

Brigade

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**Bushfires and
wild storms hit
hard in February**



**Update to
General
Firefighter**



**How VESEP
grants
boost
brigades**

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Manager Member Communication and Engagement: Brad Thomas

Editor: Duncan Russell
duncan.russell@cfa.vic.gov.au
0428 907 053

Graphic designer: Mark Hammond

Printer: IVE Group

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 facebook.com/cfachiefofficer

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CFA intranet:

members.cfa.vic.gov.au

Free CFA images for download:

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Community engagement material:

cfa.vic.gov.au/cecontentportal

CFA templates for download:

cfa.vic.gov.au/templatetoolkit



COVER PHOTO: NICHOLAS WOJCIK, BELMONT FIRE BRIGADE



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CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER



Natalie MacDonald

When Victoria faces a fire weather emergency, CFA members answer the call in large numbers and with a commitment to doing what's necessary to support their communities.

What was evident over the past few weeks was the incredible response right across the organisation and in multiple parts of the state. The combination of fires and storms resulted in thousands of our members performing a range of roles including frontline firefighting, logistical support, community engagement, in incident control centres, and through wellbeing and recovery.

Simultaneously, our crews were tackling serious fires in the west, while in Gippsland our members were clearing trees and other storm damage, rescuing residents and even supporting the delivery of water to the community of Mirboo North. And our support teams from all parts of the organisation were working hard to assist the frontline effort.

As part of our commitment to improving and increasing the opportunities for training, you can read about the review of our General Firefighter training program which sets out steps to meet the evolving needs of new members and instructors (both paid and volunteer) across the state. See page 8 for more information.

The Victorian Government's Volunteer Emergency Services Equipment Program (VESEP) is providing \$11 million in grant funding to more than 140 CFA brigades in 2023-24. The contribution towards equipment, vehicles and amenities means brigades are able to better support their operations. More detail about the program and the outcomes is available in this edition of the magazine.

I am pleased to announce that two new appointments have been made to the CFA Board for three-year terms. Experienced board directors Jo Plummer and Rosemary Martin have replaced the outgoing Deputy Chair Michelle McLean and Pam White. I would like to thank Michelle and Pam for their valued contribution to CFA.

Jo, who has been appointed as CFA Board Deputy Chair, is also the Chair of Barwon Water. Rosemary is a non-executive director of Merri-Bek Affordable Housing and a VicTrack Board member. Board members Dawn Hartog AFSM and Peter Shaw AFSM have been reappointed for further three-year terms.

Finally, congratulations to our CFA members who received an Australian Fire Service Medal (AFSM) in the Australia Day Honours: Deputy Chief Officer North East Region Ross Sullivan and Golden Beach Fire Brigade Captain Paula Grosveld, Regional Commander Bill Johnstone and Commander – Aviation John Katakouzinis. Congratulations to you all and thank you for your service.

CHIEF OFFICER



Jason Heffernan

During February we experienced multiple, large scale fires, the worst conditions Victoria has experienced since the 2019-20 fires. We also registered the first Catastrophic Fire Danger Rating since the new system was implemented.

We saw communities near Beaufort and around the Grampians National Park impacted by a series of fires, with many properties lost. My thoughts are with those residents and businesses impacted.

In what was a close call, five CFA firefighters from Ballarat Fire Brigade survived a burnover on the fireground in Pomonal. Fortunately, the quick-thinking crew members enacted their burnover skills and protected themselves from any major injuries. Dedicated to the task at hand, the crew was keen to continue fighting fires that day. I want to thank the courageous crew members for their remarkable efforts.

Victoria and Queensland were hit with devastating storms in January, and more than 200 CFA volunteers worked tirelessly to support VICSES with the flood recovery. The response showcased the commitment of CFA brigades across the region, with many working multiple days in challenging circumstances. I am so thankful for your tremendous dedication, with some of you even leaving your sandbagged homes to help fellow community members.

We also deployed more than 40 CFA members and staff to Helensvale in Queensland at the end of December to support local emergency services with flood and storm response efforts.

Sadly, we lost a CFA firefighter in the line of duty in Portland on 30 January. Garry Mallen, former captain of Portland Fire Brigade and the brigade's current 4th lieutenant, was on scene responding to a shed fire when he collapsed and tragically couldn't be revived. My deepest sympathies are with Garry's family, friends and colleagues at Portland.

CFA submitted a formal response to the Fire District Review Panel following the Panel's initial determination. The Panel identified 13 CFA service delivery areas which may require additional fire risk treatments. Thanks to the large number of people and brigades who have been involved.

The 'Behaviours at CFA' elearning module, which is mandatory for staff, has been developed to supplement the workshops held last year. It doesn't replace the workshops, which will continue, but I would encourage volunteers who didn't attend a workshop to complete this module on The Learning hub to understand CFA's behavioural standards.

As we prepare for the winter season, please continue to educate your local communities about home fire safety and the importance of having working smoke alarms.

DCO WEST REGION



Brett Boatman

CFA's values guide our behaviours and underpin the culture of our fire service. The values are a critical connector of our people in the diverse spectrum of communities we serve. In all recruitment and selection interviews in CFA, we ask every candidate which CFA value they most closely align to. As I reflect on the past 12 months at CFA West Region and ask myself which value I have most closely aligned to, it has to be adaptability.

When the last edition of *Brigade* magazine was published, we had just experienced our driest September on record. This was followed by above-average rainfall. We then experienced a succession of large fires across West Region, around the Grampians and near Beaufort, which have resulted in prolonged response and recovery activities by members. We were ably supported by strike teams from across the state and partner agencies including Forest Fire Management Victoria, Fire Rescue Victoria and our forest industry brigades. The combined effort resulted in fewer losses than could have been the case, which is a credit to the commitment of all.

In recent weeks I observed adaptive and innovative use of technologies to support our people in our mission of preventing and suppressing fires. West Region's vegetation management team recently trialled the use of drone technology to ignite six kilometres of roadside burns at Stoneleigh in District 16. This initiative has the potential to improve the efficiency and accuracy of roadside burning.

West Region's first ultra heavy tanker (UHT) has entered service at Ballarat City Fire Brigade and is responding to fires in District 15 and 16. The story of this capability and the brigade that operates the UHT is one of adaptability to changing community needs. Ballarat City's members have embraced the innovative approach to training members on the UHT, ensuing timely entry to service. As a former integrated CFA brigade, Ballarat City has pivoted to this new capability and is the only brigade in District 15 with a UHT.

In November 2023, Daylesford and Hepburn brigades attended a motor vehicle accident that tragically took the lives of five people. The adaptability of these CFA members to use their skills and capabilities to support Ambulance Victoria was inspiring. Supporting our responding personnel was an adaptable Peer Support team who were in place to provide initial wellbeing care services to our members as they returned to Daylesford Fire Station.

To all our adaptable CFA people across West Region and beyond, thank you for doing the work you do to protect our communities. Stay safe and stay adaptable.

GROUP OFFICER, D6



Mark Billing

I have been a group officer for the Corangamite Group for 27 years. Our group has 15 CFA brigades and two forest industry brigades, covering about 2,000 square kilometres from the Great Ocean Road in the south, through the Western Otways, and north into open grasslands and rocky country.

During my tenure as group officer, CFA has undergone various changes in communications, paging and the vehicle fleet. However, the importance of having motivated, well-trained and supported volunteers has remained constant. Managing a group as large as ours is especially challenging, but I'm fortunate to have a dedicated team of DGOs and captains who make my job easier. The strength of our group lies in our culture of open discussion and our drive to continually enhance our operations.

Our group has faced challenging fires, but the one that stands out is the Wye River fire on Christmas Day 2015. The fire destroyed 116 houses, burnt 2,500 hectares of land, and had a perimeter of 47 kilometres. It took 34 days to fully contain it. Though the event tested our capabilities, we were overwhelmed by the support from other emergency services and the community. The experience also led to the creation of many long-lasting relationships.

As a leader, a defining moment for me was the Linton fire on 2 December 1998, where I served as a strike team leader with crews from District 6. Tragically, five volunteer firefighters from District 7 lost their lives that day. I will never forget when the Mayday call came through. We have since learned from that tragic loss and have improved our minimum training and turnover procedures. We owe it to the five lost volunteers and our families to ensure everyone returns home safely.

One of our group's challenges is the significant population increase during summer, particularly for our brigades along the Great Ocean Road. For example, Apollo Bay brigade, responsible for an urban area, road accident rescue, high-angle rescue, and other general callouts, experiences a surge in jobs. It is a dynamic brigade that's inclusive throughout its ranks. The brigade wasn't affiliated with a group for a long time, and we are pleased the members approached us to provide operational support and help with leadership.

As I think of my involvement with CFA after 40 years, I can't help but reflect on the friendships I've made within the organisation and the community. It has been a challenging yet rewarding experience that I would gladly repeat. In fact, I've gained more from CFA than I've given back. Despite the inevitable challenges that CFA will face in the future, it's up to all of us to ensure that this great organisation remains vibrant and sustainable.



Bushfires and wild storms cause widespread destruction

PHOTO: JOHN MCLEOD

The Wimmera fire district was declared a Catastrophic Fire Danger Rating for 13 February because of predicted high temperatures and strong winds, coupled with a wind change later in the day. As expected, dozens of fires broke out, the most serious of which were in or near the Grampians National Park. More than 40 properties were destroyed in Pomonal and one in Dadswells Bridge.

