road driving, first-aid, breathing apparatus training and low structure training are common priorities across the state.

Other key focuses will be to reduce training course cancellations, and introduce digital learning that supports flexible, blended learning and improved member satisfaction. The imminent launch of our CFA Learning Management System, the Learning Hub, will support this. It will replace TRAIN, web TRAIN and Training Online Portal. The Learning Hub will be able to host online course content and provide greater reporting functionality. Members can access the hub by logging on to Brigades Online.

To ensure that CFA members' skills and experience are recognised, respected and used to improve engagement and satisfaction, we have also started to implement two key projects that will deliver:

- improved Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) with an initial focus on strike team leaders and sector commanders
- empowerment to volunteer trainers, assessors, facilitators, coaches and mentors so they can deliver and support active learning and improve the opportunities to develop all CFA people
- formal transition from historical Australian Fire Competencies to the Public Safety Training Packages.

I'm excited about the implementation of these initiatives and I look forward to your feedback.



## ASSISTANT CHIEF OFFICER North West Region



# Gavin Thompson

**What a busy six months it's been for the team in the north-west. Thank you to all our members for their outstanding support over the prolonged 2016-17 Fire Danger Period.**

The season presented a number of challenges for brigades after the early spring rain across the region caused excessive growth in the grassland and crops, and we dealt with an increased number of incidents, especially in the Mallee. With the increased crops came a large number of header fires. Across District 18 alone, there were more than 25 header fires. Work continues with the Community Safety team and Victorian Farmers Federation to see how we can best use current information and trends to reduce the number of these fires next season.

If the fires weren't enough, many brigades supported communities following extensive flooding in districts 2, 18 and 20 over spring. Then there was an extreme storm in the Sunraysia area that kickstarted our summer campaign. Many firefighters and members in support roles were involved in both incidents.

Like most CFA members, I was recently reminded just how dangerous this job can be, when four firefighters were injured in a structure fire in Sale. This highlights the dangers our firefighters face on a daily basis. As we move into the colder months, there's a higher likelihood our people will be responding to structure fires. Remember, everyone comes home. Train hard, so when you have to turn out your training kicks in.

In the past few months, both the State Urban and Rural Championships have been held. Once again, the Urban Championships were held in Bendigo and there was a solid contingent of North West Region brigades competing. With the championships being decided with the last run of the champion fours, it definitely maintained the interest to the very end. Congratulations to Maryvale for once again being state champions. Better luck next year to Kangaroo Flat – I reckon you can get them.

The Rural Championships were held in Wodonga in early April, and a number of brigades from across North West Region competed in both the senior and junior events. Our brigades competed fiercely and secured some wins. Well done to all teams, especially the Sedgwick A junior team which finished third in the race to be the champion team. We look forward to hosting the Rural Championships in Bendigo in 2019.

A number of events were held to celebrate National Volunteer Week this year between Monday 8 and Sunday 14 May. I would like to thank all CFA volunteers for their dedication, passion and commitment to CFA and their communities. I would also like to extend these thoughts to all CFA volunteers and staff, both operational and support. Together we are an amazing team and we should never lose sight of that. Remember, it's all about CFA people delivering CFA services to the community.

## OPERATIONS MANAGER District 17



# Dale Russell

**I've had a busy time overseeing the many activities taking place in District 17, and I'd like to tell you about some of the highlights.**

In March, we ran a practical training day for women, the third year this event that has been run for female volunteers and staff. It has now become part of the district's ongoing training schedule. It began as a District 17 initiative and has developed across West Region as a full-day forum to:

- talk about how CFA can be proactive in contributing to positive change to attract, support and retain female members
- explore myths and legends about why women join CFA
- discuss the development of district-based women's reference groups
- share stories and enjoy time networking with each other.

In the 2016-17 fire season, we formally established the District 17 Aviation Unit to better support the increasing use of firefighting aircraft. The unit responds to the needs of the regional district officer or incident controller, with volunteers being activated on high-risk days. Airbases were established at Horsham, Edenhope and Nhill, and two further airbases are being considered.

Twenty-four volunteer CFA crew members were trained to load the bombers. Air support for District 17 usually comes from the Stawell airbase which can mean turnaround times close to two hours in the west of the district. Using the closest airbase for reloading reduces this time to a matter of minutes which means that small fires remain small.

For the first time in the Wimmera, fixed-wing aircraft were based at Nhill for five weeks over the harvest period. Following a successful application for an Emergency Management Victoria grant, a permanent water supply will be set up at the Nhill aerodrome. This provides another vital form of fire protection for the Wimmera.

This past summer saw districts 16 and 17 pilot a number of successful harvest fire workshops. District 17 Headquarters Brigade Captain and retired farmer Kevin Bolwell, developed the pilot. It involved sharing information about mechanics, weather conditions, tiers of emissions, heat sources, the *Voluntary Grain Harvesting Guide*, recommended practices for operators, property owners' responsibilities, insurance and harvest fire planning. These workshops have been well received and a DVD has been developed. Also, work has been done to roll out these workshops across the state next summer.

Once again, emergency services across the Wimmera have continued to strengthen their partnership over the summer, with joint pre-summer community meetings, support in incident control during floods and fire and readiness days at the Horsham Incident Control Centre.

# Toxic plume modelling



PHOTO: STEVE CROCKER, MFB

**In Victoria, CFA is leading the development of a toxic plume modelling capability to predict the downwind dispersion of chemicals and smoke from incidents.**

This work mainly focuses on dispersion of chemicals released from hazmat or chemical, biological or radiological (CBR) incidents, as well as smoke from structure and non-structure fires such as tyre and rubbish tip fires.

Plume modelling brings together a range of information including chemical properties, topography, building data and high-resolution gridded weather forecasts. Using this data and information about the release (size, chemical type, duration) the system calculates how the substance disperses downwind.



The software helps to answer some key questions: where is the plume likely to go?; when is it likely to get there?; which areas will be most affected? See the chemical model example, above.

In addition, if detailed source information is available about the chemical and the release, modelling can also provide expected concentrations such as air quality exposure standards, explosive limits and odour thresholds.

This information will help an incident controller manage the plume hazard and helps with decision making around:

- community warnings for Shelter Indoors or Evacuation
- equipment placement on the fireground
- the location of staging and rehab areas
- deployment of atmospheric monitoring equipment. As models are a prediction, they should always be validated by atmospheric monitoring as soon as possible.

At a recent incident involving a ruptured natural gas main, plume modelling was used to provide guidance on the dispersion of the leaking gas, and helped to determine the immediate hazard area and isolation requirements. This was validated against results from onsite measurements.

The odour threshold model was particularly useful because it showed that, although there was a smell of gas in a wide area, there was no danger to the community. This prevented any unnecessary evacuations, which would have presented a greater health risk and disruption to the community than the incident itself.

The plume modelling service is available through the on-call scientific officer, who can be contacted through the rostered duty officer. For more information about the Plume Modelling Project and its services, go to CFA Online > Fire & Emergencies > Specialist Response, or email Darren Simon: [d.simon@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:d.simon@cfa.vic.gov.au)



# The sound of rescue

**Wildfire Instructor Tony Scicluna's office in District 12's Seymour HQ is much like any other. Maps of the local terrain are at the ready, spread across desks. A coffee cup sits next to dozens of encyclopedia-thick training manuals.**

A sombre reminder of Tony's decades of service sits behind his desk, adorning the wall in a quote from a survivor of a 2009 Black Saturday fire: "I knew help was coming when I heard the chainsaws in the distance".

"This quote was said to me by a badly-burned resident after a few CFA vols and I spent hours on the Sunday morning cutting our way towards his property," said Tony.

"He told me he was in a state of shock and despair and, when he heard the chainsaws, it lifted his spirits and kept him positive until we got to him hours later.

"I'll never forget that moment."

That incident was one of the driving forces behind Tony's commitment to chainsaw crosscut training, and CFA now has two chainsaw training trailers for statewide use.

Together with his Wildfire Instructor colleagues Mike Evans from Colac (pictured), Geordie Akeroyd from Bairnsdale and DCO Operations Training Gregg Paterson, Tony recently filmed a video with one of the new trailers.

"Our aim is to build the CFA chainsaw capability across the state," said Tony.



PHOTO: NICOLE MATEJIC

With chainsaw operator training and train-the-trainer training available to brigades, Gregg emphasised that Mike, Geordie and Tony were subject matter experts brigades could draw on.

To find out more about booking chainsaw training for your brigade, contact your local district HQ.

To watch Tony, Geordie and Mike's video, go to YouTube and search for 'CFA chainsaw training trailers'.

STORY NICOLE MATEJIC

## Victorian Senior of the Year Awards

**The Victorian Senior of the Year Awards acknowledge older Victorians who volunteer to assist, support and encourage others in their communities.**

There are a number of award categories recognising seniors as mentors, educators, role models, leaders, or behind-the-scenes workers.

The categories are:

**Premier's Award for Victorian Senior of the Year** to an individual for an outstanding contribution to their local community and Victoria.

**Promotion of Multiculturalism Award** to an individual for a significant contribution to promoting the benefits of cultural diversity in the community.

**Healthy and Active Living Award** to an individual for helping to create active and healthy communities through community involvement and as a role model.

**Veteran Community Award** to an individual for an exceptional

contribution to the veteran community. The recipient of the award doesn't need to be a veteran.

**Council on the Ageing (COTA) Victorian Senior Achiever Awards** to individuals for significant contributions to local communities in Victoria.

**The Age-Friendly Victoria Award** recognises an organisation for creating age-friendly communities, promoting active ageing and improving quality of life and inclusion for older people.

The 2017 awards will be presented in October at a ceremony at Government House.

You can nominate a member of your brigade until 23 June 2017 by contacting Roz Long in the Volunteer Sustainability team (email: [r.long@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:r.long@cfa.vic.gov.au) or phone **9262 8211**).

If you want more information about the awards, contact Seniors Information Victoria on 1300 135 090, email [askcota@cotavic.org.au](mailto:askcota@cotavic.org.au) or visit [seniorsonline.vic.gov.au](http://seniorsonline.vic.gov.au)



PHOTO: MITCHEMETT

# Burn camps: learning by doing

**CFA planned burn training camps or burn camps have been running since 2013. Planned burning is the controlled use of fire under carefully-managed conditions to reduce fuel and so reduce the intensity of a bushfire.**

Burn camps are run on a range of sites across the state and provide flexible, practical planned burning training, experience and qualifications. At the camps, volunteers gain vital experience and are mentored by a team of experienced instructors. Planned burning participation and training are recorded in CFA systems, such as WebTrain, and recorded in field evidence booklets.

The partnership approach to CFA burn camps strengthens inter-agency relationships, and facilitates the transfer of knowledge and skills resulting in flow-on benefits for fire suppression, planned burning and strategic reduction of bushfire risk to communities.

Burn camps are also designed for volunteers and staff to gain training, experience and practice in AIIMS (incident management team) roles such as:

- operations – incident controller/burn controller role, sector commander, drip torch leader (ignition commander), drip torch member (ignition crew), staging area manager
- public information – community liaison, media officer
- logistics – facilities and catering, supply officer, medical support, safety officer
- planning – intelligence, mapping, resources, fire behaviour analyst, management support, ground observer.

CFA scheduled six burn camps for 2017 and, despite some wet weather, a lot has been achieved to improve CFA members' skills in planned burning activities.

CFA's South East Region ran its first burn training camp at the end of March on the Mornington Peninsula. The camp was an inter-agency event run in conjunction with Mornington Peninsula Shire Council, Parks Victoria and the Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning.

CFA Vegetation Management Officer for South East Region Gareth George led a team to plan the camp and the fuel reduction and

ecological planned burns on private land, crown foreshore and shire reserves.

During the camp, participants learned about fire ecology and how burn planning incorporates biodiversity and environmental values. At the planned burn sites, participants learned about hazardous tree assessment and undertook overall fuel hazard assessments and fuel moisture sampling.

Craig Aiton, a CFA volunteer with Langwarrin Fire Brigade said, "It was great to go out to the burn sites to learn about the very important role of fuel moisture content, and to see firsthand the contrast between what's involved in fire suppression and planned burning."

Highlights for Mark Rowe of the Mornington Peninsula Shire Fire Crew were "learning about the benefits of fire to local biodiversity, and the opportunity to get to know a whole lot of people and the fire roles within different organisations".

The staging area for the Mornington Peninsula burn camp was run by Mt Martha Fire Brigade and was an opportunity for new and existing CFA staging area managers to practise their roles.

Staging Area Manager and Rye brigade member Ruth Aeschlimann thought the burn camp was an ideal opportunity for her brigade members to train and practise in a controlled, mentored environment. "Much better than learning while running a staging ground at a bushfire!"

CFA North East Region held a planned burn training camp at Shelley at the beginning of April, which was attended by 52 volunteers and staff (see photo, above). There were three days of intensive planned burn activities.

Participants were placed in teams and then rotated through a series of planned burning activities including burn plan development; planned burn complexity ratings; site preparation; natural values and asset protection; overall fuel hazard assessment; fuel moisture assessment; cultural heritage; vegetation laws; control line construction and rehabilitation; traditional burning practices; and ignition approval procedure.