Later in the day, severe storms, destructive wind gusts of more than 125 km/hour, and lightning across the state resulted in hundreds of power poles and lines down across the state; more than 500,000 properties lost power.

In the days following 13 February, more settled weather allowed firefighters to get the upper hand on the largest blazes, and hundreds of CFA members continued to work on the ground alongside our partner emergency services.

A fire that impacted the townships of Bellfield, Halls Gap, Lake Fyans and Pomonal burned about 2,223 hectares. Meanwhile, a second fire at Mount Stapylton to the north of the Grampians threatened nearby communities, including Dadswells Bridge and Glenorchy. The fire burned approximately 4,431 hectares.

Chief Officer Jason Heffernan thanked members for their efforts in responding to the blazes.

“I’m extremely proud of our members and their dedication, commitment and resilience in extraordinary circumstances,” Jason said.

CFA members who might need additional support for themselves or a family member can call our Wellbeing Support Line 24/7 on 1800 959 232 for advice on a range of topics.

BURNOVER AT POMONAL

Firefighters from the Eureka Group strike team were caught in a burnover, but their training and equipment helped save their lives. The crew arrived in Pomonal at about 4pm on 13 February when a wind change occurred. Ballarat Fire Brigade Crew Leader Jarrod

Pegg said the blaze went from slow moving and predictable to increasing in height several metres at a time.

“We were attacking the fire and the rapid change in wind caused a significant fire wall to approach our truck, which came over us while we were still out of the truck,” Jarrod said. “I enacted our burnover protocol, ensuring my crew got safely into the truck, then radioed through a mayday call to our strike team leader.

“We had little time to act, but were able to get into the truck safely with minimal injuries. Fortunately our training kicked in. All I had to do was inform my team we were going into a burnover and everyone played a part to make sure we were safe.”

In true CFA spirit, after getting medical clearance the strike team chose to continue fighting fires.

“I’m proud of my crew. They were adamant they wanted to get back to the fireground to continue protecting the community they were there to save.”

DEALING WITH STORM DAMAGE

Many brigades responded to trees down, power outages and other damage across the state. For example, when the residents of Mirboo North in Gippsland lost reticulated water supply because of storm damage, Mirboo North Fire Brigade members stepped in to help. They worked tirelessly from the evening of 13 February, carrying out road rescues, using chainsaws to clear fallen trees to provide access to properties, and doing welfare checks on residents. The brigade members also worked with Gippsland Water to set up temporary lighting so that the town’s water supply could be restored.

Staff from CFA’s State Logistics Centre (SLC) also supported Mirboo North residents. Only three hours after the initial call was made for assistance in the early hours of 14 February, the SLC delivered almost 7,000 litres of bottled water to grateful community members. CFA’s General Manager Infrastructure Services Paul Santamaria said the quick response showed how CFA supports communities in need.

The west takes a second hit

Only nine days after the Pomonal fire, on Thursday 22 February many communities in the west of the state again faced a serious bushfire emergency. A Total Fire Ban was declared for six out of nine fire districts because of predicted high temperatures and strong winds, including a late wind change.

The fire started in bushland near Bayindeen, east of Ararat and quickly spread and began spotting up 10 kilometres ahead of the main fire. Emergency warnings were issued in the afternoon and residents in impacted townships were advised to leave. Four relief centres were set up.

A wind change occurred in late afternoon, which created a larger firefront and threatened more communities. Impacted townships included Amphitheatre, Bayindeen, Beaufort, Buangor, Elmhurst, Mount Cole and Raglan.

By the evening, the fire had grown to just over 5,000 hectares. About 1,000 firefighters from CFA, Forest Fire Management Victoria and Fire Rescue Victoria fought the fire on the ground, including CFA strike teams from across the state. The ground force was supported by aerial firefighting aircraft, including the C130 Hercules and the Boeing 737 large air tanker from NSW. The efforts of these waterbombers saved many homes, but unfortunately, the fire destroyed six homes and numerous outbuildings.

The strong southerly wind change pushed the fire to the north overnight, and by 10am Friday morning it had grown to more



PHOTO: NIGEL HOOKE

than 11,000 hectares, and 21,000 by Monday. Beaufort brigade members, who had recently fought the Pomonal bushfire, were faced with protecting their own community a few days later.

"Once the wind change came through, the fires got progressively worse. We had our own spot fires, fires in Raglan, which is close by, and fires burning towards town," Beaufort Fire Brigade Captain Tony Neville said.

He said they fought on rough terrain that wasn't easily accessible. "Good for sheep and that's about it."

"I'm proud of my members and what they did to fight those fires. It's our houses and people we know, and that's ultimately why we do it. It's not something we do for pats on the back. We choose to do it because we live in the same community as everyone else."

Flood response in two states

Hundreds of CFA members spent December and January helping with the devastating floods that impacted Victoria and Queensland. More than 200 CFA volunteers supported VICSES with the damaging floods in early January, and 57 members were deployed to Queensland to support the clean-up following terrible storms and floods over Christmas and New Year.

The hardest hit Victorian communities included Shepparton, Bendigo, Yea, Seymour, Rochester, Echuca and Murchison.

At 2am on 13 January, Goornong Fire Brigade Captain Jamie Francis answered the call of a community member whose home had been inundated by water.

"Many people told us they couldn't get out of their homes. We helped eight people to get out of four homes," Jamie said. "We also had to rescue a couple stranded on the roof of their car."

Over a 48-hour period, the commitment of CFA brigades across the region was clear to see, with many working through the next day.

"Honestly, we were just helping the community. The community pitched in so much as well. We are a small brigade. I don't know what we would have done without the community's help," Jamie said.

Bunyip Fire Brigade also made a significant contribution, with volunteers diverting more than two million litres of water away from homes in low-lying areas. Brigade Captain Jason Boler said eight homes on Riverside Avenue were about to be inundated when CFA arrived.

"It's what we do. We didn't save the homes. We just saved water going into them. Our members are part of the community and they didn't hesitate to turn out," Jason said.



TRAINING IMPROVEMENTS ON THE WAY

CFA has carried out a thorough review of General Firefighter training and is also launching a new online training platform. Story by Mollie Brandjes and Lucy Bishop



The Volunteer Firefighter Training Program (commonly called GFF) was rolled out in 2019. Five years on, CFA carried out a thorough evaluation and review of the program to assess where improvements could be made.

After collecting insights from diverse sources, including volunteers, the CFA/VFBV Joint Training Consultative Committee and instructors, the evaluation team came up with a list of recommendations that would transform the program.

THE REVIEW

To delve deeper into the program's strengths and weaknesses, we talked to new volunteers and instructors (both paid and volunteer) across the state. Focusing on class 1 and 2 brigades in regional areas, we asked for feedback about specific issues that hindered the effectiveness of the existing course. This approach ensured that changes were informed and tailored to the needs of those directly involved.

Our commitment to understanding the nuances of the training included attending consolidation and assessment sessions. This hands-on approach provided valuable insights into how the training was conducted and delivered. Additionally, recognising the importance of individual perspectives, we conducted one-on-one discussions with current instructors, volunteers, learning and development coordinators and administrators and regional leaders to understand the intricacies and challenges faced by those actively involved in different areas of the program.

The feedback from more than 100 people across our five regions, gathered through in-person meetings and phone conversations, proved invaluable in the journey to revitalise the GFF course.

Currently, work is underway on the new version of the program, incorporating both major and minor changes based on the extensive feedback and the program team's own insights and recommendations. Recognising the overall effectiveness of the

course, we aim to streamline content to make it more concise and accessible for new firefighters entering their brigades.

GFF 2.0

The GFF program updates have been carefully considered and determined based on feedback received during the consultation process. In late February, CFA's Operational Doctrine and Training team met with the Joint Training Consultative Committee to review and discuss the proposed changes, ensuring that the outcomes meet the needs of volunteers.

One significant proposed change to GFF is the addition of a nationally accredited unit (PUAEQU001 - Prepare, maintain and test response equipment) to enhance learners' skills without extending the course duration. This addition is a necessary and highly requested prerequisite for other CFA courses, offering learners more relevant and practical skills.

In response to concerns raised about the assessment process, we will comprehensively restructure the theory assessment. This strategic overhaul ensures the assessment aligns seamlessly with the covered content, creating a more coherent and integrated learning experience for participants.

One more notable improvement would be the transition to an online assessment format so that learners can complete assessments at their own pace. This shift not only caters to different learning styles, but also diminishes stress levels among participants because they can follow the course material in a way that suits their individual preferences and schedules.

Additionally, incorporating a self-marking feature in the online assessment system will add another layer of efficiency to the learning process. This innovative approach streamlines the evaluation process, allowing participants to receive immediate feedback about their performance. Simultaneously, this feature significantly lightens the workload for instructors, freeing up valuable



PHOTOS: MOLLIE BRAND JES

time that can be redirected towards more personalised support for volunteers during in-person sessions. Hard copy assessments will still be available for those who prefer not to complete it online.

By embracing these changes, we aim to create an assessment framework that accurately measures participants' understanding and fosters a conducive learning environment. The emphasis on flexibility and self-paced learning, coupled with the eased administrative burden on instructors, reflect our commitment to continuously enhance the overall educational experience within the GFF program.

The Brigade Action Checklist (BAC) also emerged as a recurring topic during our discussions, with many people saying it was a challenge to complete it within the allotted time or fill it out accurately. Despite these difficulties, it was acknowledged that the BAC has a vital role to motivate new volunteers to participate in their brigades and engage with existing members. Brigades are a valuable source of shared knowledge and information, and we are committed to streamlining the BAC process to preserve its role in passing on essential skills to volunteers while eliminating the obstacles that have led to delays and frustrations.

One concept that emerged was for a condensed version of the GFF program that could be completed in just three days. This idea was suggested to the team during an evening workshop session with a group of District 16 brigades, where we discovered that one of the instructors at the workshop had already devised a three-day session plan. As this idea aligned with feedback we had received about offering more flexible delivery options, we were eager to support this innovative approach. We have set the wheels in motion to implement a pilot session of this version of GFF.

The three-day GFF format was a resounding success in that area, and generated interest from other smaller brigades across the

state. While we acknowledge that this condensed version may not suit everyone, its success shows our commitment to flexibility within the course structure. The overarching goal is to allow the scheduling of the GFF program to align seamlessly with the preferences and needs of the participants.

The flexibility also includes various scheduling options such as multiple nights over three weeks or even a two-month duration. The intention is to provide districts and groups with the tools to tailor the scheduling of the GFF program to what works best for their unique circumstances. By embracing diverse time frames, we aim to empower districts and groups to craft a GFF experience that aligns with their specific requirements and maximises the effectiveness of the training.

NEXT STEPS

To ensure a smooth rollout of the new GFF program, information will be made available closer to the release date. Watch out for emails detailing the changes and outlining each participant's role in the process.

The evolution of the GFF program showcases our commitment to address the specific needs and challenges faced by volunteers. Through a collaborative and comprehensive approach, we aim to provide an enhanced training experience that meets accreditation standards and equips volunteers with the skills needed to serve their communities effectively.

Training Pathway: feedback sought

This month, members get a first glimpse of the new Training Pathway platform that's designed to guide them seamlessly through all areas of their development requirements.

The platform gives members greater visibility and clarity around training by providing further insight into what training is available to them and what the progression of skills looks like in their chosen area.

Set to be finalised in the middle of the year, CFA Manager Training Design & Development Nicol Levi said she was excited for members to get an opportunity to provide feedback about the interface before it is officially launched.

"We're currently developing the Training Pathway with a working group alongside Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria," Nicol said.

"Together we have been working through consultations to build the draft.

"We've set up a page on Members Online where volunteers can browse the draft platform and supply feedback through a survey. The closing date for giving feedback is the end of March, so I encourage members to log into Members Online soon.

"Ultimately, this platform is for the volunteers and we want them

to have the best user experience. The idea is, for example, if someone wants to be a crew leader, they can see everything they need to do to get there. They can uncover what training skills they need to develop to reach that milestone," Nicol said.

"We wanted to create a more seamless way for members to understand what steps they need to take to develop themselves further in a specified area of interest.

"Once live, everything will sit in one place on Members Online, and we will realign the catalogue, so the two things mirror each other. Members can explore the courses available and then proceed to them via a link.

"It may be that they can register an expression of interest or find out more information as to when a course is coming up too."

The new platform will also let members see what other brigades are doing and show them a wider range of training activities, such as rescue or hazmat.

"This feature means members might come across something they didn't even know they had access to or a topic they have always been interested in learning more about," Nicol said.

To find out more about Training Pathway go to members.cfa.vic.gov.au/brigades-operational/training

VESEP GRANTS BOOST BRIGADES

The Victorian Government's Volunteer Emergency Services Equipment Program (VESEP) will give almost \$11 million in grant funding to more than 140 CFA brigades to purchase new equipment in 2023-24. Story by Duncan Russell

For every \$1 of funding from a brigade or group, the VESEP program provides \$2 (up to a maximum of \$150,000) and helps with the purchase of a wide range of items.

There are five categories under which funding is available:

- Volunteer amenities costing less than \$5,000
- Minor works costing less than \$150,000
- Operational equipment
- Specialist vehicles and field command vehicles
- Tankers.

The 2023-24 funding included a range of replacement vehicles for Wooriwyrite, Mooroolbark, Knox City, Emerald and Maude brigades, while brigades in Eaglehawk, Kallista-The Patch and Kyabram are among those receiving updated amenities.

The contribution from the government towards equipment means brigades have a great incentive to fundraise in their communities and apply for a VESEP grant. There are also VESEP Special Access Grants available to provide a further financial boost for brigades that face challenges with fundraising.

The full list of successful applicants in 2023-24 is available on EMV's website: emv.vic.gov.au/how-we-help/grants-and-awards/volunteer-emergency-services-equipment-program-vesep.

To find out how to apply for a VESEP grant go to members.cfa.vic.gov.au/brigades-operational/brigades-vesep, and if you have any questions, email VESEPProjects@cfa.vic.gov.au.

We talked to two brigades who received a much-needed new station and vital equipment thanks to VESEP.

POREPUNKAH FIRE BRIGADE

Porepunkah Fire Brigade has successfully obtained a new fire station thanks to three government grants and local fundraising.

"We're excited about the station redevelopment at Porepunkah," Fire Brigade Captain Mick Dalbosco said. "We're building a new three-bay shed beside our existing station to house our Iveco

heavy tanker, Nissan Patrol ultralight and, at some time in the near future, a new pumper."

The new station will also have a breathing apparatus (BA) washing area and laundry facility.

The grants will also help the brigade to convert the existing station to provide an office, a meeting/training room, kitchen, change rooms, shower and toilets. The meeting room will have a large screen with video conferencing capability.

"This will enable remote training which will be a great advantage to our members who are faced with an hour's drive to our major centres for face-to-face training," Mick said. "Our town is central to the Ovens Valley Group, so hopefully the room will be used as a hub for our group for shared training sessions."

The new station was made possible through three government grants. First, the brigade was told it was eligible to apply for a grant from the Enhancing Volunteerism Grants Program and it received money following the community sale of a local church. In 2020-21, the brigade successfully applied for its first VESEP grant for concreting the new station, then it received a second VESEP grant in the 2022-23 cycle to fit out the existing station.

In all, the brigade has secured about \$426,000 towards the new station build and old station renovation, and has contributed about \$183,000.

At the time the magazine went to print (end of February) contracts had been signed with the builder and the brigade was waiting for council approval.

The new station is needed because the brigade's risk profile has changed over the years.

"Our risk profile was traditionally rural, but recent developments in the township areas have increased our urban risk profile.

This has brought about a change in direction for the brigade and we now want to increase the numbers of members trained in structural firefighting and with BA accreditation," Mick said.



JUNG FIRE BRIGADE

Jung Fire Brigade Captain Chris Pallot has worked hard over the years to secure VESEP-funded equipment – the brigade received a Nissan Patrol ultralight in 2015, a tyre inflation system for its medium tanker in 2020, and a side-by-side vehicle (SSV) in 2024.

“We’re very fortunate when it comes to raising money,” Chris said. “There are a couple of large companies in our response area which we protect. I emailed them explaining what equipment we needed, and these two emails raised \$5,000 for the brigade.

“We also sold a lot of chocolates, collected old car and truck batteries for recycling, and have raffled a trailer load of firewood at a local market. We’ve done all sorts of things to raise money.”

During the 2014 Grampians fire, the Jung tanker was on strike team duty and Jung brigade members wanted to find a way the brigade could respond in its local area. The brigade applied for a VESEP grant to buy an ultralight which they thought would be perfect for the brigade’s response area.

“We contributed about \$22,000 towards the ultralight in 2015, and it has been an invaluable asset,” Chris said. “We have a lot of swampy country with trees close together, and we can be in tight spaces to fight a running fire.

“We try to send the ultralight out of the door first and aim to knock down a fire quickly or protect property quickly. It’s easier to manoeuvre than a tanker and is perfect for rapid response.

“It’s a very useful vehicle. It’s part of a strike team, it can tow a quick fill and other equipment, and it will tow our new side-by-side vehicle on a trailer. The ultralight paid for itself very quickly.”

There’s a lot of sand in District 17 with the Little Desert and Big Desert, and Jung brigade borders both. To help with response in this environment, the district has dedicated sand tankers. Jung brigade doesn’t have a sand tanker, but thanks to a VESEP grant it has the next best thing – a tyre inflation system (pictured below) that was retrofitted at the Horsham DMO workshop in early 2020.

“When we’re going into sand we can deflate the tyres with the push of a button,” Chris said. “This gives us a bigger footprint and increases traction, which is safer for the firefighters. We’ve also used this inflation system to pull out bogged trucks while working in sandy conditions.”



As well as fighting fires, Jung brigade has a keen focus on vegetation management which benefits the town and surrounding communities.

One of the controlled burns it conducts is a 17-kilometre stretch of grass along a rail corridor that runs through town. The brigade, along with the vegetation management officer and rail operator, work cooperatively to ensure this vital vegetation management takes place to protect the Jung township.

“We walk the 17 kilometres with a drip torch. On average it takes three days and needs a different crew for each day. Undertaking this task wears people out.”

In the future, the new VESEP-funded SSV will be used to speed up this task and improve the welfare of brigade members. It could also be used to help with rescues in the Grampians or at Mount Arapiles.

“It’s better to have modern equipment that can get the job done more quickly and safely.”

Chris is a huge advocate for applying for VESEP grants and VESEP also benefited him directly in his job.

“I had a VESEP-funded job for four years as a DMO in the Horsham workshop, so overall VESEP has been a really important part of my life.”

The role of an HQ brigade

On a visit to South Australia in 2004, the then District 17 Operations Manager Dale Russell met with South Australia Country Fire Service members. Dale learned about SA's headquarters brigades, which had an important role supporting brigades on the fireground.