Participants also had the opportunity to inspect sites burnt a week ago, a year ago and two years ago to see how the vegetation and fuel hazard had recovered.







PHOTO: PENNY RICHARDS

### Bushfire partnership still delivering

A proactive bushfire prevention partnership developed between CFA and Gippsland Community Correctional Services continues to deliver results.

The Community Work Program, which won a Fire Awareness Award, was established to support brigades and local land managers prepare sites for planned burning in and around the Latrobe Valley. VicRoads, Latrobe City Council and landowners have all benefited from this bushfire prevention work and, following its success across the Latrobe Valley, it has been expanded to Bairnsdale and neighbouring areas.

The Community Work Program has also expanded its scope to include other vegetation management works and manual bushfire fuel removal to protect at-risk communities and locations where planned burns may not be possible.

“The valuable work of the partnership creates planned burn control lines by manually removing and managing vegetation in targeted locations across the region,” said CFA Vegetation Management Officer John Crane.

“This program has delivered in excess of \$250,000 of labour in kind, assisting our brigades with excellent bushfire prevention outcomes. In return, CFA offers education and training to the participants.”

The camp was a huge success with participants posting positive comments on the Shelley Burn Camp Facebook page such as, “I didn’t appreciate how much work went on in the background to plan a controlled burn before this” and “best training I’ve ever done”.

For more information about burn camps, contact your local CFA vegetation management officer. For more information about planned burning, go to [cfa.vic.gov.au/about/planned-burns/](http://cfa.vic.gov.au/about/planned-burns/) and [cfaonline.cfa.vic.gov.au/mycfa/Show?pagelD=intraPlannedBurning](http://cfaonline.cfa.vic.gov.au/mycfa/Show?pagelD=intraPlannedBurning)

STORY PENNY RICHARDS

# Assessing brigade viability

**For many years, we’ve measured the health of brigades by focusing on operational preparedness and response. But, as we develop our understanding of risk, we know it’s much more than that.**

Leadership, changing communities, prevention activities and the wellbeing of our people are just a few of the factors impacting service delivery. But how do we measure our strengths, risks and limitations? Over the past three years, CFA has developed a Brigade Viability Indicator tool (BVI) to do just that.

The tool was developed by the South East Region Brigade Sustainability pilot team and operations managers in 2014 and trialled in other regions in 2015. Since then, there have been major improvements.

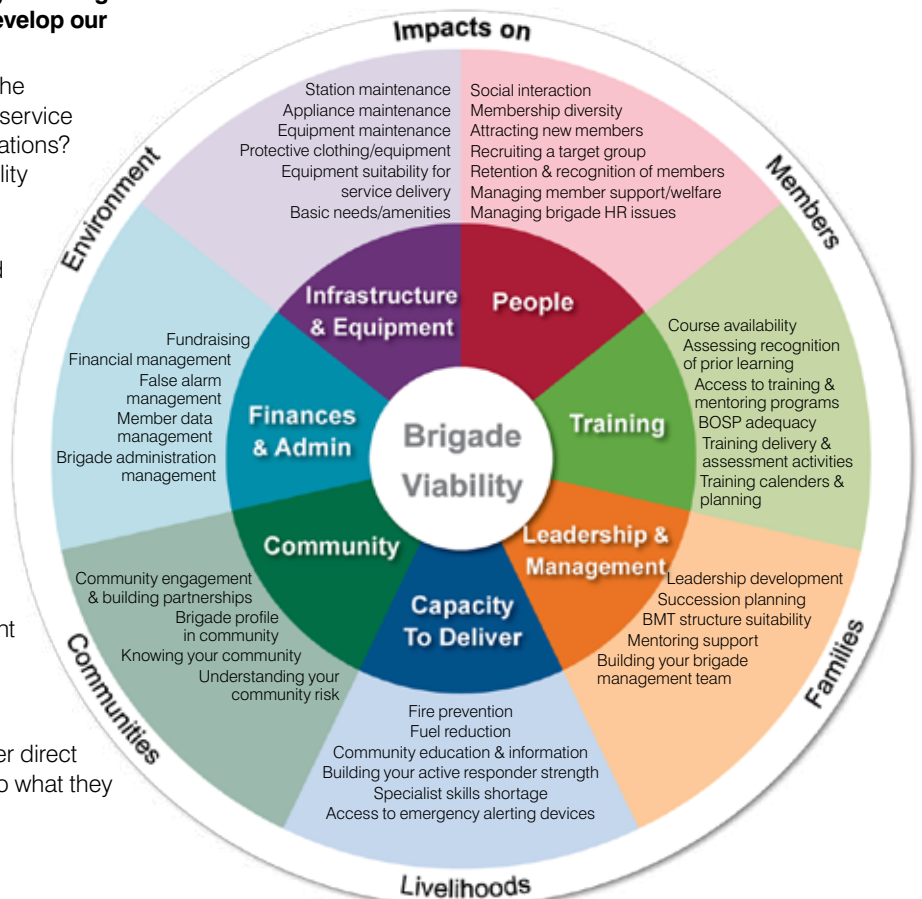
There has been a comprehensive review of all questions by operations and functional teams, and testing of questions with selected brigades and catchment teams. We are developing a user-friendly, web-based portal, and looking at a number of reporting tools to ensure the results are meaningful to the audience. There will also be a robust evaluation process.

Such is the focus on the urgent need to improve this part of CFA business that Chief Officer Steve Warrington recently said, “It is my view that this [BVI] tool will become one of the most significant drivers of change we have seen in CFA for a long time”.

The BVI tool will help us capture the essence of what makes a brigade viable by pinpointing strengths, risks and limitations associated with our brigades. In turn, this will help CFA to better direct resources to help brigades mitigate risk and empower them do what they do best – serve their communities.

The BVI is expected to roll out later this year.

STORY KERRY LAURIE



# The importance of cultural diversity



PHOTO: MERLINDA MERSON

**CFA was again proud to sponsor and participate in Cultural Diversity Week in late March. Cultural Diversity Week brings together Victorians from all walks of life to promote community, harmony and celebrate the many cultures that make our state so vibrant.**

As part of the celebrations, the Victorian Multicultural Commission hosted the Multicultural Festival at Federation Square. This year CFA had a joint display with MFB, SES, Surf Life Saving Victoria and the Department of Justice, who all provided valuable community safety information.

The area was buzzing with activities with a Bayswater Fire Brigade truck on display, entertainment and fire safety messages from April and Captain Koala, and the kids could sit in Little Pat the fire truck.

CFA also supported and participated in various local activities across the state, including the Harmony Festivals in Ballarat and Dandenong.

Cultural Diversity Week is always a wonderful opportunity for CFA to showcase what we do in the community and our commitment to embracing and encouraging diversity among our members. We know that greater diversity in CFA will improve our performance, our ability to innovate and, ultimately, the safety of Victorian communities.

CFA continues to take significant steps in the areas of diversity and inclusion, and is developing an inclusion and fairness plan and establishing state and regional advisory councils.

The state council will be chaired by the Chief Officer and comprises Organisational Leadership Team members and CFA member representatives with recognised subject-matter expertise. The council will draw on external guidance and support where appropriate.

It will make sure CFA develops, implement and monitor organisation-wide inclusion and diversity goals, action plans and performance measures.

The council will empower CFA to become an inclusive organisation and ensure that diversity and inclusion are recognised as being central to the protection of lives and property.

If you're interested in learning more about the work of the CFA Diversity Council, email: [diversityandinclusion@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:diversityandinclusion@cfa.vic.gov.au)

## **FIREY'S RESEARCH INSPIRES CHANGE**

Diversity and inclusion research will contribute to organisational development at CFA. Morwell Station Officer Alex Batty (pictured right) is in the final stages of his PhD into diversity and inclusion in emergency service organisations – findings he hopes will help guide diversity and inclusion in CFA.

For the past three years, Alex has conducted research into diversity and inclusion best practice, interviewed a range of career and volunteer emergency service members with various backgrounds, and investigated the current and historic CFA culture.

"Much of my research has highlighted strong benefits in building brigades that reflect the communities they serve, both in gender and cultural background," Alex said.

"Advantages include enabling firefighters to more easily build trust with community members at incidents and increasing positive outcomes with fire safety education.

"While we do have a lot of work to do, CFA has already made significant changes and improvements in relation to enhancing diversity and inclusion," Alex said.

"A recent example was that we recruited more women as career firefighters than ever before to our courses last year, with eight and 10 women graduating from two consecutive courses when previously only two or three women would be part of this training.

"My research will help CFA continue this momentum in formalising processes and policies to ensure we're well equipped to support a range of people in developing their skills and experience to excel as volunteers and career staff."

STORY GEORGINA HILL AND BRIE SNARE





# CFA raises \$1.7m for the kids



PHOTO: MELINDA MERSON

Victorians of all ages enjoyed the CFA display at this year's Kids Day Out festival on Good Friday, while raising valuable funds for The Royal Children's Hospital.

The young and the young-at-heart climbed aboard Bayswater Fire Brigade's tanker, tested their sea legs with the Coast Guard's marine rescue vessel, and picked up valuable fire safety advice from our team on board the mobile education bus.

Family photos in Little Pat the fire truck and Little Lex the helicopter were popular, and visitors danced along to the tunes of our very own Red Austins band.

Captain Koala was also kept busy answering phones, taking a quick health check in the Teddy Bears' Hospital (luckily his heart was strong) and starring in the Home Fire Safety Show with CFA volunteer April Himmelreich.

CFA is extremely proud of its 68-year history with the hospital, which has raised \$17,605,662. This year, District 10 Operations Manager Allan Rankin and his father Jimmy presented a cheque for \$1,711,604.22 during the live telecast.

"It was a great privilege and honour for my dad and me to present this incredible cheque on behalf of all the dedicated and committed CFA members and their brigades across the state, who work tirelessly to make this total possible," said Allan.

"Well done, thank you and congratulations to all involved."

STORY MELINDA MERSON

## Juniors' service recognition

Following requests from our members and VFBV to consider the recognition of Junior service as part of the total length of members' service, CFA investigated the issue. As a result, CFA has changed the way members with Junior service receive recognition.

The CFA Honours & Awards Committee and CFA Board Chair Greg Smith are pleased to announce that the total length of Junior service will now be retrospectively recognised for the purposes of CFA's Service and Life Membership awards.

Since 1 April 2017, current members who have accurate CFA Junior membership records in CFA's RMS database will have their Junior service recognised as eligible service for CFA Service and Life Membership awards.

This important change ensures CFA has a consistent approach to recognising the significant contribution our members make within different tiers of the organisation.

For more information about CFA honours and awards, search for 'honours and awards' on CFA Online/Brigades Online. If you have any questions or feedback, email: [cfa-awards@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:cfa-awards@cfa.vic.gov.au) or phone 9262 8842.

STORY BELINDA GILLESPIE



PHOTO: KEITH PAKENHAM

# The changing landscape of volunteering

**As our way of life changes, the way we volunteer is changing too, presenting both challenges and opportunities for CFA and other emergency service organisations.**

New research by the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC has identified four key forces that are reshaping how people volunteer: changing lifestyles and values and the changing nature of work; the impact of new communications technology; greater private sector involvement; and growing government expectations of and intervention in the voluntary sector.

Emergency management organisations are aware of this shift in the volunteering environment and its impacts and, in some instances, are already responding to opportunities. There's evidence and impetus to shift away from a reliance on traditional, structured volunteering models, to models that are more adaptive and inclusive of newer and diverse volunteering styles.

The research has informed key national initiatives and was used extensively to develop the National Spontaneous Volunteer Strategy by the Australia and New Zealand Emergency Management Committee. The strategy provides advice to emergency service agencies on best practice principles, as well as what they need to be aware of, and what

they need to consider and plan for when working with spontaneous volunteers – people who offer help following an emergency who may not be part of a volunteer organisation. Important issues such as legal obligations and social media are also covered, with the work of the research team integral to the strategy's content.

Building on this, the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience is drawing directly on the research to develop a new handbook about spontaneous volunteer management. The handbook will provide important guidance for organisations on how to incorporate the principles of the National Spontaneous Volunteer Strategy and the most recent research on spontaneous volunteering, into their own plans and procedures.

The next stage of the study will focus on supporting the capacity for emergency services to move from the tradition of command and control, to fostering the internal change required to embrace less traditional styles of volunteering.

Find out more about this research at [bnhrc.com.au/hazardnotes/27](http://bnhrc.com.au/hazardnotes/27)

STORY NATHAN MADDOCK

## Using CFA's photo collection

CFA's official image gallery CFA Pix was recently upgraded to make it easier to search and download images.

You can use the images in many ways, such as:

- training
- post-incident analysis and investigation
- recruitment
- community safety campaigns
- social media
- publications.

CFA Pix can now create themes or categories for files and showcase specific topics depending on the time of year, for example, electrical fires in the lead-up to winter.

All new and current subscribers need to sign up to the new version of CFA Pix at <http://cfapix.com.au>

If you have any photos that might be useful for us to store on CFA Pix, email Keith Pakenham: [k.pakenham@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:k.pakenham@cfa.vic.gov.au)





# Spotlight on FIRS

**In 1997 CFA established a call-taking service to collect data about incidents attended by our brigades. This database is called the Fire and Incident Reporting System or FIRS, and the friendly team that runs FIRS is ready to take your calls from 8am until 11pm, seven days a week.**

The call centre now caters for CFA, SES Victoria, Tasmanian Fire Service and Grassland Curing, and recently took over the Volunteer Enquiry Line.

The information gathered in FIRS reports can be displayed in many ways – map overlays, by report tables, by incident type, dates, and locations – and CFA uses it in many important ways including:

- occurrences, distribution and causes of incidents
- strategy development and resource allocation
- risk assessment and management
- incident avoidance
- development of fire safety programs
- development of fire safety legislation and codes
- performance monitoring
- recording individuals' and brigades' attendance at incidents.

We also use some of the data in every issue of *Brigade* magazine in the incident summary on page 3.

It's important for our members to understand how critical it is to gather as much information as possible at the scene. CFA uses this data to report to government and other agencies as part of our legislative responsibilities, and commitment to working with the sector to reduce the likelihood, effect and consequences of emergencies.

One team leader, Kylie Fisher, started with CFA as a volunteer firefighter then became a call taker in the FIRS team. Kylie said the best part about being a call taker is engaging with firefighters and forming relationships.

"We pride ourselves on being a call centre based on connecting with our callers," Kylie said.

"Our call takers come from all over Victoria, some are volunteer firefighters and a few are aiming to get into career firefighting. But all of them are friendly people who love CFA."

Kylie works alongside fellow Team Leader Trish Swanson who joined the organisation in 2016. Trish is passionate about expanding the department and aims to reach out to volunteer and career firefighters to help shape the future system.

"The data collected by our callers provides us with information to make evidence-based decisions," Trish said.

"We're looking at many different options to increase productivity, data integrity, customer service and project management.

"We want our callers to know how important they are and that there are many different avenues to get in contact with us and provide feedback to help improve our processes."

The FIRS email is managed by the whole team, and the team leaders' email addresses can be used for feedback and tricky enquiries. If you have a confidential issue, you can email the team leaders.

"We aim to take all feedback as an opportunity for change, so we're asking callers to let us know how we can make their experience even better," Trish said.

The call centre is working on brigade visits and training.

"We would love for all our callers to have the opportunity to visit us at the call centre, ask any questions and learn about what we do," said Trish. "We're pushing for a big change in how we capture data which will improve decision making across CFA."

If you need to log a report with FIRS, aim to call within 14 days of the incident to ensure you remember all the details and we meet our legislative responsibility.

FIRS can be very busy between 9am and 12pm on Sunday so, if you can't get through, leave a message with your preferred call back time and we'll get back to you.

If you have any questions or enquiries email: [firs@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:firs@cfa.vic.gov.au). To contact the team leaders, email [firs-supervisor@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:firs-supervisor@cfa.vic.gov.au)

STORY NICOLE RUSSO



# Our Inspire Award nominees

The Victorian Inspire Awards, an initiative of the Funds in Court (of the Supreme Court of Victoria), recognise people with a disability who are well respected in their field of work/interest and community. In this second year of the awards, a category was created especially for CFA members. Here is the winner and the nominees for the Best Achievement Award in the Country Fire Authority.

ALL STORIES BY LEITH HILLARD

## ROBYN MCKEAN – WINNER

Being a Juniors leader, cleaning the station, buying food and drinks, making lunch and snacks, fundraising, being on the Santa Run... You name a support role and Greendale brigade member Robyn McKean has been in on it.

She joined the brigade in 2001 and was immediately welcomed by the “great bunch”, but her participation has also filled a hole left by the end of her career in one-on-one aged home care.

Robyn was born with the hereditary condition Spastic Familial Paraparesis which adversely affects her mobility and is degenerative. A fall at work meant the end of the caring job she loved, but she redoubled her volunteering and Greendale brigade is the beneficiary.

Robyn was nominated for the Inspire Award by Greendale 3rd Lieutenant Donna Zabinkas

“Robyn took on the role of being one of

our two Junior leaders in 2007 and still performs this role,” said Donna. “She’s dedicated many hours to helping with the training of the youth, attending to their needs and supporting their activities and being an excellent role model for them.”

Again, it’s a role Robyn loves. “I like being with the kids and seeing how they’re growing with us,” she said. “I always hope they’ll continue with us.

Robyn usually gets around with a walking frame at home and crutches everywhere else, but knows she will be in a wheelchair one day.

“The brigade gives me something positive to do and the Santa Run is the highlight of the year. I sit in the cab of the truck and get to see the kids in the street with their eyes all lit up when we hand out lolly bags.

“If we can do something to make a difference, then that’s what it’s all about.”



## GREG MALLETT

Four years ago everything changed dramatically when, over just nine weeks, Clonbinane Fire Brigade member Greg went from having full vision to only being able to tell day from night. The previously undiagnosed diabetes-linked condition clogged the blood vessels in his retinas and caused them to die off with scar tissue forming.

“It was very aggressive,” said Greg. “I had six surgeries across those nine weeks but [his sight] was gone.”

Greg was determined to keep up his job as chief engineer at Accor Hotels, but how would he get from Broadford to St Kilda in Melbourne every day? Enter Vision Australia.

Greg’s wife Tracey – who he met at Broadford brigade – put him on the train for the one hour 40 minute trip each day to Southern Cross Station. There he was met by a Vision Australia mobility officer who taught Greg how to get off the train and on the tram amid the noise and chaos of rush hour.

“Six months in I was made redundant, but early retirement meant I wanted to do more with CFA,” continued Greg. “I wanted to stay involved.”

Greg trained for a role in the Seymour Incident Control Centre and once again Vision Australia got involved, helping Greg navigate the train to Seymour and his way around the District 12 office.

Operations Manager Rob van Dorsser nominated Greg for the award and is hugely impressed by his contribution and the difference it’s making to the incident management team.

“I see it as a measure of Greg’s character that, despite the newness of his disability, he has been able to find a way to contribute to the community in a positive way again,” said Rob. “Comms can be a hard-to-fill role so he’s really filling a need.”

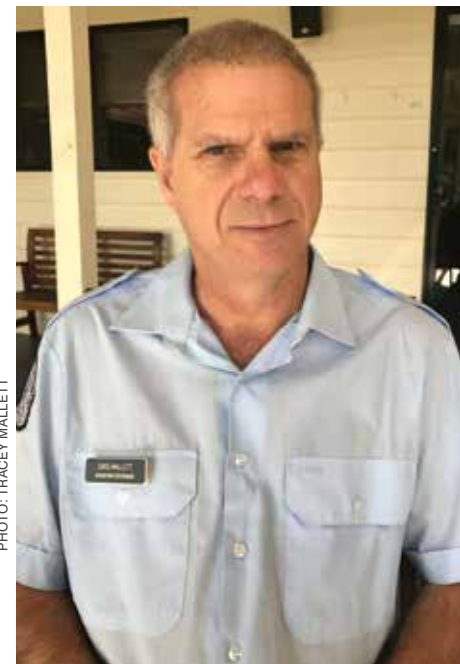


PHOTO: TRACEY MALLETT



## ROSEY CHESTER

Six years after Rosey Chester was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis (MS) she joined Alexandra Fire Brigade. Both her boys had started primary school and, when asked to join, "I was unable to step backwards quickly enough".

Rosey admitted she's not very good at saying no, and so her job became to take all group radio traffic 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Her first day in the role was a Total Fire Ban. During her first seven years, she kept a log of radio traffic for all Alexandra Group trucks and had to stay within hearing distance of the fixe radio.

"It was difficult to even go outside," said Rosey.

One challenge she takes in her stride, however, is MS.

"I don't consider myself disabled," she said, "merely seriously inconvenienced at times. Having MS has put life in perspective. My long-suffering husband Chris seems to be able to find a solution to every challenge. "He and my two sons Lecks and Ben are extremely supportive and my priorities are family first."

MS is increasingly affecting Rosey's mobility and flexibility. She has to use two hands on the portable radio transceiver and the shakes come and go. She wears splints indoors that bend at the knees and rides a scooter outdoors, and is also often in a wheelchair.

Rosey has now served the Alexandra Fire Brigade and her community for 19 years and is the second-longest-serving comms officer in the Alexandra Group.

"The most significant event over this time was the Black Saturday fires when about half our group area was burnt out," continued Rosey. "I was so proud of our firefighters and our community. Life is still now split up into before and after Black Saturday.

"My role now is mainly listening in to events to make sure everything is running smoothly and reporting any concerns to the group officer. Occasionally, for big jobs, I'll become the radio operator."



PHOTO: CHRIS CHESTER



PHOTO: MARK CHRISTIE

## RACHEL CHRISTIE

Growing up with parents who operated the Clyde Fire Brigade base radio, Rachel Christie "got sucked into Juniors at 11".

"At 18, I was invincible," she recalled, "but then Mum found me unconscious at home. I'd had flu-like symptoms but Mum found herself performing first-aid on me and I was rushed to Dandenong Hospital."

Rachel was placed on life support and given only a 25 per cent chance of surviving the first 24 hours. She was in an induced coma for two and a half weeks and was diagnosed with one of the first cases of meningococcal in Victoria.

"I lost both legs mid-shin and the tips of six fingers," said Rachel. "Rehab was a long process – occupational therapy, physiotherapy twice a day, building up muscle and getting used to prosthetics.

"I got out of rehab after five months and I remember it well. It was a 40 degree day with a major fire at the Cranbourne Botanic Gardens. I was answering phones at the station that day and thought, 'This is my home'."

Since then, Rachel has moved in leaps and bounds. In 2000, she moved to Cranbourne Fire Brigade and helped establish its Junior Development Program. She works as a radio operator in an incident management team and offers general operational support.

She met her now-husband Mark in 2002 and they both helped run the Juniors program. They now have two children.

"I just don't see myself as having a disability," said Rachel, who is also a motivational speaker to high school students. She passes on a message of resilience to young people making major life decisions not only about further study and careers but also about alcohol, experimenting with drugs and driving.

"You can make the right decision. Make the most of what you have. I'd wanted to get into the police but then I couldn't pass the physical.

"Change direction; move on."





PHOTO: SUPPLIED BY DICK STEPHENSON

### DICK STEPHENSON

Late 2013 and Fentons Creek Captain Dick Stephenson was cleaning the fire station in preparation for the official handover of the brigade's new tanker when he "didn't feel right; the back of my head wasn't right".

It was the onset of a stroke.

"I called across to some neighbours," said Dick, "then lay down and put my feet up. They did first-aid and called for the ambo from St Arnaud.

"I was taken to Bendigo then had a helicopter ride to Melbourne that I know nothing about. I had a sleep for five weeks. I looked like dying and they wanted to use me for spare parts but my family said no."

This was followed by more than one-and-a-half years of rehabilitation, and Dick, now 55, is heading back for another stint to further improve his mobility.

His volunteering, however, hasn't flagged. Although he's stepped down as captain, he's now the brigade's safety officer and communications officer.

"I also mentor younger members," continued Dick. "I was asked if I wanted to be captain again but I said I had too much on."

While considering becoming a volunteer instructor, Dick has also been nominated by District 20 Operations Manager Peter Taylor to become a peer and he begins training later this year.

"I couldn't think of anyone more suited to the peer role," said Peter. "Dick has demonstrated repeatedly that he has the capacity to listen, respect others and empathise with others."

"The stroke is the best thing that's ever happened to me," said Dick.

"It got me off the grog, out of shearing and into my own earthmoving business with Dickie's digger. I've met a lot of really nice people and been given a second chance at life.

"The district office has been bloody magnificent and so have the brigade and the community."

### STEPHANIE HABIBIS

Stephanie Habibis is one of those elite CFA members who's been part of a brigade since the day she was born. With Mum Niki the captain of St Leonard – Indented Head for 12 years, Stephanie has always been included.

Steph has a mild intellectual disability, but this doesn't stop her from being an active contributor in her brigade. She's well known in her community because of her friendly and outgoing personality and her involvement in virtually all brigade activities.

She continues to grow and develop her leadership skills and has grown in confidence with the support of her fellow brigade members. And what would they do without her?

"I sweep the floor of the engine bay, make sure there's enough stuff like serviettes, sauce, cleaning items on the barbecue trailer," said Stephanie. "I like being responsible for getting ready to do the barbecues. It's my job to give out the drinks.

"I help with writing shopping lists and doing shopping. I help to wash the fire trucks. I put labels on things so people know where they go. People sometimes forget to do things, so I remind them that we need to do it."

Steph is a big fan of teamwork because jobs get done more easily. She particularly enjoys taking part in the annual Santa Run and the Good Friday Appeal for The Royal Children's Hospital.

"I like talking to people and representing the brigade," continued Stephanie. "I like doing good things for other people. I like handing out lollies to kids to make them happy. I collect money for the children's hospital to help the sick kids."

"Stephanie is an inspiration amongst the other brigade members," said John Fyfe, who nominated Stephanie, "and demonstrates that, if you have a passion for something, you can achieve anything."