Dale could see the potential of establishing headquarters brigades in CFA and, following support from the Chief Officer, he spent 12 months promoting his idea to CFA management across Victoria.

HQ brigades can draw on the experiences and expertise of former active members from brigades across a district, so that CFA retains important knowledge. These members enthusiastically contribute to CFA and feel they still belong to the CFA family. HQ brigades are also a good option for community members who want to support CFA but don't want to be firefighters. CFA has 19 headquarters brigades including District 17 Headquarters Brigade, established in 2006 following a public meeting in Horsham.

Over the past 18 years District 17 HQ Brigade has assisted at many significant incidents, including the 2009 fires, Grampians fires in 2013 and 2014, the 2022 Poolaigelo fire, and major floods in Horsham and the wider district in 2011. Currently, the brigade has 28 members, of whom 17 have been brigade management team members in other brigades.

Brigade members carry out a range of activities to support firefighters, including:

- on the fireground by establishing and managing staging areas as required, providing essential supplies (for example, meals and fuel) and communications
- decamping from a fireground; by relocating personnel, vehicles and rehabilitating staging areas
- maintaining skills and equipment in readiness to respond.

Brigade members also take on roles in incident control centres, field management, use their well-equipped field operations vehicle, and support the welfare of group personnel. Their extensive experience is also valued as leaders of fire safety training, public information sessions and school visits targeted at both agricultural industries and householders.

Since 2006, the brigade has acquired crucial equipment that is integral to its support role, including a field operations vehicle. This Mercedes Benz van is fitted with extensive communication equipment, including a radio mast and internet access, and its own power generator so that it can operate in any location.

They also have a staging area trailer containing all the equipment needed to establish and manage a staging area, a mobile cool room trailer with cold bottled water, and a fuel trailer with a power pump for quick fill. In the near future, the brigade will have a twin hygiene trailer unit to provide toilets and washing facilities on the fireground.

Brigade Captain Graeme Lewis said his members have a lot of valuable experience.

"The brigade draws from a large knowledge base of former active CFA members," Graeme said. "However, we also have a number of people who are new to the CFA family who want to support the district in any way they can.

"A recent achievement of the brigade was to receive funding from both the Federal Government's Stronger Communities Program and from the Victorian Government's VESEP initiative to purchase a hygiene trailer unit. This will provide better amenities to support our fellow CFA members."

At the last presentation dinner, 11 brigade members (nine of whom are shown in the photo below) received awards representing 465 years of service. Also, four National Medal 15-year service clasps were presented.

STORY DAVID ELTRINGHAM OAM, DISTRICT 17 HEADQUARTERS BRIGADE SECRETARY



Back Row: Maree Varley, Ray Carman, Kevin Bolwell, David Eltringham, Dale Russell
Front Row: Doug Mitchell, Graham Hateley, Alan Hutchinson, Geoff Stratford

Watching grass dry is important

CFA volunteers and community members are being encouraged to become 'citizen scientists' to help provide critical information about the state's fire risk.

Grassland curing observers play a vital role in collecting ground information. These observations are combined with satellite imagery to produce maps that show how dry the grass is across Victoria.

CFA Remote Sensing Analyst Dr Danielle Wright said CFA needed more observers trained to provide readings of grass curing.

"There are parts of the state where we really need more eyes on the ground like the north-east, north-west and south-west where we have fewer observers participating," Danielle said.

"Our volunteer grassland observers are an incredibly valuable resource that helps to inform a lot of our decision-making over a fire season. We can't rely on satellite imagery alone. Although it's the best model available to us, it can overestimate and underestimate the curing levels.

"Observers' information can adjust the satellite readings so we can provide more accurate information to inform decision-making.

"Anyone who is interested in the role can participate, not just CFA volunteers," Danielle said.

Grassland observer and Wattle Glen Fire Brigade member Melissa Hughes (pictured) said the online training module took about 30 minutes to complete and it gave her everything she needed to become a citizen scientist.



"I love the data and the science that goes into this grassland observation. The course was so easy and CFA gives you great tools to support the role," Melissa said. "The information we observers gather has an immediate benefit to the community.

"I don't just see grass anymore when I'm out on the road; I now see so much more detail. It might be dry at the top but still green at the bottom, and I know exactly where it is in the curing process no matter where I am."

For more information go to cfa.vic.gov.au/grass or email grassland@cfa.vic.gov.au.

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PEER PROGRAM SUPPORTS MEMBER WELLBEING

CFA's volunteer and staff peers talk to their fellow members about difficult or potentially traumatic events. We spoke to five peers about their experiences. Story by Shaunnagh O'Loughlin

The volunteer program has been running for more than 30 years, starting in 1985 in the wake of the Ash Wednesday fires. In 2021 CFA welcomed its first corporate peers, including PTA staff, district mechanical officers and tower overseers. Together, in the past year alone, they have provided almost 3,000 hours of support to members.

Peer Support can be accessed via the CFA Wellbeing Support Line on **1800 929 232**, option 2.

KYLIE FINDLEY

A Regional BASO in South East Region, volunteer with Orbost brigade and Orbost's Group Secretary, Kylie Findley is happy to help anyone who walks into her office – staff or volunteer.

"As Arnold Schwarzenegger says in his book *Be Useful – Seven tools for life*, 'You'll get more satisfaction from having improved your neighbourhood, your town, your state, your country, and your fellow human beings than you'll ever get from your muscles, your figure, your automobile, your house, or your credit rating.'"

Kylie was in CFA's first intake of corporate peers, completing training online during the COVID-19 pandemic. As well as giving one-on-one support, Kylie has provided peer support during and after major disasters including in Bendigo and Echuca during the 2022 floods.

"Rocking up to a pump station where our members had been sitting for hours and having a chat and running an errand for them was great," she said.

"When members from my district came in for a meal break, it was like a reunion; they were so glad to see me. Just to sit and talk, give them some relief – chocolate – and a laugh; just being there to make them feel valuable was so impactful.

"There is a perception that peers are only there when someone is down, but we are there to remind everyone that they matter, that they are valuable and that we are there for them."

Kylie is a strong advocate for the program and encourages other members to join.

"If you have ever thought about being a peer, express your interest, take the opportunity, and run with it. It will enrich your life as well as the lives of the people we serve."



TIM PHILLIPS

Tim Phillips has been a volunteer for more than 30 years. He is 1st lieutenant at Digby Fire Brigade, deputy group officer for Merino Group and a BASO in District 4.

"When we come home from a traumatic event, sometimes we need to have that chat to help manage our thoughts," Tim said.

"As emergency responders, my father and I have always had each other to talk to – I wanted to provide the same service to others."

Tim is a peer with both the volunteer and corporate peer teams as well as a deputy peer coordinator.

"Mental health is such a huge issue in society. We all have things going on at home and in life and we can all suffer from the black dog. I have always been someone who people feel they can approach to get things off their chests, and I want to be there for those who need to talk."

Tim recalls a group Psychological First Aid session he and another peer had with a brigade that had responded to a car accident.

"We sat and talked through their experiences, giving those who wanted to the chance to tell their own story. After the session the group officer called to thank us for the time we spent with the members.

"To have the feeling you actually made a difference to someone in their time of need gives you such an overwhelming sense of achievement."

Tim said there were many reasons to talk to a peer, and sometimes the mere act of reaching out was enough to help people move forward.

"People often hesitate to seek professional help due to stigma. Peers can help reduce that anxiety and encourage people to reach out for further support.

"We can't give you all the answers. Sometimes people have the answers already and they just need a non-judgemental ear to allow them to get things off their mind, process their thoughts and take the next steps."





VAL CONDUIT

“A conversation with a peer can help you sort through the clutter and provide clarity about how to work through what you are experiencing.

“The conversations might not always be easy but the outcome for those who talk to a peer are much better than if they hadn’t started the conversation in the first place.”

Learning and Organisational Development Consultant Val Conduit became interested in joining the Peer Support Program after seeing a peer in action at a staging area.

“The level of training we receive is comprehensive and we had the support of experienced peers along the way. Once I had the skills and knowledge, I found it relatively easy to follow the simple strategies to help others.”

For Val, it’s often a chat in the corridor that develops into a peer conversation.

“It’s gratifying to see the person I am interacting with working with their own story to find a way forward,” she said. “Sometimes it’s simply letting them see that it is OK to not be OK at that point in time.”

DANIEL IDCZAK

Vegetation Management Team Leader Daniel Idczak, pictured right, believes it’s vital that people acknowledge the importance of mental health.

“Today’s society is getting busier and busier with many competing pressures especially for our members. Through the Peer Support Program we can raise awareness of mental health and help people understand that fluctuations in our mental health are normal and there is support available.”

A peer for three years, Daniel said that learning the best way to approach and speak with people and understanding when to listen and refer people to support services was great knowledge to have.

“Becoming a good peer is a journey,” he said. “Joining the program doesn’t immediately mean you will be doing activations as a peer; you can use your training as you feel comfortable.

“The peer cohort is also great to bounce ideas off others and get feedback.

“What you learn during your training is also transferable to other aspects of your CFA role and everyday life.”



TREVOR SCHWARZ

“Volunteers go above and beyond. Peers can make a huge difference when it comes to restoring others’ wellbeing,” Trevor Schwarz said. “Having contact with peers also has an educational component – people learn signs and symptoms in themselves and in others that may benefit from help.”

A volunteer for 20-plus years and member of Nhill Fire Brigade, Trevor regularly referred people to the Peer Support Program when he was a group officer and was encouraged to join himself five years ago.