PHOTO: NIKI HABIBIS



## Anthrax sheep burn

### Summary

In February 2017, Whittlesea Fire Brigade in District 14, attended a livestock burn involving anthrax. The crew was requested to support the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources (DEDJTR) by securing the burn and patrolling for spotting and fire outbreaks.

Although very few cases of anthrax have been reported in Victoria, it's important that all CFA members are aware of the risks and procedures before entering a property with anthrax.

### Overview

On 7 February at 6.31pm, the rostered duty officer (RDO) received a phone call from Agriculture Victoria requesting CFA attend a livestock burn. Because the burn was during the Fire Danger Period, a permit was issued and CFA attended to provide fire protection. A suitable area had been identified with limited vegetation surrounding it.

The RDO contacted the state duty officer (SDO) and the scientific officer for guidance and precautionary recommendations for the crew attending. The brigade was to stand a minimum 30 metres from the fire, upwind, wear P2 masks and to be only used for fire protection. The crew was also given decontamination instructions to follow before leaving the premises.

Whittlesea tankers 1 and 2 and the RDO arrived on the property at 7.47pm and were well informed and briefed of the situation and the risks before entering the property. The crew supervised the burn from a distance and, by 11.27pm, all carcasses had been destroyed. The crew then followed the decontamination procedure and returned to Whittlesea Fire Station.

### What is anthrax?

Anthrax is an infectious disease in animals caused by the spore-forming bacteria *Bacillus anthracis*. It can affect humans and a wide range of animals, though in Victoria almost all cases have been in cattle and sheep.

There are two types of anthrax that can affect humans: cutaneous anthrax and inhalation (pulmonary) anthrax.

A cutaneous anthrax infection enters your body through a cut or other sore on your skin. It's by far the most common route the disease takes. It's also the mildest. With appropriate treatment, cutaneous anthrax is rarely fatal. Signs and symptoms of cutaneous anthrax include a raised, itchy bump resembling an insect bite that quickly develops into a painless sore with a black centre, and swelling in the sore and nearby lymph gland.

Inhalation anthrax develops when you breathe in anthrax spores. It's the most deadly way to contract the disease and, even with treatment, is often fatal. Initial signs and symptoms of inhalation anthrax include flu-like symptoms such as sore throat, mild fever, fatigue and muscle aches which may last a few hours or days, mild chest discomfort, shortness of breath, nausea, coughing up blood and painful swallowing.

### When to see a doctor

For CFA members attending an anthrax-infected property, the risk of infection is very low unless you are handling or in close proximity to carcasses.

However, if you have any concerns or you have other medical issues that may make you more susceptible to infections, see a doctor immediately for evaluation and care. Early diagnosis and treatment are crucial.

### Lessons identified

Other recent livestock burns around the state have not been as successful. To ensure the safety of our members, the following should be considered.

- The RDO should notify VicFire if DEDJTR contacts CFA directly.
- The RDO should liaise with the DEDJTR and Agriculture Victoria representatives to ensure CFA member interests are taken into account when determining CFA's commitment.
- The RDO should contact the scientific officer for advice.
- The RDO should discuss the burn plan with the Agriculture Victoria infected premises site supervisor.
- The RDO should also advise the SDO.
- Communication between the RDO and brigade is vital, especially if plans change. This will allow the RDO to review the situation and help the brigade.
- A risk assessment must be carried out before entering the property. It's important to understand the risks and have a well-developed plan.
- Monitor the operation and adjust your strategy and tactics if required.
- CFA is a support agency at these incidents. Our role is to support the control agency by providing fire protection. CFA members must never come into contact with infected carcasses.

When working on anthrax-infected properties (and not coming into contact with carcasses) the following hygiene practices must be followed:

- All people should, as a minimum requirement, wear firefighting boots and bushfire personal protective clothing. When supervising the burning of anthrax-infected carcasses, a P2 mask should also be worn.
- All people should practise good hygiene, ensuring they thoroughly wash and disinfect hands and boots at the entry/exit points of the property.
- All vehicles that enter the infected property must be washed down before leaving the property.
- All the above must be undertaken in accordance with instructions from the Agriculture Victoria infected premises site supervisor.

### Conclusion

Anthrax burns occur from time to time and it's imperative that all brigade members (supported by the SDO, RDO and scientific officer) are aware of their role and responsibility, and that the agency conducting the burn understands CFA's level of commitment. The safety and welfare of CFA members is paramount.

# Springvale Commonwealth Bank fire

## Summary

In November 2016, a 21-year-old man walked into the Commonwealth Bank (CBA) in Springvale carrying a container of accelerant and set himself on fire at the entrance of the bank before running inside and squirting flammable liquid on the carpet. The fire quickly took hold, trapping around 50 people inside.

In total, 27 people were injured (six with serious burns, including the man allegedly responsible for the fire) and taken to the Alfred Hospital. An additional 21 people, including three children, were treated for smoke inhalation.

## Incident overview

On Friday 18 November 2016 at 11.32am, it was reported that a man was on fire in the Commonwealth Bank, an explosion had taken place and around 50 people were trapped inside. Springvale pumper arrived on scene within three minutes, closely followed by Dandenong pumpers 1 and 2, Victoria Police and Ambulance Victoria. The incident was further supported by the Springvale tanker, Noble Park pumper and Patterson River mobile communications vehicle.

The primary objective was to provide a safe egress for the occupants still trapped in the heavily smoke-logged building, provide first-aid treatment to the casualties and prevent further spread of fire.

To achieve this, two firefighters donned breathing apparatus (BA) and entered the building with 38mm hose in a Cleveland hose lay

configuration, dry chemical extinguishers and a thermal imaging camera. They were advised that electricity and gas would be difficult to isolate and they should consider both services live until told otherwise. The rest of the crew helped people escape from the bank to a location where triage was conducted for the injured.

Based on their familiarity with the area and previous premises inspections, the crew knew of a laneway which provided access to an open area at the rear of the building.

The Senior Station Officer from Springvale established a control point at the front of the building and tasked the Dandenong crew to the rear of the building where they could complete his 360 size-up.

An additional two firefighters in BA entered the building to help with the search and rescue.

Good communications between the BA teams and the casualty triage area allowed for quick extraction of people and an up-to-date understanding of the situation inside.

At 11.45am, the fire was declared under control. After completing a secondary search and the fire being deemed extinguished, the air was sampled to ensure the safety of anyone entering the bank not in BA.

The majority of the flame damage occurred in the entrance of the bank. However, the entire ground and first floors had extensive smoke damage though very little damage was caused by the water and foam used to put out the fire. At 12.26pm, control was transferred to the police.

## Lessons identified

The following contributed to the successful management of the incident:

- The first CFA pumper on scene established control outside the bank's entrance, ensuring effective and efficient deployment of crew and equipment. The main objective was to rescue occupants still inside the bank while providing medical aid to casualties. The strategy was an offensive internal attack using BA crew to suppress the fire and create a way out for those trapped inside.
- It was recognised that explosive devices may have been placed at the scene. While the alleged offender was in police custody, he was questioned to determine whether there was a risk of another explosion. The use of secondary devices is a common tactic in incidents overseas, and first responders need to be on the lookout for secondary attacks or explosions during deliberate attacks.
- The control was transferred from CFA to Victoria Police after the fire had been controlled because it was declared a crime scene. The briefing included the circumstances and the number of injured. The SMEACS briefing process was used to ensure all relevant information was passed on effectively.
- An emergency management team (EMT) was established early with CFA, Victoria Police, Ambulance Victoria and a Commonwealth Bank representative. The early establishment of an EMT is critical for information sharing and good decision making.
- The crew inside the bank provided regular situation reports while assisting casualties, allowing the crew outside to effectively lead casualties to the triage area.
- Thermal imaging cameras were used to find people still inside and identify hot spots in a heavily smoke-logged environment.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF VICTORIA POLICE





PHOTO: COURTESY OF VICTORIA POLICE

### Areas for improvement

- Response tables and wordback tables should be reviewed regularly to reflect support brigade capability and capacity.
- On initial response, CFA couldn't gain access to secure the area of the bank because there were two locked areas on the ground floor. Even though firefighters had good knowledge of the premises due to area familiarisation and premises inspections, CFA tools couldn't gain access to the rear area. Access was eventually gained using keys sourced from a CBA employee from another bank. When inspecting premises, it's important to discuss contingency plans with the occupants.

### Conclusion

CFA crews were faced with a difficult firefight because of the thick smoke, an alleged offender still on scene and the complexities of the premises. Control was effective and understood with good communications between CFA crews and supporting agencies. The early establishment of an EMT, good local knowledge and planning contributed to the successful management of this event. Crews inside the building were faced with scenes that training could not sufficiently prepare them for. They did an extraordinary job in difficult circumstances, using initiative and teamwork. This was a good example of inter-agency cooperation and emergency management.



PHOTO: COURTESY OF CHANNEL 7

## Kallista tree fall

### Summary

On 9 October 2016, a CFA firefighter was injured by a falling tree in Kallista in District 13. At the time of the incident, CFA was responding to a storm and supporting the SES. While Silvan Fire Brigade members were removing a fallen tree that was blocking a road, another tree fell which knocked one member unconscious and trapped him under the fallen tree.

### Incident overview

Silvan Fire Brigade was supporting SES following a large storm that had caused widespread damage across the Dandenongs in Victoria's east.

En route to the first job, a tree was cleared from Belgrave-Gembrook Road that had blocked their passage. Once they had cleared this tree they continued on towards Belgrave taking Grantulla Road. Travelling along Grantulla Road they came across another tree blocking the way which they also cleared. This tree was on an uphill slope above the road level and had fallen downhill over the road.

At around 3.25pm, after clearing the downed tree on Grantulla Road, an adjacent tree, less than one metre from the first came down on top of the chainsaw operator who was preparing to leave for another job in Belgrave. The tree that fell on the member was around 30 metres tall and had a trunk diameter of roughly 70 centimetres.

The crew leader was standing a short distance away and heard the thud of the tree landing. He turned around to see his crew member pinned under the trunk of the tree. He immediately went to help and transmitted a Mayday call. Kallista-The Patch tanker, Monbulk Rescue and Ambulance Victoria arrived shortly after and extracted the injured man from under the tree and transported him to hospital.

This member has since made a full recovery.



### Lessons identified

- Situational awareness appears to have been impacted by the workload placed on the crew. It's important for members to understand that a high workload may affect their ability to maintain situational awareness. During storms, individual fallen trees are often treated as separate jobs. This often leads to perceived pressure to respond to and clear them as quickly as possible. This can lead to rushing and losing situational awareness.
- It can be difficult to establish whether a tree's stability has been affected by a storm. When working around storm-affected trees, it's imperative that crews conduct an effective risk assessment of the area and work methodically through their tasks.

### Conclusion

The work required of CFA and SES during storms reduces the impact on communities. Our members, who are often part of the communities they serve, often feel pressured to assist beyond a level that is reasonable. During these times, details get missed and shortcuts are taken.

For the safety of the members and the community, it's vital to remain vigilant and think clearly.

This incident highlights the importance of situational awareness and good communications.

### More information

Safety First Alert No 31 *Hazardous Trees* January 2014

JSOP J08.02 – *Dynamic Risk Assessment*: <http://files.em.vic.gov.au/JSOP/SOP-J08.02.pdf>

JSOP J08.03 – *Tree hazard– bushfire response*: <http://files.em.vic.gov.au/JSOP/SOP-J08.03.pdf>

EMV *Safety Fact Sheet – Tree hazards*: <http://files.em.vic.gov.au/Safety/SFS.01.08.pdf>



PHOTOS: DARYL OWEN





## Reporting an injury, near miss or hazard

It's important for all staff and volunteers to report all injuries, near miss events and hazards so they can be investigated.

Reporting these events allows the local officer-in-charge or supervisor to review the circumstances surrounding the injury, near miss or hazard and, where possible, implement steps to prevent a recurrence or to manage the hazard. This reporting includes non-emergency and emergency activities involving CFA volunteers, staff or contractors under the control of CFA or involving a CFA location.

These types of incidents may also need to be escalated to the relevant CFA department or manager to resolve the issue.

We also analyse the overall data to identify potential trends or common risks, and this helps CFA improve areas such as vehicle design, training programs and operating procedures.

Another reason it's important to accurately report incidents is to help an incident management team identify safety or environmental risks, leading to:

- the inclusion of key safety strategies in the incident action plan
- the provision of critical safety information such as Red Flag Warnings, changes to crew deployments and SMEACS (crew changeover briefings).

The health and safety team has created a poster about reporting incidents (see image), which has been sent to all brigades.

### WHAT TYPE OF INCIDENT SHOULD BE REPORTED?

- Serious injury or illness.
- Damage to CFA property or equipment.
- Physical and psychological conditions or exposures (a range of mental health support services is available).

- Events that expose members to a health or wellbeing risk such as blood or chemical exposure.
- Damage to the environment.
- An unplanned event (near miss) with the potential to cause an injury or illness. For example, a falling tree that narrowly misses a vehicle.
- A hazard which has the potential to cause harm to a person, damage to property or the environment. For example, an unguarded machine.