“I knew people were affected by the jobs we’d been to and needed support. The difference one phone call can make to people experiencing distress can be huge, and peers can access psychologists very efficiently if they need professional help.”

Trevor said every peer activation was different but campaign fires such as the 2019-20 fires stood out because of the size and nature of the response.

“The ability to use your peer training to not only support CFA members, but to support members from other agencies and emergency services as well as the general public, was a real honour.”

Trevor said that joining the Peer Support Program should be an easy decision if it’s something that interests you.

“You’ll be supported every step of the way and if you’re training with a group, you’ll form a close bond with that group for years.

“The training was a self-learning journey, on top of gaining new skills. It’s benefited me in other ways, including providing the ability to have valuable conversations with people in all aspects of life, not just CFA.”



Australia Day 2024 Honours

Congratulations to the two CFA members and two secondees who received the Australian Fire Service Medal (AFSM) for their work in emergency services.



Ross Sullivan AFSM

Throughout his career Ross has exemplified the values of CFA and is well-regarded by volunteers and staff alike as an assured, knowledgeable, supportive, empathetic and humble leader. Since 2016, he has held the role of DCO North East Region.

Ross began his career at Bolinda and Monegetta brigade in the Junior running team before officially joining as a volunteer in 1978 at the age of 16.

“Being a volunteer at a small rural fire brigade was about looking after friends and farms around the district,” Ross said. “It meant a lot to be part of a service that made such a valued contribution.

“After I finished high school, the lure of working with machinery and equipment and the skills I learned operating vehicles led me to seek a career in the fire services. I never thought I would have been able to be a career firefighter with CFA and jumped at the opportunity when the course opened up.”

Over the years Ross worked his way through the CFA ranks from a frontline firefighter to his current role, where he has led North East Region through many emergencies and large-scale fires and floods including the 2009 fires, the 2014 Hazelwood Mine fire, the 2019-20 fires and the October 2022 floods.

During the 2009 fires, Ross was deployed to Churchill where he led and managed the response in the chaotic first hours of the fire when impacts on life, communities and first responders were not known. After the fires, he supported volunteers and staff in the ongoing response to the fires and subsequent recovery.

At the Hazelwood Mine fire, Ross was deployed as incident controller where his knowledge of the power industry and coal mine firefighting tactics supported the development and implementation of strategy and plans to suppress the fire and minimise community impact.

During the 2019-20 fires Ross established a process for the rehabilitation and repair of areas damaged by firefighting activity, which is now used as the CFA standard.

“To be in a position to support, provide assurance and opportunities to people on the ground – whether volunteers or staff – and help them to be successful in their own right is a great privilege,” Ross said.



Paula Grosveld AFSM

Paula has served CFA for 36 years and is currently the captain of Golden Beach Fire Brigade, deputy group officer, treasurer and health and safety officer of Banksia Group and District 10 Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria executive. She has had three stints as brigade captain, the first one from 2000, and was group secretary for 30 years.

“You have to respect the volunteers and they need to respect and trust you as captain,” Paula said. “Respect and kindness cost nothing and help develop a collaborative team.”

Paula regularly attends incidents in her response area and has taken on the role of strike team leader many times. She has attended campaign fires including the 2009 Delburn Complex fires, the Bairnsdale floods in 2012 and two tours of the 2019 Gippsland fires.

“My most memorable time as a strike team leader was during the 2019-20 fire season,” Paula said. “We drove through the Mount Delegate area to reach the Tubbut fire. It was a real challenge dealing with an angry community that felt they’d been forgotten. I tasked the strike team to talk to the community to gain their support and trust.

“We were protecting a property as we saw the fire coming. But we were then told to go to Buchan to protect the town. It was very emotional having to leave the property, but luckily it survived without our help.”

Paula is the local source of expertise for several CFA courses (including driving and General Firefighter training) and is highly regarded by Forest Fire Management Victoria firefighters.

“I try to remove the ‘us and them’ attitude,” Paula said. “When I’m at a fire alongside people from other agencies, I don’t care what colour they wear. We’re all there to do the same job.”

She is a mentor in the well-respected CFA Captains Peer Mentor Program and supports the wellbeing of others.

“I really valued the captains who chose to take part in the program. I’ve mentored two captains and found it so rewarding – seeing people bounce ideas off you and giving someone the courage to step outside their normal boundaries and give it a go. Sometimes people need encouragement to explore their own values.”



Bill Johnstone AFSM

Starting out as a volunteer at Gisborne Fire Brigade as a Junior in 1977, Bill progressed through the senior volunteer ranks over a 23-year period. He has maintained his training and responds to emergencies when required.

"It's a privilege to do what we do with the volunteers, and the community in general, and I've just been lucky enough to turn a journey in to a really rewarding and interesting career," Bill said.

Bill reflects fondly on his firefighting career with the Australian Aviation Rescue Fire Fighting Service (ARFFS). He started with ARFFS in 1986 as a labourer at the training college at Melbourne Airport, and served at Avalon, Tullamarine, Hobart and Cairns. It was here that he proved his exceptional empathy and operational experience in the well-known Hinchinbrook Island rock rescue on the evening of 9 April 1997, where a rock climber was trapped under a large boulder for 40 hours.

"It was really challenging and although a long time ago, it still resonates with me now," Bill said.

Going on to join CFA's career ranks in 2000, Bill worked extensively in operational management across Victoria.

Now as Regional Commander, he is a highly regarded senior figure in CFA and broader community. The development and ongoing success of using a helicopter for firefighting in Mallee crops and the value of pre-determined dispatch was proven under Bill's direction and is perhaps one of his proudest achievements.

"Getting aviation into the Mallee was a big thing at the time, and I was fortunate to have some very committed people alongside me who were able to help overcome all the hardships we encountered," Bill said.

A standout of his service was his appointment as the inaugural operations manager following the 2014 Hazelwood Open Cut Mine fire and the establishment of the new CFA District 27 positioned for the high-risk environment of our power supply. His leadership skills and compassion for volunteers' wellbeing has been used extensively throughout major floods, fires, and the devastating Kerang train crash in 2007.

"Going forward I'd like to see us put more of an emphasis on psychological wellbeing," Bill said.



John Katakouzinis AFSM

With a career spanning 32 years, John is well-respected for his work in the aviation firefighting sector. Beginning with CFA as a volunteer firefighter at Springvale Fire Brigade in 1991, John went on to become a career firefighter in 1999. He is currently CFA Commander – Aviation.

John has always been keen to champion change within the Victorian fire services, constantly looking for ways to improve the ways we protect the community. During his time as a career firefighter at Dandenong Fire Station, he helped to launch and improve a number of courses still used in CFA today. He also worked on a project to deliver battery-operated road rescue tools to rescue brigades.

John's interest in fire aviation developed while he was a volunteer, first qualifying as an air observer in 1997, before becoming an air attack supervisor and air operations manager.

"I've always been interested in aviation. During the 1997 Dandenong Ranges fires, I was a volunteer on the ground and aircraft played a big part. That set the course for me to get involved in fire aviation," John said.

"I always look for ways to give our people the skills they need, which is what made me start to look at what was being done with aviation internationally."

One example of this is the fire aviation flight simulator. John led the design, development and delivery of this Australia-first project. The flight simulator provides real-world training and skill testing in a safe, controlled environment.

John's passion for training comes from a desire to ensure the community feels safe in the knowledge they are in good hands.

"As firefighters, we are generally turning up to the worst day of someone's life. We need to turn up with the best possible skill set, and the only way we can do that is by continually training to the best possible standard. My passion is about giving our people the best tools possible."

John said he is proud of the people he has helped to develop to become leaders in their own right.

"It always puts a smile on my face when firefighters I've trained contact me telling me about their achievements and thanking me."

Vale Garry Mallen

On 30 January 2024, we lost one of our own, Portland Fire Brigade member and former captain Garry Mallen, who passed away while attending a shed fire in Portland.

After the long-serving member collapsed at the scene, colleagues from his brigade, Fire Rescue Victoria and Ambulance Victoria administered CPR. Unfortunately, Garry was unable to be revived.

Garry, who was 66, joined CFA in 1972 as a Junior member of Portland brigade. He relocated to Narrawong Fire Brigade in 1998, but rejoined Portland brigade in 2005.

Over the years Garry held many positions including Portland captain from 2010 to 2016 and 2nd lieutenant in 1994. His most recent role was 4th lieutenant and the apparatus officer. Garry was not just an active member of the brigade but was also the 6th deputy group officer of the Heywood Group and the district planning committee delegate.

Garry's funeral was held at Portland Civic Hall on 9 February, and was attended by brigade members, family, friends, CFA Chief Officer Jason Heffernan, CEO



Natalie McDonald, CFA Board members and other senior leaders including Emergency Management Commissioner Rick Nugent and Fire Rescue Commissioner Gavin Freeman.

Those who knew him and worked alongside him respected his leadership, experience and most importantly his willingness to mentor others.

Portland Fire Brigade Captain Ryan Delony said Garry was gentle, caring, devoted, calm and humble, yet also a larrikin.

"The brigade and community have lost a father we didn't realise we had," Ryan said. "He was the cornerstone of his family, brigade and community."

At the funeral, Chief Officer Jason Heffernan announced that Garry had received the Outstanding Service Medal for his prolonged service and exceptional performance.



2024 State Championships

Over two weekends in March, brigades will compete in the 2024 CFA/VFBV State Championships in Mooropna. This event is a great opportunity for members to test their skills and compete with other brigades in a friendly environment, as well as reconnect with, and meet, new members from across the state.