### HOW DO I MAKE A REPORT?

Incidents should be notified as soon as possible via the chain of command and recorded using the Incident Report Book located in the wallet on the Safety First noticeboard, or the online incident reporting system CFASafe, if internet access is available.

At a long-duration emergency incident, reporting may also include the multi-agency Incident Report Card.

The report should, as a minimum, include:

- an accurate description of the circumstances of the incident, near miss or hazard, and outline clearly what happened, who was involved and what injuries or impact the incident had or potentially had
- list what immediate actions were taken as an outcome of the incident

**HEALTH SAFETY ENVIRONMENT WELLBEING**

## Report an injury, near miss or hazard

### WHAT to report

**Hazard**  
An event that has the potential to cause harm to a person, damage to property or the environment.  
Example: an unguarded machine or shelving that is unstable.

**Incident**  
An unplanned event which led to a physical or psychological injury/illness, damage to property or the environment.  
Examples: a serious injury or fatality, major disruptions to a CFA location, property damage or vehicle accident.

**Near miss**  
An incident which had the potential to cause an injury, illness or environmental impact.  
Example: where a falling tree or branch just missed a person.

### WHEN to notify

Notify your manager/OIC immediately in the case of a **serious** incident involving CFA staff, volunteer or contractor including:

- any fatality, serious injury where someone is injured and is required as a result of the incident
- Significant property or environmental damage or loss
- vehicle accidents.

When a serious incident occurs, a senior manager must be notified via the chain of command within 60 minutes where practical.

### HOW to report

HSEW incidents should be reported using the **Incident Report** book or reported online using CFASafe, the electronic incident reporting system.

The manager/OIC is responsible for reviewing the circumstances of the incident and implementing steps to prevent a recurrence or control the hazard where practical.

The report should include as a **minimum**:

- an accurate description of the circumstances of the incident, near miss or hazard; what happened; who was involved; and what injuries or impact occurred
- a description of what immediate actions were taken as an outcome of the event.

**For more information**  
For more information go to CFA Online/Brigades Online and search for 'injury reporting'. If you're unsure or concerned about the report you wish to make, discuss it with your line manager, HSE or wellbeing adviser, HR business partner or peer.

**Reporting other types of incidents**  
Use the following processes for other types of incidents to ensure your report reaches the appropriate area.

- Building maintenance issues – online Building Maintenance Request System
- Appliance maintenance issues – follow the district protocol for DMO support or contact RDO if urgent
- Communications equipment issues – follow the district protocol for communications support or contact RDO if urgent
- Operational Service delivery issues – Operations Officer or Operations Manager
- Individual/team performance issues – line manager and HR team if required.

Incident Reporting Poster - 7/6/17  
cfa.vic.gov.au

- describe what first-aid was given to the injured staff/volunteer/contractor and if medical treatment was sought (such as was the injured person taken to hospital).

There are other issues you may want to report that concern:

- building maintenance – use the online Building Maintenance Request System
- vehicle maintenance – use your district's protocol for DMO support or contact the rostered duty officer if urgent
- operational service delivery – contact your operations officer or operations manager.

Remember, your injury or near miss reports may prevent one of your fellow members or crew from being seriously injured.

# Walking Off the War Within



PHOTOS: BLAIR DELLEMIJN

## The inaugural Victorian Walking Off the War Within had the slogan 'Share the burden; march as one'.

Some 2,000 people took up the challenge in Ballarat, many walking up to 20 kilometres around Victoria Park carrying 20 kilograms on their backs. The walk was in honour of CFA career firefighter Nathan Shanahan who lost his battle with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) last year. Participants also walked in memory of CFA and MFB firefighter Damien Burke, who died in February 2016, and all other fallen emergency and other service personnel.

The pack carrying replicated the pack Nathan carried two years ago on his walk from Mildura to Adelaide to raise awareness of PTSD. Then and now, the packs symbolised the weight of mental illness.

Some in Ballarat walked carrying BA cylinders, while others were weighed down by wriggling children in front packs and backpacks.

Walk organisers Mildura Leading Firefighter Adam Young and Ballarat City Firefighter Josh Martin coordinated the event with members of the emergency services in New South Wales and Queensland. There were firey mates walking in Papua New Guinea including

along the Kokoda Track, while some marched alone and posted messages of solidarity on Facebook.

Nathan had been a proud member of the Northern Territory Fire and Rescue Service, and some of its members walked around Uluru while others slogged through Darwin's 80 per cent humidity.

Adam Young considers himself lucky to have been a colleague and friend to both Nathan and Damien. He also recognises that he's fortunate to not suffer from depression and PTSD, but his empathy has been boosted by watching those close to him endure.

"Nathan's death has hit particularly close to home," said Adam.

"He was mostly a very quiet person but then he'd come out with these one liners that were either really funny or insightful. If we had a heavy workload, he'd say something that got us through a lot. He lit up our shift and we really miss that. He was a light globe."

And when Adam remembers Damien, it's his smile that stands out. "We all looked up to him and wanted to be like him. He was such a positive person and the first person to see the good in everyone."

Members of Damien and Nathan's family marched in Ballarat with Nathan's father John acknowledging how much the walk was doing to bring PTSD out of the shadows.

"There is help out there and we want to let people know that we're with them," continued Adam. "By talking openly, we hope we can make people feel stronger so they can seek help."

STORY LEITH HILLARD





# Asthma on the fireground

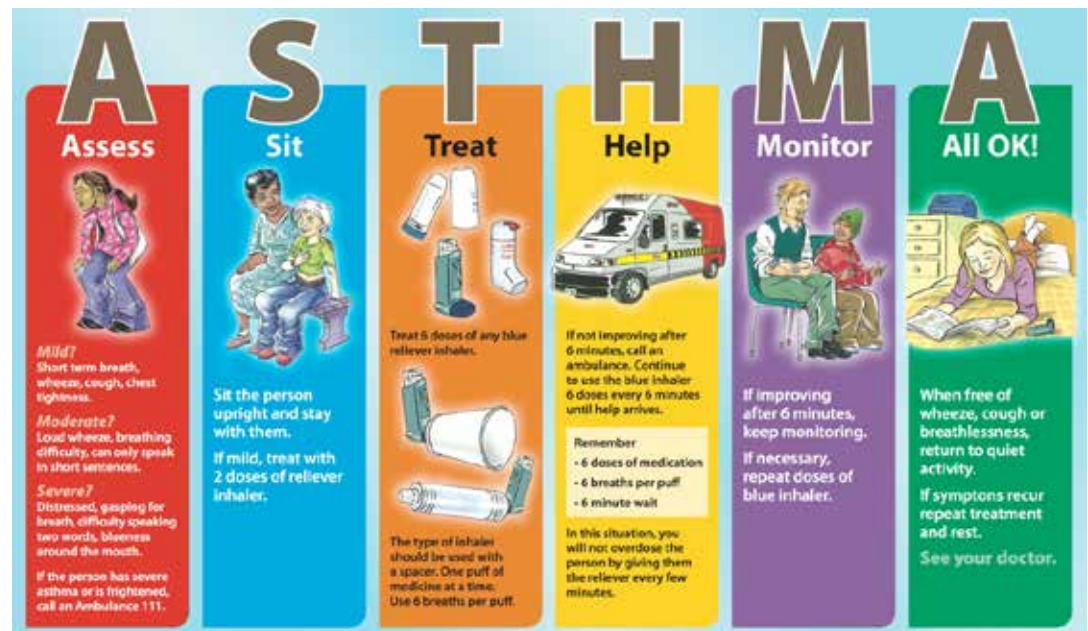
## An asthma attack at an incident is a potentially dangerous medical emergency.

Late last year, a brigade was paged to respond to a machinery fire on a nearby property. A CFA member responding to the incident rode their bicycle to the fire station and travelled to the property in the tanker. However, when getting out of the tanker, the member fell to the ground holding their chest and gasping for breath.

The crew leader offered immediate assistance and called VicFire to request an ambulance. The member was soon assessed and transported to hospital, where they were diagnosed with having an asthma attack.

The member didn't realise they were having an asthma attack and, as they didn't usually carry an inhaler, they were ill-prepared to manage what was happening. The crew leader treated the member for chest pain because he didn't know it was an asthma attack.

Some members have been reluctant to mention they have asthma because they think they won't be able to turn out. But most asthmatics perform brilliantly in an emergency response role once their doctor has prepared an asthma action plan. Before producing the plan, the



doctor needs to understand the tasks of a firefighter, which are listed in the Brigade Member Medical Practitioner Report. This form will help a doctor give advice that enables CFA to manage a member's safety and welfare while undertaking duties.

In consultation with the member, a brigade can pre-plan a timely emergency response to be used if needed. Sometimes, it can be as simple

as someone else in the crew being trained in asthma first-aid management and having a blue reliever puffer on hand.

For more information about asthma, you can contact the Asthma Foundation Victoria ([asthma.org.au](http://asthma.org.au) or 1800 645 130).

## Getting in and out of trucks

### Stepping on to, entering the cabin or crew area, and stepping off the back deck of a truck are everyday activities that are causing injuries to staff and volunteers.

Creightons Creek Fire Brigade member Robyn Sheehan recently sustained a torn Achilles and broken left arm when she fell while stepping down from the back deck using the steps. Robyn had attended a grassfire and was concentrating on getting to the quick fill pump to help refill the tanker.

She spent three months in hospital and another two months wearing a moon boot. She also had physiotherapy three times a week on her upper arm and foot. Her recovery is progressing slowly.

Robyn thinks the incident could have been prevented if she had had three points of contact with the hand rail and steps at all times, as well as being mindful that the first step down is further than anticipated.

In the past five years, there have been 145 incident reports involving falls from trucks. Of these, there were 64 compensation claims with a five-year cost of \$546,237 and 5,883 lost hours.

The retrofitting of steps on older trucks in 2014-15 and the improved ergonomic design of steps and handrails on new trucks have helped to reduce the severity of injuries. In the past two years, there has been a marked drop in the severity of injuries.

To further reduce injuries, you should:

- step on and off the truck using the steps and hand rails provided
- ensure you have both hands on hand rails either side of your body before you move your feet
- always maintain three points of contact even when you are under pressure to get on or off the truck quickly.



PHOTO: LEITH HILLARD

## Ray of light in dark times

**For years, Ray Carman had a hellish showreel running through his head featuring the graphic lowlights of his life as a Horsham Fire Brigade member and tow truck driver. The images of death and destruction were often on high rotation in the early hours of the morning as he lay awake.**

At 18 years of age, Ray was the youngest person ever to be issued with a tow truck licence in Victoria, and he'd attend accidents on his 'P' plates. This was also the year he joined the fire brigade. His first call-out with the tow truck was for three fatalities in the days before SES when tow truck drivers turned up to an accident with a crow bar and an axe.

The second particular horror was the death of his parents' next-door neighbour in a house fire. Ray's mother called in the emergency and the incident had her address listed.

"You have no idea what you're turning up to," said Ray. "It's the randomness of it. Sometimes people survive incredible crashes and other times you wonder how someone died in such a slight accident."

Ray married Debbie and, when the phone rang in the middle of the night "she often didn't even know I'd gone. When I went to a fatal, though, I'd find her waiting in the kitchen. She had a sixth sense whenever it was a fatality. She can't explain it but it really increased our bond.

"There was no peer support then and we used to make light of a lot of incidents on the scene. It was part of the comradeship between all the emergency services. A dark sense of humour was a method of coping."

In 2001, one of Ray's tow trucks was involved in a head-on with a car that had drifted across the median strip and two people were killed.

"Our driver called me," said Ray. "The hardest thing I've ever had to put up with was listening to my son say, 'Why is Dad crying?'"

But here is where one of Ray's strengths asserted itself: *he asked for help*. Ray called District 17 and, by that evening, a peer was talking to Ray, his two tow truck drivers and the three wives.

And so Ray's story is also the charting of the expansion of CFA's peer support program and its brilliant effectiveness. He's seen the huge distance we've come in caring for our members and can declare that "peer support is the best member, family and associates support system in the emergency services".

By 2010, the road toll was taking a heavy toll on Ray's wellbeing. He was living out the effects of mental illness, going for drives in the middle of the night thinking that life wasn't worth living, but he was having none of that sort of "nonsense talk.

"I really believed there was no such thing as mental illness," he confessed. "It was just a weak person seeking attention."

Even collapsing on the kitchen floor one Christmas Day and being admitted to hospital didn't change that rigid view on mental distress. There was a chink of light in that grim time, however, as another one of Ray's strengths asserted itself: *he can talk*.

Debbie rang CFA and peer Max Maher (pictured above right, with Ray), a member of Lubeck Fire Brigade and recipient of the AFSM, visited Ray in hospital.

"The talking started on the first day," said Max. "It took two or three hours but we then had subsequent contact."





But Ray was yet to reach rock bottom. In 2014, a tiff over a litter of puppies pushed Ray beyond his ability to cope. He went for one of his drives in the early hours and hung up on multiple phone calls from his wife, son, daughter and Max.

The family took the matter to the police and an officer phoned Ray and pleaded, "Don't hang up!"

"She had a memory of my dogs and me helping her children into the fire truck at our fire station," recalled Ray. "I'm Poppy Ray to all the kids at the fire station and she took me back to children and my dogs."