The Urban Juniors State Champs will be held on Saturday 16 and Sunday 17 March, and the Urban Senior, Rural Junior and Rural Senior State Champs will on Saturday 23 and Sunday 24 March. There will also be a torchlight procession, trade displays, firefighting equipment displays and a CFA merchandise store.

Last year's Urban Seniors champion team, Melton A, will be back to defend the title it has won for the past two years. When team coach and competitor Anthony Rhodes was asked whether he thought Melton A could make it three in a row, he was optimistic but also aware of the huge challenge.

"The Seniors have been improving over the years and we came second in 2021," Anthony said. "Everyone has come through the Juniors team and it takes years to improve the Seniors. We've lost some of last year's winning team members and it takes a lot of training to compete – we train twice a



week for two hours. There are so many good teams competing, but we are definitely going to try to win again."

Melton Juniors also won the Urban Champs last year. Anthony, who coaches the Juniors as well as the Seniors, said he makes sure the younger competitors understand the importance of discipline and teamwork.

"I started in the Melton Juniors when I was 12 years old and I'm still here at 50. It took me 32 years to win my first Championship and I want to experience winning again. The Champs are a positive mental outlet, using skills and working with teammates. They are a great opportunity to celebrate what we do in CFA," Anthony said.

"We are all proud of Melton brigade and its history, and Champs give our volunteers another avenue to be involved in the brigade."

Anthony's sons, Bailey and Cooper, will also be in the Seniors team hoping to make it a three-peat at the 2024 Champs.

"We don't own the jumper. It's given to us to create our own story while the jumper is in our hands."

STORY DUNCAN RUSSELL

QUARTERLY OPERATIONAL UPDATE



Chief Officer's message for autumn

Over the past few months, Victoria has experienced unusual weather for what was supposed to be our first El Niño season in quite some time. Some parts of the state received more rain than expected for this time of the year, while other parts remained dry.

With this in mind, I would like to take this opportunity to remind you all of the risk with trucks becoming bogged in areas that have experienced increased, unseasonal rainfall. I encourage all members to familiarise themselves with the content shared in the Quarterly Operational Update in autumn 2023, on the recovery of a bogged or disabled CFA vehicle.

In addition, the extreme weather events in February, which resulted in fires, power outages and other incidents, continues to keep our members activated around the state. These incidents also reinforced the importance of continuous training.

A crew at the Pomonal fire was involved in a burnover. The members remained calm and implemented the procedures they regularly practised and trained for. Thankfully, our members came out of the incident unscathed.

Our CFA members have not only given their time attending to numerous incidents within Victoria, but many were also deployed interstate to assist in the Queensland and Northern Territory with flood and fire response. I applaud all members for their continued dedication to supporting our state and other parts of Australia.

The March Quarterly Operational Update includes information about the following topics:

- Overview of electric vehicle fires
- Planned burns
- First on scene
- Revisiting the Linton bushfire.

Overview of electric vehicle fires

With fires involving electric cars, scooters and bikes on the rise, it's always a good idea for brigades to be up to date with the latest information about how to deal with them safely.

Planned burns

Planned burning forms a large part of CFA's service delivery to control and manage fuel loads in preparation for the fire season. It's important members have a thorough understanding of the

doctrine that underpins it, the planning process, how to conduct a burn, and the programs offered by CFA.

First on scene

In this edition we are introducing a new series: first on scene. CFA members attend a wide variety of incidents. At times these can be incidents that are out of the box, and members may not be familiar with the situation or may require specialist skills or qualifications to manage. This new series will focus on steps you can take within 15 to 20 minutes of arriving first on scene to a variety of incidents, including structure fires, hazmat incidents, motor vehicle accidents, and more.

This edition has a quick overview of the key guiding principles that all members should be aware of when arriving on scene at any incident, including establishing control, size-ups, dynamic risk assessments and sit-reps.

Revisiting the Linton bushfire 25 years on

As we recently passed the 25th anniversary of the Linton bushfire, we have included an article that revisits the incident and the lessons that came from such a tragic event.

After action reviews (AARs) and recording observations

We all know the importance of conducting AARs to give our members the opportunity to share their experiences and views about our response to incidents. An Observation Management Tool is currently being developed to make recording your observations easier. More information about this work will be provided, but in the meantime brigades are encouraged to hold AARs to review their operational response and email a copy to aar@cfa.vic.gov.au.

I would like to thank each and every one of you for your commitment and hard work, whether it's volunteers on the frontline or the many CFA staff in incident management teams, district command centre and other roles. I also recognise the impacts that these contributions may have on you and your families. Thank you for your continued commitment to CFA.

To access the Quarterly Operational Update material and other topics of interest, go to members.cfa.vic.gov.au/brigades-operational/quarterly-operational-updates or scan the QR code.



Overview of electric vehicle fires

Recently there has been an increase in the number of fires caused by battery-powered products such as cars, bikes and scooters. Below is an overview of what to look for and how to safely deal with an electric vehicle (EV) lithium-ion battery.

Electric vehicles

Electric vehicle fires require more attention compared to a petrol or diesel car fire because:

- the technology is newer
- EV fires are complex and it is likely they may emit a highly toxic/flammable vapour cloud
- There is a risk of thermal runaway.

EV terms include:

- HEV – hybrid electric vehicle
- PHEV – plug-in hybrid electric vehicle
- BEV – battery electric vehicle
- FCEV – fuel cell electric vehicle.

The most common type of battery used in electric vehicles is a lithium-ion battery containing high DC voltages of 400 to 900 volts.

What is thermal runaway?

Thermal runaway is a chemical chain reaction in lithium-ion batteries that occurs when a battery cell short circuits and starts to heat up uncontrollably. In lithium-ion batteries this can create a flammable and toxic vapour.

Temperatures can exceed 1000°C, igniting vapours and can be violent and explosive in nature.

A lithium-ion battery may go into thermal runaway when exposed to fire, crushed or overcharged.

Actions to take when thermal runaway happens:

- Conduct a dynamic risk assessment.
- Wear correct PPC and BA.
- Approach from uphill and upwind.
- Do not enter the vapour cloud.
- Ensure atmospheric monitoring is being conducted.
- Ensure a thermal imaging camera is available. Use it to monitor battery temperature – any rise above ambient temperature can be an indication of thermal runaway.
- Further details about these actions can be found in the Thermal Runaway Information Sheet.

Electric vehicle fire considerations

Here are some factors to consider when attending a vehicle accident:

- When conducting a size-up, take note of any impact damage to the vehicle's floor pan/battery casing. If the battery's casing (floor pan) is open or severely crushed, prepare for thermal runaway.
- When monitoring the battery's temperature, focus on the place of any damage.
- Be aware that projectiles may be released from a battery in thermal runaway.
- Inform the road operators and other agencies of the possibility of a long-duration incident so they can consider traffic management and community notifications.
- Not all EV fires and accidents will result in the battery going into thermal runaway.

Follow these extinguishment techniques:

- If the vehicle has not been immobilised, commence fire attack from 45° to the wheels to avoid unexpected vehicle movement or high-pressure flames.
- Attack fire using a line of 38mm hose (at a minimum). Watch out for hose lines laying in contaminated fire water run-off.
- In some circumstances (and if safe to do so), allowing the fire to burn itself out may be an option.
- Traction batteries are generally in the floor pan of passenger vehicles. Applying water to the underside of the vehicle may help to cool the battery.

PPE and decontamination

Full structural firefighting PPE (with donned BA) should be worn by all firefighters at EV fires during offensive operations.

Due to the toxic products of combustion, after attending a car fire, a risk assessment must be completed of possible PPC and equipment contamination. The scientific officer can also assist with this assessment.

Warning

- Due to the high voltage hazard and risk of electrocution, never cut or pierce a sealed battery enclosure, HV cabling (coloured orange) or remove the service plug.
- All battery cells may still contain voltage, even if damaged. This is called stranded energy. Stranded energy is like having LPG in a damaged cylinder with no way to remove the gas.
- Do not forcibly open the casing of a battery to access burning cells as this will expose firefighters to high voltage DC electricity and toxic chemicals.
- During all offensive operations, wear correct PPC and BA.

Members are encouraged to go to members.cfa.vic.gov.au/alternativepower for more information about thermal runaway, battery energy storage systems, photovoltaic solar systems and electric vehicle fires, or use the QR code.



Planned burning

Planned burning is an important part of CFA's service delivery to control and manage fuel loads in preparation for the fire season.

Fuel reduction by burning decreases the spread of bushfire by lowering the intensity. Lower intensity makes it easier for firefighters to control a bushfire, and significantly reduces the impact of flame, radiation and ember attack.

It's important that members have a thorough understanding of planned burning including the doctrine that surrounds it, the planning process, how to conduct a burn, and the various programs associated with planned burning.

CFA involvement in planned burning

CFA brigades have a proud history of undertaking planned burns to protect their community. In addition to reducing community risk, there are many benefits to brigade involvement in planned burning. It provides CFA members with experience and training in bushfire suppression, and the opportunity to observe and learn about fire behaviour under different conditions. As a brigade activity, it can also raise the profile of the brigade in the community and attract new members.

Burns conducted jointly with CFA and public land managers provide learning opportunities and improve agency interoperability and relationships during bushfire suppression.

Planned burns accountability

Planned burning is a part of broad array of environmental and land management objectives. As such, CFA has a clear duty to ensure all planned burns meet our responsibilities required for compliance with up to 38 pieces of legislation. The knowledge and administrative workload to collate these requirements is done through regional and state-based vegetation management teams, to reduce the burden on brigades. Brigades should note that when receiving permits for planned burns, special care should be taken to understand and comply with the conditions of that permit. These may include traffic management, protection of biodiversity, protection of trees, protection of heritage as well as any local law requirements. Failing to comply with these conditions will mean that permits are not being adhered to, resulting in follow-up enquires.

Planned burn doctrine

Standard Operating Procedure 9.39 outlines the procedures and processes required to undertake a planned burn by CFA. It helps members plan and conduct a planned burn and ensures it is executed in a safe and efficient way that benefits the community and environment.

A planned burn conducted in accordance with the planned burn SOP *and Safe Work Procedure - Conduct Planned Burning Operation* secures the protection provided to CFA members and the landowner or manager in accordance with the CFA Act 1958 for loss or injury associated with a planned burn that has been approved.



A properly planned burn is legal, and CFA supports you in undertaking these important fire prevention works. To maintain safety and to better protect our members and the community from any potential loss or injury, it is vital that all doctrine is followed.

The CFA suite of planned burning doctrine can be found on members.cfa.vic.gov.au/burns.

CFA planned burn camps

Training is an important for upskilling our workforce and ensuring members have an in-depth understanding of certain activities before they take part in them.

CFA runs burn training camps. At the camps, members gain vital experience in all aspects of introducing fire to the land under controlled conditions. The experience gained also has the direct benefit of building skills in fire response and suppression. Contact your regional vegetation management team about planned burn opportunities. Find contacts at members.cfa.vic.gov.au/vegmanagementcontacts.

Planned Burn Taskforce

Many areas don't have enough volunteers to undertake planned burning when the conditions are favourable. In these situations, CFA has a statewide Planned Burn Taskforce that can be deployed anywhere to support planned burning.

Similar to strike teams that are mobilised for emergency deployment statewide, the Planned Burn Taskforce is a volunteer program designed to support each other across the state during planned burning and other non-emergency-based fuel treatments. More information about this program is available by emailing plannedburntaskforce@cfa.vic.gov.au.

For more information about planned burns and resources to support your brigade with planned burning, go to members.cfa.vic.gov.au/burns or use the QR code.



First on scene

Introduction to our new series

CFA members attend a variety of incidents. At times these can be incidents that are out-of-the-box, and members may not be familiar with the situation or may require specialist skills or qualifications to manage it. Crews need to understand what actions they can take to support incident management and remain safe, particularly when waiting for specialist resources.

This new series will focus on steps you can take within 15 to 20 minutes of arriving on scene, rather than how to manage the entire incident. Future editions will include specific information relating to a variety of incidents including structure fires, hazardous materials incidents, motor vehicle accidents, road crash rescues, and more.

Guiding principles

The first part of this series provides a quick overview of the key guiding principles that all members should be aware of when arriving first on scene at any incident.

Establish control

SOP 8.02 Incident Controller (CFA as Control Agency) outlines the process for establishing control.

When CFA is the control agency, the crew leader of the first arriving vehicle at a fire or incident is the incident controller (IC). The IC should:

- identify themselves as the IC
- establish control of all resources
- make contact with senior personnel of any support agencies.

If the first crew leader is not qualified and endorsed as a Level 1 IC, or does not believe they have the appropriate skills and experience, they should:

- take all reasonable steps to identify a qualified and endorsed person or the most senior/experienced person to fulfil the role of IC
- remain in the role of IC until control is transferred in accordance with SOP 8.04 Transfer of Control.

Size ups

A size-up is used to evaluate a fire to determine a course of action for fire suppression. A size-up should consider:

- **facts:** what is known?
- **probabilities:** what could happen?
- **own situation:** what resources do you have?
- **decision:** what are the objectives?
- **plan:** how will you achieve the objectives?

Dynamic risk assessment

A dynamic risk assessment (DRA) is the assessment of the hazards and risks that may pose a threat to the safety of personnel. There are six key steps involved in the DRA process.

1. **Evaluate** the situation, including your designated task and the known hazards and risks.
2. **Select** a plan and determine the strategies and tactics required for you to achieve it.
3. **Assess** the risks of the plan including the risk to emergency responders, community and assets, and determine if it is an acceptable level of risk.
4. **Decide** if the plan is safe and whether the benefits outweigh the risks.
5. **Modify** if the benefits do not outweigh the risks. Consider additional controls and return to step 3 to reassess the risks with the new controls.
6. **Proceed** if the benefits do outweigh the risks and ensure goals and safety measures are understood by everyone.

Situation reports

One of the most critical responsibilities of the IC at any incident is to provide a situation report (sitrep). This is used to describe the current situation and assists with response and planning. As incidents escalate, sitreps should be provided at least every 15 minutes. The IC must provide timely and accurate information via the control channel to Firecom as soon as the size-up is completed and situational awareness is gained.

Provide regular situation reports including:

- appropriate call sign
- location
- type and size of incident
- potential of the fire/incident
- fire/wind direction and/or assets under threat
- action being taken
- additional help required.

Below is an example of a sitrep for a motor vehicle accident involving hazardous materials.

Firecom, Springfield Control Situation Report.

Situation Report from Captain Smith. We have a motor vehicle accident involving hazardous materials on Lancefield-Kilmore Road Springfield. Two vehicles involved, including a B-double truck carrying a large quantity of unknown chemicals. Hot, warm and cold exclusion zones have been established. Crews are positioned uphill and upwind and have commenced emergency decontamination of two people exposed to the unknown chemicals, using a hose line. Hazmat appliance still required. Further advice requested, and can the DDO/SDO and a Scientific Officer contact me on the pumper mobile.

As the fire develops or the situation changes in any significant way, the IC must provide an updated sitrep. When the IC delivers a timely and accurate sitrep, the district can support the fireground in a timely manner, and the community messaging can be tailored and delivered accurately to enhance community safety. The IC can then focus on fireground strategies and tactics to safely combat the incident.

Revisiting the Linton bushfire 25 years on

Summary

2 December 2023 was the 25th anniversary of the Linton Bushfire that burned through more than 600 hectares of private farmland and state forest near the Linton township. We have revisited this tragic event to remember the firefighters who selflessly put their lives on the line to protect the community and to highlight the lessons learned that have continued to protect firefighters who have found themselves in similar situations.

This article may contain content that some people may find distressing.

Incident overview

At about 1pm on Wednesday 2 December 1998, crews were called to a bushfire which started on private property and spread to the state forest near the township of Linton. It was a warm day, approximately 28°C with a northerly wind of 44km/hour.

Members from Snake Valley Fire Brigade were first on scene, closely followed by crews and a bulldozer from Beaufort's Department of Natural Resources and Environment (NRE), now Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMV). Access to the fire was challenging because of its location, so initial extinguishment attempts were unsuccessful.

As crews arrived on scene, a combined incident management team (IMT) consisting of CFA, NRE and Victoria Police was established, with the local CFA operations manager (now called an assistant chief fire officer) being in control.

At about 2.30pm, crews attempted to back-burn an area on Maddern Flat Road and Pittong-Snake Valley Road, but the fire breached the control line. An additional 27 tankers arrived to help to control the fire at Pittong-Snake Valley Road, but this attempt also failed. As numerous spot fires developed, a tanker crew drove into the forest on the south side of Pittong-Snake Valley Road to extinguish them. They soon found themselves surrounded by several spot fires, at which time aircraft began to firebomb the area.

As the fire escalated, an incident control centre (ICC) was set up at the NRE building in Ballarat and the operations point was set up at Linton Shire Council offices. A staging area was established at Linton Recreation Reserve.

At about 4pm, an NRE ground observer reported that the fire had crossed over Possum Gully Road which prompted the incident controller to send in additional strike teams to protect Linton which was south of the fire. By 4.30pm several spot fires started on the outskirts of Linton and they were quickly extinguished by ground crews.

A request was made for a further strike team of five tankers, including Geelong West and Geelong City, and they arrived on scene at about 5.40pm.

The main fire to the north of the town was contained at about 6pm with NRE bulldozers arriving to construct control lines heading north along the eastern and western flank of the fire. The IMT



decided to send a ground observer to keep watch on the wind and report any changes as the large bulldozer began constructing a control line from Pittong-Snake Valley Road heading south. They wanted to complete the control line before the expected wind change.

At about 7.50pm a message was broadcast advising the cool change had reached Wickliffe with south-west winds at 35km/hour and no rain. Shortly after, the Bureau of Meteorology issued a spot fire weather forecast detailing a major wind change expected at 11pm with south-west wind gusts of 60km/hour.

The operations point alerted crews at about 8pm that the wind had changed direction and would reach them in about one hour. At that time, one of the bulldozers was constructing a control line along the extension of Homestead Track with support from the two Geelong tankers.

In an attempt to get to a water point, the tanker crews drove ahead of the dozer along an old track, and they were overrun by a sudden flare-up because of a wind change. The tankers were situated in an unburnt fuel area and upslope from the fire.

Due to the change in direction of the wind and its strength, a burnover and entrapment was imminent, which led to one tanker being badly damaged and the other completely destroyed by fire and the tragic loss of five crew members onboard.

Improvements since Linton

Following the tragic events of Linton, a coronial inquest was undertaken, as well as internal reviews.

As a result of the coronial inquest, many recommendations were made to improve planning, procedures and CFA equipment. Issues that emerged from the investigation of the Linton fire highlighted key risk factors that needed to be addressed to minimise the risk of similar incidents associated with entrapment in wildfires.