The police being called leads to an automatic admission to hospital, but Ray voluntarily checked himself in.

"Luckily they gave me [anti-depressant] medication and the very first lot worked," continued Ray. "I was in hospital for five days and at the end of that I was a different person. Max was there every day and his support was invaluable. We'd talk about my issues and then about lucerne hay and then my dogs and then back to me."

"He and Ops Officer Peter Bell were the rocks of my family. It was their level-headedness and commitment."

As Max supported Ray, a counsellor was assigned to each member of Ray's immediate family.

"As a peer, you learn to ask open questions," explained Max. "We're not there to solve people's problems but to help them solve their own. The basis is to get people to talk. Ray has been in the depths of despair, but we've always been able to talk and we've built a deep rapport."

"Ray's problems come from all the trauma he's seen. He went to too many horrendous accidents."

"It's not always enjoyable as a peer but there's job satisfaction. The most important quality is people skills, being non-judgemental and communicating clearly while maintaining confidentiality."

Now semi-retired, Ray and Debbie hitch the caravan and travel to dog shows as far afield as Queensland and have won best-in-breed. His days of thinking that mental illness was just attention seeking are over.

"Mental illness isn't put on," he said emphatically. "I've lived it. I'm one of the lucky ones. To this day, if I don't take my medication I can feel myself go downhill. With medication, I'm good as gold."

"Never be afraid to ask for help."

"The fire brigade and its support mechanisms are the glue that keeps the community together. For [34 years] we've had the privilege of peer support and I've appreciated all those visits from Max and his regular phone calls just to check in."

STORY LEITH HILLARD

## GETTING HELP

If you or someone you know needs help, contact

**Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Headspace on 1800 650 890**

If you are in an emergency situation or at immediate risk of harm, contact emergency services on **Triple Zero (000)**

### CFA Welfare Support Services

Member Assistance Program: **1300 795 711** (24 hours)

Peer Support Program: contact your local peer coordinator

Chaplaincy Program: **1800 337 068** (24 hours)

HeadsUP online resources: [cfa.vic.gov.au/headsup](http://cfa.vic.gov.au/headsup)

# Compensation helps recovery

**In late April 2008, while Wallan Fire Brigade firefighter Allan Kosmer was driving the pumper tanker on the Hume Freeway near Clonbinane, he was struck by another truck. His truck was pushed off the road and it rolled several times.**

Tragically, Allan sustained life-threatening head injuries and spent weeks in intensive care and several years in rehabilitation before returning to work. Needless to say, his road to recovery was difficult. Treatment for his acquired brain injury comprised intensive physiotherapy, neuropsychology for eight years, occupational therapy for two years, and endless specialist surgeon visits for seven years.

"CFA helped me in every possible way," said Allan. "The district operations manager made it to the hospital even before my wife did on the day I was admitted to the intensive care unit. The Volunteer Compensation staff gave me endless support and then some. Absolutely nothing was too much."

The Volunteer Compensation department covered all medical expenses, assisted me in returning to work, in day-to-day living including a nanny for my young children, learning to do house cleaning again, gardening, cutting firewood, and offered financial assistance so I wouldn't lose my home.

Without the Volunteer Compensation team, I would have been in a very difficult position, not to mention my recovery would be nowhere near where it is now."

Allan has successfully returned to work with his pre-injury employer as a biosecurity officer.

"Being injured on the fireground profoundly changed my life, but it hasn't dampened my enthusiasm to stay involved with the CFA family. I now contribute to ICC duties and help at the fire station."

CFA Volunteer Compensation is available to all members injured while performing CFA duties. Contact the Compensation Team on **9262 8444** if you need help.



# Working on wellbeing

Since 2014, CFA's team of member wellbeing advisers has delivered more than 500 wellbeing training and education workshops to brigades and teams across CFA.

"Most of the feedback we receive centres around how members are able to reflect on a different way of looking at things and how their brigade or work group operates," said Acting Team Leader Chris Bull.

"The 'Equal opportunity' and 'Mental health and resilience' workshops are two of our most popular sessions. Mental health and wellbeing are the biggest issues our members are facing.

"We also do a lot of 'Strengthening team relationships' workshops coupled with conflict management; it's all about relationship management."

CFA's member wellbeing advisers deliver workshops on topics such as:

- Mental health and resilience
- Strengthening team relationships
- Equal opportunity
- Social media
- Conflict – what is the problem?
- Having difficult conversations
- Legislation and leadership
- Fire season briefings

Workshops can also be individually tailored to meet the needs of a brigade or team.

"They're a mixture of practical information, extended thinking and practical tips in supporting other members," explained Chris. "The workshops are interactive and engaging, and provide participants with skills for real life."

To find out more, or to book a workshop, phone Wellbeing Intake on **9262 8409** or email: [wellbeing.intake@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:wellbeing.intake@cfa.vic.gov.au)



PHOTO: ANDREW OLDROYD

# Get Moving Challenge 2016

**During October and November 2016, over 100 inspired teams from all corners of the state battled it out in the annual Get Moving Challenge.**

New to this campaign was the highest district participation award. This encouraged members to get on the move not only for the benefit of themselves and their immediate team, but also for their district. The winning district was the one with the greatest proportion of members who finished the challenge compared to the total number of members registered.

The inaugural champion team of the highest district participation award was District 13. Damien Kook, Executive Manager, Workplace Health, Safety and Wellbeing, presented the shield

to the proud-as-punch winners (see photo, right).

The district now has the bragging rights for 12 months as the most active, before the shield is back up for grabs in the 2017 Get Moving Challenge.

Congratulations to all participants in the 2016 challenge. Last year was a record year with over 100 teams and 800 participants.

Collectively, the organisation stumbled in with a lazy 234,562,000 steps. In distance, that's a whopping 187,000 kilometres!

Congratulations to Wonthaggi brigade's Wonni Wanderers team which had the highest step count – each team member averaged 133,738 steps a week.





# Tom's focus on half the sky

**At 76 years of age, married to Cecily for 51 years and with four children and seven grandchildren, Tom Dumaresq has come to the conclusion that “the saviour of the world is women”.**

Tom has been a CFA member for 60 years and was the captain of NW Mooroopna for 14 years. He's still a volunteer on a mission with his sights set on improving the lot of women in Tamil Nadu, southern India.

Thirty years ago he was one of the foundation members of Assisi Aid Projects after learning about a nun in India who set up a dairy farm to ensure babies were fed nutritiously. The organisation's motto is 'Empowering change'.

Tom bought his daughter a ticket to India after she completed her nursing studies and he followed not far behind. He has since travelled to India eight times in the intervening years and remains on the board of this registered organisation which has raised about \$350,000 a year for Tamil Nadu and Cambodian women's groups.



PHOTO: LUKE COMMISSO

“We have 30 widows' groups in villages running cottage industries such as dress making and pottery and we advise them,” said Tom. “We also educate them and we educate girls so they can get on in life. Other groups of 20 women run little supermarkets, make soap and have cottage gardens. Some also make chimneys because smoke in houses gives them a hell of a lung problem.

“We have 1,400 standalone groups down south now with 28,000 women involved.”

“We had a wonderful father and he brought us up to do something for somebody,” which surely lies at the heart of all volunteering.

Tom recommends the book *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* named for the Mao Zedong quote that “Women hold up half the sky”.

“I'm very wrapped up in it because we're getting results,” said Tom.

STORY LEITH HILLARD

# Lunch boxes feed into funds

**Preparations for the coolest lunch box in town are underway.**

Mernda Fire Brigade has continued its partnership with Smash Enterprises to manufacture mini CFA pumper-shaped lunch boxes, and is inviting all brigades to use these lunch boxes as a fundraiser. The funds go directly to the brigades involved.

Mernda began this initiative three years ago and its success has funded additional equipment for the brigade.

“We are building a much-needed rehab unit which will attach to the back of our field command vehicle and hopefully it will be ready by mid-year,” Mernda brigade Secretary Tony Coon said.

“Because the fundraiser has been such a success for our brigade, we're inviting others to get on board and bulk order to use this as a way to raise funds for their own projects.”

These nifty little containers are not just for the little ones – big kids enjoy the fire trucks just as much.

“I get a few laughs when I bring mine for a day of fishing,” said Tony.

Expressions of interest for bulk orders close on 19 June, with expected delivery around August. CFA members can buy a lunch box for \$15.

For more information, email: [admin@merndacfa.com](mailto:admin@merndacfa.com) or call **0421 448 842**.



PHOTO: BLAIR DELLEMIN

STORY NICOLE RUSSO

# Private units blitzing it







PHOTO: KEITH PAKENHAM

### Private firefighting units are just part of the conversation in brigades in broadacre farming areas of Victoria.

Consider the Grampians Group area: 170,000 hectares of open farmland with tourism on the fringes and just four brigades with some satellite stations. While those stations are far apart, gaps are filled in by sheds on private land housing private firefighting units ready to go.

"We're solid farming brigades and initial attack is often in private units," Group Officer Robert Kelm told *Brigade* magazine in 2015. "I'd say 99 per cent are driven by our brigade members and they're all stickered up to get through traffic management points.

"It's self-preservation. A fire in the Grampians can take us out for weeks."

Brimpaen is in Grampians Group and member Ivan Smith fought the 1957 fire which burnt more than 20,000 hectares.

"We tried to burn back but it spotted over us," said Ivan. "We drove about half a mile to the dam and got out the pump but next thing there's a fire at the dam and on the other side of the dam. We couldn't do anything with it. We burnt back along the highway but again it spotted over us. Private units came out of the woodwork. If it wasn't for private units and their local knowledge, we'd have lost houses."

Strangely, Captain Daryl Fox from District 18's Goschen brigade uses the same term and "private units came out of the woodwork, literally dozens of them" to help with the late-2016 Parsons Road and Ultima fires.

"Both those fires came up to our brigade border and were ferocious with huge potential," said Daryl. "Parsons Road was burning with the north-east wind behind it and a south-west change was threatening but we caught it in the pea stubble.

"We picked up Ultima in the lentil stubble but you can't put that out with water. Seven tractors with disc ploughs attended and they tipped dirt over the smouldering straw to smother it. When we get a fire, we get a disc or two on the road right away now.

"At Parsons Road we had two front-end loaders to clean up sticks and trees. They were invaluable, but you're asking someone to do it for nothing and it can be risky for the machinery."

DELWP was also in attendance alongside numerous farmers each with between 1,000 and 1,500 litres of water in utes or on trailers with firefighting pumps, and everyone went to Channel 18 on UHF radios.

"Most of the farmers are members," continued Daryl, "and they're raring to go, do their bit and then they're gone."

Further west near the South Australian border, private units are a vital local resource that meshes in seamlessly with brigades. They quickly appear where assets are, do their job and disappear again. A combination of established relationships, experienced operators and quality equipment means this flooding of resources helps prevent little fires turning into big fires.

"Our people are switched on and we have to be self-sufficient," said Murrayville and Border Group Officer Trevor 'Blue' Wyatt. "We've educated everyone to operate under the brigade and the group. A lot of the private units are driven by our members with pagers and they log in through UHF back to the LCF [local command facility]. The brigade paid for some of those UHF radios. We also used to give them \$100 towards heat shielding but now they do it themselves."

Some of the private units carry up to 6,000 litres while four ex-milk tankers carrying about 12,000 litres each and hooked to semi-prime movers are, by good fortune, housed in the group's north, south, east and west.

In an area where members might live 60 kilometres from the fire station, a private unit is also transport to the fireground. Often first on scene, they can provide vital early intelligence to CFA vehicles still en route.





PHOTO: KEITH PAKENHAM

Trevor runs all fires from the fireground in the group FCV. He communicates only with the deputy group officers and lieutenants and usually assigns five private units to each of them. He estimates there are about 30 private units across the group area.

"As soon as our fire trucks reach the firefront," continued Trevor, "four or five private units pull in straight behind, all moving at about 40 kilometres an hour. The first two will have their hoses going then they'll pull off and get water while the ones behind step up. We insist on straight jet because fog nozzles waste too much water."

What sounds like highly-disciplined vehicle ballet is described by Rutherglen Group Officer Andrew Russell as "almost like poetry" as it operates in District 24.

"We have a lot of common sense landholders," he said, "and their role in private units is generally to attend to flare-ups once our brigade tankers have knocked down the main fire."

As the December 2015 Barnawartha fire moved up the Indigo Valley in the Rutherglen Group area, members turned out in their private units to black out behind fire trucks. About 40 of them backed up then-Captain Frank Harbottle from Springhurst brigade at what he described at the time as "the most dynamic fire I've ever been to". The fire was estimated at 6732 hectares with a 180-kilometre boundary.

**Pictured at  
1am on Sunday  
8 February 2009  
at Longwarry  
Fire Station**

This Austin belongs to the brigade's Roots family after passing through Kialla and Strathkellar brigades. It's been a secondary vehicle for the brigade and, driven by Charles Roots, attended a fire on Black Saturday near the Longwarry truck stop on the freeway.



PHOTO: KEITH PAKENHAM





PHOTO: SALLY PATTERSON



PHOTO: KEITH PAKENHAM

“They turn out without being called and often get to the fire first and jump on it quicker,” said Group Officer Col Pickering. “They’re in direct contact with our tankers via UHF and they’re usually tasked to tag along behind them and mop up. They stop outbreaks and put edges out on an adrenaline rush, and nine times out of 10 they save the day. They follow the protocols and do their thing without hindering anyone.”

CFA has updated the publication *Guidelines for Operating Private Equipment at Fires* which is available online and in hard copy. The major changes relate to incident management terminology; and new JSOPs, procedures and policies around issues such as traffic management points.

What hasn’t changed is the attention everyone with a private unit must pay to its reliability. The guidelines can help you get your unit raring to go before summer arrives.

Turn to 4.4 in the guidelines ‘Is your vehicle ready?’ and work through the checklist covering: vehicle weight and roadworthiness; a properly-secured load; mechanically-sound and regularly-serviced pumps; first-aid kits and woollen blankets; an amber rotating beacon; and UHF radios and heatshields.

If you answer ‘no’ to any questions in the checklist, your private unit is not ready for service.

Above all, safety first, safety always.

STORY LEITH HILLARD



PHOTO: KEITH PAKENHAM

District 24 Operations Manager Paul King also praised private units as “a valuable part of the firefighting arsenal.

“Of course people who protect their property from the impact of fire must be suitably dressed to survive the passage of fire and the impact of radiant heat,” he said. “The highest priority is saving responders’ lives, so private units must link up to DELWP and CFA so they have access to critical safety messages.”

Down in District 6, the majority of private units in the Lismore and District Group are ex-CFA fire trucks. The Austins, Bedfords, Isuzus and Hinos are mostly owned by cereal-crop-farming brigade members so they have both fire and farming know-how, can-do. The cropping brigade Mingay alone has more than 10 private units.



# Willaura celebrates a milestone

**In late April, Willaura Fire Brigade celebrated its centenary with a dinner and open day.**

A formal dinner was held at Willaura Memorial Hall, where CFA Board member Tim Young urged the local community to remain proud of its brigade's achievements and to remember that, despite the problems every small community has to grapple with, if it can keep putting water on fires then some of these problems will disappear.

Westmere Group Officer John Chapman reflected on the important role the brigade's members had played in the development of radio communications within CFA.

In his address, Captain Anthony Heard reiterated a common theme of the evening. "If you want to get to know your community, join your local brigade," he said. "Willaura Fire Brigade is the community, and if you move into town that's how you get to know each other."

The evening included the launch of the newly-published history of fire services in Willaura,

*From Buckets to Brigades*, and the launch of a DVD *Fire Yarns* featuring a recording of long-time brigade members who gathered at the station last December to reminisce.

There were also service award presentations including a 70-year medal for still-active brigade member Les Bright.

The next morning the fire station's doors were opened to the community, and there was a display of vintage and modern fire trucks, a running team demonstration and barbecue.

Vintage fire engines were displayed at the Recreation Reserve along with Willaura's current tankers and various private units from around the district.

President and former Captain Richard Laidlaw remarked that the weekend had brought the community together. All ages had enjoyed celebrating with their much-valued brigade and seeing its history laid out before them.

STORY HEATHER FLEMING



**Above right:** Pat and Sarah Millear with daughters Kate, Charlotte and Louise on their private fire truck

PHOTO: PETER PICKERING, ARARAT ADVERTISER

**Right:** Les Bright, who received a 70-year service medal, with District 16 Operations Manager Bernie Fradd

PHOTO: HEATHER FLEMING

**Below:** Willaura brigade Captain Anthony Heard and Martin Gellert

PHOTO: PETER PICKERING, ARARAT ADVERTISER





# Devastation in Kerang



**On 5 June 2017, it will be the 10-year anniversary of the Kerang train crash which killed 11 passengers. It was a tragedy that changed the lives of many and prompted important Victorian road safety reforms.**

Kerang Fire Brigade was paged to a traffic accident on the railway line.

"It was not unusual for us to be called to a traffic accident," said Captain Ramon Steel, because the brigade attends multiple incidents a year.

But when brigade members arrived at the scene, the magnitude of the devastating incident quickly dawned on them. A semi-trailer truck had crashed into a V-Line train and derailed it. This was an incident unlike any other they had attended before.

"We walked down to see two carriages had been ripped open. Police were checking the carriages to determine exactly what emergency services personnel had to deal with," Ramon said.

To the Kerang members' surprise, the truck driver was alive and already out of the vehicle receiving treatment from Ambulance Victoria paramedics.

Kerang brigade's initial task was to ensure there was no fire. The truck was secured by disconnecting the battery, using foam and feeding out two hose lines to ensure there was no immediate risk.

"Our 2nd Lieutenant Peter Boal is a paramedic for Rural Ambulance Victoria. He was a calming presence on the day and played a major role in the rescue," continued Ramon.

"Using his experience, Peter helped limit other volunteers' exposure."

The incident carried through to the following day as the recovery process began. "I handpicked a crew of skilled and mature members who I knew would be able to handle this situation," said Ramon.

The scene was graphic and took its toll on members as loved ones of the deceased arrived on scene.

"We hope to never ever see anything like this again. We created an imaginary barrier between us and the public; we had a job to do."

With critical incident support (CIS) available for all members exposed to this incident, they were able to work together to cope with the aftermath.

This incident highlighted to Ramon and Kerang brigade members the importance of communicating.

"We are a strong brigade. We talked through it together and got through it together. After every incident that's distressing we seek peer support and I call my members to make sure they're OK."

Stuart Broad, District 20 operations manager on the day of the incident, commends CIS. Stuart said that, because of our proactive peer support, the CFA crews on scene have had no long-term effects from this incident.

"The volunteers of both CFA and SES will never forget what they saw here, so emotional support was crucial," Stuart said.

The incident resulted in a much-needed overhaul of level crossing boom gates across the state.

Stuart said that is a tribute to the coronial inquiry's excellent decision to improve road safety.

"Today we can see level crossings, rumble strips and 80,000 boom gates operating across the state.

"This was a tragic incident no matter which way you look at it. But from how this incident was managed, we have been able to learn and grow.

"The professionalism of our people, SES and Victoria Police was outstanding. This was inter-agency operations at its best. We shared a common goal as emergency services to manage this operation as a team."

While the incident has brought improvements to level crossings and state traffic laws, it has not taken away from the devastation that has left an imprint on the lives of many. The 10-year anniversary prompts us all to remember the lives of those who perished and the extraordinary work of our emergency services.

STORY NICOLE RUSSO



# Engaging kids in fire awareness



PHOTO: SIAN JEPSON

**As part of CFA's 2016-17 Summer Fire Safety Initiatives program, the children at Toora Primary School slipped on their dancing shoes in the name of bushfire safety.**

The Bolder Bush Beats program teaches the community's youth about bushfire safety and readiness skills by using drama, music, comedy and, of course, fun.

The program invited children from grades three to six to participate in a series of

workshops led by local musician Nick Fischer. The program finished with a quirky stage performance in late March.

Fireys from Toora Fire Brigade attended the performance to show their support and invited the kids to explore the fire truck.

Brett Whittle, a teacher at Toora Primary working on the production, said the children enjoyed their intensive drama lessons while learning some new skills.

"The music and performance was great. Everyone got involved with the project and learned a lot about fire safety awareness," Brett said.

Sian Jepsen, CFA project coordinator for the Summer Fire Safety Initiative, said Bolder Bush Beats aims to encourage students to have conversations about bushfire safety and fire readiness.

Sian attended the performance and was impressed by the wild and funny student-centred production.

"The story was great; it followed Stella and Dippy who are neighbours. Stella is a superstar in bushfire safety and readiness whereas his friend Dippy is an ill-prepared 'she'll-be-right' local larrikin," Sian said.

Bolder Bush Beats is one of 21 projects funded by the Summer Fire Safety Initiatives program. One-off grants were available to brigades and community organisations to fund innovative and empowering initiatives.

"The program aims to build community leadership, increase fire awareness, promote shared responsibility and strengthen community resilience," said Sian.

STORY NICOLE RUSSO

# Pat Bigham recognised

**One of CFA's first women volunteers in her district, Pat Bigham is an inspiring woman who has dedicated her career to helping others and serving her community.**

After the devastating Ash Wednesday fires in 1983, CFA recognised a gap in support for those affected by traumatic events, and asked Pat to help coordinate and implement a welfare support system.

"It's important for members to know there's someone out there to help them," Pat said. "There's nothing that can prepare you for what you're about to experience, but CFA will train you and has a team of people to support you."

Pat used her skills and expertise, along with other colleagues, to develop what's now called the Peer Support program. Today, Pat continues to be involved with the program which now operates in every CFA district.

Pat's inspiring leadership and outstanding commitment were recognised through her induction into the 2017 Victorian Honour Roll of Women.

The Honour Roll acknowledges the outstanding achievements of women in Victoria. "I think this award is a huge tribute to all CFA members – the fact CFA itself has been recognised is an honour," said Pat.

In 2008, Pat was awarded the Australian Fire Service Medal for outstanding service to her community, brigade and CFA.

STORY AMY SCHILDBERGER



PHOTO: ERIC ALGRA



# Bystander CPR saves a life

**Local school teacher Greg Purcell and Sunbury Fire Brigade Senior Station Officer Tony Smith have received certificates of commendation from Ambulance Victoria for performing CPR on a man who went into cardiac arrest in early February.**

While driving to work, Greg noticed a mountain bike leaning against a bench in Sunbury Park and a man, Kevin Law, lying on the ground nearby.

"I saw Kevin's bike and thought it was a bit weird that it was sitting by itself," Greg said. "I turned my car around and found Kevin lying unconscious on the ground. He was not in a good state."

Greg sprang into action and immediately called Triple Zero (000) and started CPR with the assistance of the operator.

Tony was off duty and driving by when he spotted Greg performing CPR, and he stopped to help. The two men continued to help after paramedics arrived.

"The paramedics shocked him twice and after a period of time he started breathing again, which was a huge relief to us all," said Tony.

Kevin Law made a full recovery and said it was because of the first responders that he's still alive.

Kevin was recently reunited with those who came to his aid and congratulated everyone.

"If not for Greg and wonderful first responders like Tony and the ambos who came along, I'd not be here today."

MICA Paramedic Michael Holmes agreed saying, "It can't be stressed enough that bystander CPR is the one factor that saved his life."

STORY RACHEL JENKINS



PHOTO: RACHEL JENKINS

# Keeping the home fires burning

**Wangaratta Fire Brigade has reached a proud milestone with the awarding of 60-year service medals to brigade life members Joan Rosser and Elaine Graham.**

Records being imperfect, it's impossible to calculate the amount of money raised by the brigade auxiliary.

"We mainly ran card games and raffles and did sewing and cooking for street stalls," said Joan. "Most of the money we raised was spent on equipment like hoses and running hydrants and even towards the trucks."

"[Husband] John and I went to fire demos every week of our lives and travelled all over with our six children."

Elaine, husband Peter and their five children were just as active with the running team.

"The fire brigade was our life," she said. "I never missed an auxiliary meeting. It was my

night out. There were wonderful friendships and all the children grew up together."

The devastating 1943 Tarrawingee fire was a lived experience for Elaine; it was the day of her seventh birthday party.

"My father had to go to the fires," she said, "and it caused him to take to drink. That fire caused so much damage to our family."

One generation later, however, and Elaine (pictured left) and Joan (pictured right with Operations Officer Paul Scragg) emphasise the building up of families because of the brigade.

"Protecting life and property only works when there's support at home," said Joan. "We were there for the menfolk, cooking in our homes and taking food to them at fires."

"We got involved for the love of our men."

STORY LEITH HILLARD



PHOTO: LEITH HILLARD

# It won't happen to me, will it?

During the colder months, CFA works hard to remind people how important it is to have working smoke alarms, but it can be a hard sell.

For those people affected by a house fire, a smoke alarm can be the difference between life and death.

By law, all residential properties in Victoria must have at least one smoke alarm installed on each level. We remind people to test their smoke alarms each month, change batteries and dust them once a year and replace them every 10 years. The best smoke alarms are the photoelectric type which use a 10-year lithium battery in a tamper-proof chamber. They are more effective and less prone to false alarms.

Even when the risk of home fires is apparent, people often believe on some level that it won't happen to them. To get people thinking about what it would mean if fire impacted their home or business, North West Region tried a new approach. A building in a high-visibility area was chosen and, by using some creativity, turned it into a burned-out wreck.

North West Region chose Castlemaine as the place to get the message across. A huge piece of artwork was placed on the outside of a building in the main drag, so that it appeared there had been a major fire.



PHOTO: DANIELLE SCORER

With support from the local brigade, the artwork was launched with a fake emergency response. With sirens blaring, a brigade crew headed down the main street to 'save' the local tattoo parlour, and then stuck around to have a chat with locals.

"Most people are pretty good and make sure their smoke alarms are working and installed properly," said brigade Captain Terry Franklin. "I'd like to see people thinking about friends and family who might not be able to check or

install their own smoke alarms as well, and see if they can lend a hand.

"You can't miss this message, and where it's positioned every local will see it and hopefully be reminded that anyone can experience fire and, if someone does, we want them to survive. The only way to be sure is with a working smoke alarm."

STORY DANIELLE SCORER

## Brigade helps its country cousin

**Brucknell-Ayrford Fire Brigade in District 6 is one of the latest brigades to benefit from the 'Help for Dairy' initiative.**

Help for Dairy co-founder Catherine McLeod is a volunteer with District 14 HQ brigade and comes from a dairy farming background.

"Help for Dairy isn't about giving you a handout, it's about giving you a leg up. We all understand that times can be tough, but the wider CFA community is here to provide support and assistance to each other in a time of need," she said.

This new initiative encourages partnerships between metropolitan brigades and country brigades in dairy farming areas. This program was developed to help brigades that have been affected by the dairy industry crisis which began in 2016. The financial impact is having lasting effects on communities.

The majority of Brucknell-Ayrford members are dairy farmers so when this opportunity

arose they were very keen to participate. They thought they were very lucky to be paired with Warrandyte Fire Brigade in District 13.

Before meeting in person, captains Trevor Smith and Adrian Mullens spent many nights on the phone getting to know one another and each other's brigades.

It was decided that Warrandyte brigade would buy chainsaw protective equipment to donate to Brucknell. Trevor invited Warrandyte members to their annual Australia Day community function this year to meet the rest of the brigade and community. Four Warrandyte members and a member's partner made the journey to the Brucknell area.

Following a barbecue lunch and handover of the donated equipment, the Warrandyte members went on a dairy farm tour. This was a huge hit and they stayed on the farm for the whole milking process before returning to the station for dinner and drinks.

A true friendship and bond was built in those few hours, and both brigades would like to continue their new-found relationship with an annual get-together.

STORY AMY BOYD



PHOTO: AMY BOYD



# Still doing their 'level best' after 125 years



PHOTO: DAVID ROWE

**On 6 February 1892, Kangaroo Ground Bush Fire Brigade was formed. The brigade was born out of a community need – we live in a bushfire-prone area.**

It was agreed that those people who joined the brigade would give their word of honour to attend any fire that broke out at once and do their 'level best' to put it out.

The Kangaroo Ground Bush Fire Brigade has become Kangaroo Ground Fire Brigade and, over the past 125 years, has seen many changes – especially with its firefighting vehicles.

To celebrate its 125th anniversary, the brigade had an official event at the end of March. This will be followed in August by an Anniversary Ball at Stones of the Yarra Valley and a community day in October.

The official celebration, held at the fire station, was attended by current and former brigade members, the local community, Emergency Management Commissioner Craig Lapsley and representatives from the Victorian Government, CFA Board and shire council.

There was such a large crowd that it spilled out of the station and on to the apron.

The brigade presented an historical display, which is the new home for the replica of the brigade's first vehicle – a horse-drawn water

cart. The original water cart was commissioned and built in Kangaroo Ground in 1914 at a cost of seven pounds and 10 shillings. The replica was constructed for the brigade's centenary celebrations by former Kangaroo Ground captains Don and Bruce Ness.

This vehicle, along with a Willys Jeep, International fire truck from the Fire Services Museum, and a new medium tanker officially handed over to the brigade by CFA Board member Peter Shaw, showed the evolution of firefighting trucks used by the brigade.

The display was designed and constructed by current members Dale Versteegen and Peter Sanderson.

Peter Shaw presented National Medals to Peter Grant, Len Muir and Richard Smoorenburg for their long and outstanding contribution to the brigade and CFA.

Operations Manager Trevor Roberts presented service medals to members including a 40-year award to John Withers and a 45-year award to Gavin McCormack, both still very active members of the brigade.

The theme for the anniversary celebrations is very much about community. The community has thrown its full support behind the brigade by raising funds for stations, trucks and other equipment over the past 125 years. All the

speakers acknowledged the tremendous commitment and service of the brigade and the close ties with the community.

"The brigade is a true reflection of its community, demonstrating great leadership, community connectedness and community values," said Craig Lapsley.

No anniversary would be complete without a cake, and Verryle Rodgers made a cake in the shape of a fire truck. Past captains John Withers and Peter Grant, along with Rose Watkinson, daughter of Don Ness representing the Ness family, cut the cake.

The formalities concluded with a pledge to the local community that the brigade would keep the promise made 125 years ago to do its level best to serve and protect this community.

Following the speeches, the crowd enjoyed a fantastic lunch with many stories being told and the opportunity to catch up with old friends.

"Volunteering is at the heart of the CFA," commented Member of Parliament for Eildon Cindy McLeish. "For a brigade to be in existence for 125 years is a remarkable effort and speaks volumes of the local community who give so much back."

The brigade is now looking forward to the next celebration, the Anniversary Ball, in August.

STORY CAPTAIN GLENN LAW, KANGAROO GROUND





## 2017 Champs

**This year, the State Junior Urban Champs were at Tatura from 25 to 26 February, the State Senior Urban Champs were held at Bendigo from 11 to 13 March, and the State Rural Champs were in Wodonga on 1 and 2 April.**

A big thanks to everyone at the Bendigo Champs who contributed to fundraising for the Jane McGrath Foundation. McGrath Breast Care Nurses help women living with cancer and their families by providing physical, psychological and emotional support. From the time of diagnosis and throughout treatment, this support is available for free. A total of \$3,246 was raised through an auction to help with this valuable work.

Thanks to the Firefighters Credit Union and VFBV State Vice President Graeme Jilbert for donating the T-shirts for the auction.

Tatura brigade won the Urban Junior Champs for the fourth consecutive year. See page 44 for a story about this exceptional team.





**URBAN SENIOR RESULTS**

## Dry aggregate

1 Maryvale	20 points
2 Kangaroo Flat	13 points
3 Drouin/Bunyip	11 points

## Wet aggregate

1 Maryvale	68 points
2 Kangaroo Flat	64 points
2 Narre Warren A	64 points

## A Section

1 Maryvale	88 points
2 Kangaroo Flat	77 points
3 Narre Warren A	41 points

## B Section

1 Tatura	75 points
2 Benalla	45 points
3 Geelong West	32 points

## C Section

1 Pakenham	84 points
2 Hoppers Crossing	53 points
3 Eaglehawk B	51 points

**URBAN JUNIOR RESULTS**

## Dry aggregate

1 Tatura	51 points
2 Melton A	27 points
3 Harvey A	21 points

## Wet aggregate

1 Tatura	52 points
2 Morwell A	19 points
3 Harvey A	13 points

## Under 14 years aggregate

1 Tatura	48 points
2 Melton A	30 points
3 Melton B	28 points

## Under 17 years aggregate

1 Tatura	55 points
2 Harvey A	34 points
3 Pakenham	21 points

## Grand aggregate

1 Tatura	103 points
2 Melton A	37 points
3 Harvey A	34 points

**RURAL SENIOR RESULTS**

## Division 1 aggregate

1 Beazleys Bridge A	52 points
2 Greta A	42 points
3 Napoleons/Enfield A	30 points

## Division 2 aggregate

1 Chiltern A	56 points
2 Dunrobin/Nangeela C	38 points
3 Hurstbridge B	32 points

## Division 3 aggregate

1 Sedgwick A	32 points
2 Pearcedale B	22 points
2 Willaura B	22 points

**RURAL JUNIOR RESULTS**

## 11-13 years aggregate

1 Stuart Mill A	46 points
2 Sedgwick A	42 points
3 Eldorado A	36 points

## 11-15 years aggregate

1 Eldorado A	38 points
2 Springhurst A	38 points
3 Stuart Mill A	36 points

## Champion team

1 Stuart Mill A	82 points
2 Eldorado A	74 points
3 Sedgwick A	50 points



**Above:** Clare Murphy, Kerang brigade (left) and Sarah Murley, Eaglehawk brigade, a breast cancer survivor who received help from the McGrath Foundation



# Tatura Juniors by a country mile



## What are they feeding the Juniors in Tatura? Tinned spinach? Magic beans?

Whatever they're doing it's working, with the team winning the grand aggregate at the State Junior Urban Championships for the past four years. This year they won both the under-14 and under-17 aggregates. Across the weekend's 18 events, Tatura won 10 and was placed in six others.

They've been winners five times in the past seven years and were runners-up the other two years. They also enjoyed the home-town advantage with the Champs held at Tatura for the second year in a row.

It's not as if this is the only activity for young people to choose in Tatura with many sports on offer, yet there are nine children involved across the under-14 and under-17 teams.

"They're a great group of kids," said Martin Rennie, one of the coaches. With two of his own children competing he has reason to be biased, but he's no soft touch.

"We train them hard," he continued, "and put them under pressure with the stopwatch so they can get their runs done cleanly and don't freak out under the real pressure of the comp. We always ask them for their input – what happened this run; why do you think that didn't work. We also try to fine-tune the little things like how they hold the couplings and placing them correctly on the ground."

Martin's brother Darren is also a coach alongside Damian Briese and both men have children in the Juniors. They put the group through their paces two nights a week for up to two hours. They have a dry and wet training track beside the local racecourse and Darren checks the equipment is up to scratch.

Harry Browning-Briese is sorry to now be leaving Juniors behind.

"We try really hard," he said, "but it's not all seriousness. It's always fun to go to training because we're all friends, but when we need to turn it on we can. We develop our skills and the coaches push us to do well because they see our potential."

"We've got good backing within the brigade," said Martin. "The competitions are generally within an hour of Tatura and most of the parents come along."

Congratulations to Harry, Josh Esam, Hayley Rennie, Luke Rennie, Matthew Rennie, Tailah Rennie, Kelham Tyson, Grady Tyson and Tim Wilson who have seen their many hours of training pay off.

STORY LEITH HILLARD



Above: Hayley and Luke Rennie

Left: Grady Tyson, Matthew Rennie, Tim Wilson and Harry Browning-Briese

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF VFBV



## Keen to learn new skills



PHOTO: AARON BAKER

**For 19-year-old Ararat Fire Brigade member Tameeka Cann, being involved with CFA is a way to make a difference in the lives of others.**

Tameeka entered the Junior brigade as an 11-year-old and has progressed through the ranks to be a senior member.

"CFA is practically my life, I absolutely love it. I love helping people and this is a great way to give back to your local community," she said.

As an enthusiastic member of the brigade, Tameeka has taken part in a number of CFA and community-related activities including the 12-day CFA leadership development program in 2015.

"The program really helped me to further develop my skills in conflict resolution, communication and leadership," she said.

"It also taught me skills that I can use outside CFA and helped me decide what I wanted to study at university."

Tameeka was one of four Victorians chosen to attend the recent National Police and Emergency Services Women's Leadership Summit in Canberra. She said the summit taught her valuable skills that she's now applying in her new role as District 16 Council Secretary.

"The summit gave me new ideas that I could bring back to my district.

"About 100 people attended and we listened to guest speakers from different backgrounds, which I found really empowering."

Tameeka said her brigade is a very supportive environment. "It feels like one big family. We often all sit down together after a call or training and catch up or play cards.

"My advice to young people who are considering joining is to give it a go! It's lots of fun and you'll learn a lot of valuable, practical and life skills."

STORY RACHEL JENKINS

## Community award for Maldon Junior

**For Maldon Fire Brigade Junior member Emma Webb, CFA is a part of her family history. She joined CFA as a Junior member in 2015, following in the footsteps of her grandparents, her parents and her three brothers who are also CFA members.**

"The fire brigade has always been a very welcoming place," Emma said. "Even when I was too young to be involved, I loved going to the station with my family and getting to experience the environment."

Earlier this year, Emma was awarded the Maldon & District Junior Citizen of the Year (pictured receiving the award) which recognises individuals for their outstanding service to the local community.

"It was really cool to see the effort I've put in be publicly recognised."

Maldon Fire Brigade Captain Sean McCubbin praised Emma as a well-respected brigade member who's influential in her Junior brigade.

"Emma is a wonderful ambassador for the brigade and particularly for our Juniors. They really look up to her," said Sean. "I've never seen a kid that smiles as much as she does. She's always positive and is a true credit to CFA."

Emma has been a member of the CFA Junior running team since she was 11 years old and last year became the youngest ever running coach for the Juniors.

"My role as coach is to help develop their running skills and to prepare them for competitions. We also do team building activities."

The Castlemaine Secondary College student juggles her Year 12 studies with undertaking extracurricular activities, and last year completed a Certificate 3 in childcare and Certificate 2 in hospitality.

"The adrenaline rush and getting to be a part of an organisation that helps the community is what I really enjoy about being a CFA Junior."

STORY RACHEL JENKINS



PHOTO: VIV MARKHAM, TARRANGOWER TIMES



# Through the ages – Upper Beaconsfield







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- 1-6 Ash Wednesday, 1983
- 7 1980s members
- 8 First fire truck, 1927 Model T Ford
- 9 Original fire station
- 10 Second fire station with replacement vehicles following Ash Wednesday
- 11 Brigade members, 1990
- 12 Current fire station
- 13 1942 ex-military Dodge weapons carrier
- 14 Display of new comms equipment, 1978



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# Emergency Memberlink



Your Emergency Memberlink program is a way for us to recognise your commitment and contribution to emergency services and Victorian communities.



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