Some of the proposed action plans developed and implemented by CFA included:

- firefighter skills and knowledge
- firefighting methods
- work practices and equipment
- command and control
- communications and information flow.



As part of CFA's initial training, it is now a requirement for all firefighters to complete mandatory training:

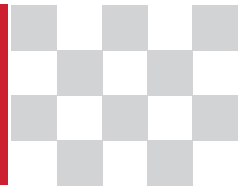
- General Firefighter/Minimum Skills – to ensure our new operational members develop the essential knowledge and skills required to safely and effectively participate in their first turnout.
- Entrapment Drill (SOP 9.32) – as conditions on the fireground can change suddenly, it is a requirement that all firefighters complete the entrapment drill each year as part of the Chief Officer's Fire-Danger Period preparedness requirements.
- LACES (lookouts, awareness, communication, escape routes, safety zones) SOP 11.13 To improve firefighter safety at wildfires.

In addition to changes to CFA training and work practices, it was identified that there was a need for both active and passive defence systems.

This includes fixed sprinklers and hand-held hoses (active systems), and the inclusion of high sides, reflective window curtains and heat shields for vehicle doors (passive systems).

Important lessons continue to be learned as emergency response agencies explore what happened in a guided, sensitive, learning approach. Part of CFA's continued learning from this experience is the Linton Staff Ride. Occurring at the site of the fire, the staff ride invites members to 'walk in the shoes' of the firefighters on that fateful day. Recreating the experience through storytelling, the ride is used to train incident management teams and firefighters who might be faced with the same situation.

All CFA members are encouraged to understand what occurred when those CFA members became trapped. This is a risk for everyone on the fireground and it is vital that our members learn from those Geelong West members and know how to respond in these situations.



Kerang hay shed fire

Summary

On 7 November 2023 a call was received at midday for a hay shed structure fire in Kerang (District 20). Kerang and Cohuna brigades responded to the hay shed storage facility which contained 22 haystacks with approximately 800 large bales in each. One shed in the far north corner was fully alight and because of the high winds it spread to the neighbouring six sheds. The fire took four days to burn out, and CFA crews managed to save 15 sheds.

Incident overview

On a windy day, the Kerang and Cohuna brigades were called out to respond to a shed fire at a hay storage facility. When crews arrived, it was clear that one shed was already fully alight. Due to the fuel type (dry hay) and the size of the shed, crews quickly realised the fire would take a long time to extinguish. Members on site called in additional tankers, bringing the total of responding tankers to five. The tankers monitored the fire while extinguishing smaller fires around the other sheds on the property. At the same time, facility contractors removed hay from the sheds near the burning haystack.

As the weather conditions changed and did not appear to be a threat, four tankers were released at about 3.30pm and one tanker remained on site to monitor the burning haystack. The incident controller had been in contact with the Lake Charm brigade captain and the Swan Hill group officer all afternoon to maintain awareness of the wind situation. No winds were reported in their areas, however at about 5.30pm an unexpected change in wind occurred, causing increased embers to spread across small stacks of 20 hay bales. Several crews returned to the scene and managed to put out this haystack quickly. After this, the decision was made to call for a total of seven tankers to monitor the burning stack.

While brigades were en route, a major ember attack was caused by a sudden windstorm from the north-east. A stack approximately 80 metres away went up in flames and engulfed a semi-trailer with a water tanker on it. An immediate request for 15 tankers was made as the winds continued to spread embers across the facility. A further five stacks went up in flames because of this windstorm and several spot fires in a neighbouring paddock were managed over the coming hours by two tankers because these fires had the potential to travel towards the Kerang township.

As the response continued, the fireground was sectorised into north and south regions and the decision was made by the incident controller, the Kerang brigade captain and IMT members to change the strategy to focus on protecting unburnt stacks. This decision was made because nothing

could be done to stop the seven haystacks that were already burning.

Crews were positioned around a haystack, wetting down the hay and checking for smoke and hot spots. This strategy resulted in no further haystacks igniting. Responding crews worked under incredibly hot conditions, as well as ember attacks for several hours. The strong winds caused sheets of tin to blow 100 to 200 metres away, making it a high-risk response in the smoky, low visibility conditions.

Crews remained on scene and were eventually relieved by strike teams from the Mid-Murray and Deakin groups at about 10pm. The new crews monitored the burning stacks and were on high alert until 3.30am the next day, while contractors resumed the moving of unburnt stacks.

Gannawarra Shire Council made sure bulk water tankers were available from 7pm until 7am to provide water to the strike teams on scene. Crews from Kerang brigade returned to the scene at about 7am to relieve the strike teams and stayed on scene until about 10.30pm that day.

This day was not simply to carry out monitoring, as a thunderstorm which came through in the evening caused strong winds and ember attacks. Fortunately, no new fires started. All crews then returned to their stations at about 10.30pm and the burning haystacks were left with the owners of the facility to be monitored overnight.

In the following days, Kerang crews were on scene for about 12 hours a day monitoring the haystacks while the landowner used excavators to break up the burning stacks and reduce them in size. Two days after the initial call out, two spot fires appeared and were extinguished quickly. That afternoon, haystacks were levelled out to two inches thick of burning ashes. On the following Friday afternoon,





full extinguishment was about to commence when a grassfire started between Kerang and Lake Charm. This became a 200-hectare fire and required 20 tankers. When that grassfire was brought under control crews returned to the hayshed fire and completed the mopping up with A-class foam and monitors on the truck.

What worked well

Resource requests: The quick requests for additional tankers ensured appropriate resources were on scene as the fire escalated. As arrival was staggered in intervals, it ensured trucks didn't exhaust their water supply.

Decision-making: The ability of members to alter their strategy to focus on asset protection and crew safety when conditions changed was highly effective. Members are encouraged to always remain adaptable and ensure their response, strategies and tactics take into account changing conditions.

Assistance from council: The assistance from Gannawarra Shire Council in providing bulk water tankers was invaluable because it allowed for faster truck refill.

Experience: The brigades used existing knowledge to inform their incident plan and strategies. They had attended similar incidents where the haystack was extinguished and resulted in it reigniting days or weeks later, so this time they chose to use a 'burn out' strategy and focused their time on exposure management.

Lessons identified

Removal of hay from sheds: Given how time-consuming it is to extinguish haystack fires, it would be beneficial to place greater focus on removing hay from nearby sheds to limit exposures and the likelihood of spot fires escalating. Although this was considered during this incident, only the stacks in very close proximity to the original fire were moved, and stacks further away were not considered.

Questions for your brigade

- Do you know what support your local council can provide in similar incidents, such as supply bulk water tankers?
- Have members in your brigade previously attended haystack fires? Discuss what they learned from these incidents and if they would approach another incident differently.

Conclusion

The Kerang brigade captain thanked the responding crews and added that he had not seen a storm of this severity during his 39 years of firefighting. The Kerang fire brigade effectively drew on their knowledge and experience to manage the challenges as they arose. An incident like this requires quick and precise planning and timely escalations. They were able to assess the situation and put in place alternative strategies when the wind changed, which resulted in no further loss of haystacks as well as ensuring crew safety.

Thank you to the members involved for their openness in sharing their experience and lessons. If you have any lessons to share email Lessons-management-centre@cfa.vic.gov.au.



Crew protection for ultralights

CFA has begun a program to retrofit crew protection to our fleet of ultralight tankers to enhance safety in a burnover.

Two deluge systems were developed for trialling and evaluation, one using a gel and the other using compressed air foam (CAF) where water from the main tank is mixed with Class A foam and air from a dedicated 12V compressor. The target was to use 50 litres of water during the five-minute burnover test.

When designing the systems, it was important to make sure they worked well with our current system which includes internal radiant heat curtains, external deluge system, fire blankets in the cabin and a water tank low level alarm.

During a series of controlled vehicle burns, both systems were independently assessed against several criteria including effectiveness, ease of operation, maintenance and practicality. The conclusion was that the CAF-based system was the best solution.

Testing was carried out in Victoria and at the Hot Fire Training Facility at Mogo, NSW. Not surprisingly, the outside of the vehicle looked a bit charred after testing but the inside was unaffected.

“Everything worked as we had hoped,” CFA’s Manager Engineering Andrew Webb said. “The results of CSIRO testing – which included measurements of internal and external temperatures as well as toxic substances in the cabin air – were positive.

“We were pleasantly surprised that we were able to drive the vehicle off the test pad straight afterwards,” Andrew said.

The retrofit is being done in Pakenham, starting with Toyota Landcruisers followed by Nissan Patrols, and the work should be completed by the end of this year. Use the QR code to watch a video of crew protection features.



STORY DANNY JONES

Improvements to MyCFA

CFA’s ‘MyCFA’ email platform is introducing a Preference Centre which encourages subscribers to nominate their areas of interest, based on their personal or professional circumstances, to receive tailored information.

Created in 2015, MyCFA has been sending subscribers place-based notifications on Fire Danger Periods and Total Fire Bans, as well as general information and advice about seasonal fire safety themes.

There are 27,000 people signed up to MyCFA who currently receive up to six emails a year.

Previously, all subscribers received the same general information depending on their location, but the enhancements of MyCFA to include a preference centre will help CFA better tailor information to individual circumstances.

Paul Harris, Team Leader Community Engagement and Program Development, was one of the original architects of MyCFA. He said the idea behind

the service was to create long-term relationships with individuals and the communities CFA serves.

“The aim was to move from a purely transactional interaction with individuals to a more relational experience with tailored touchpoints and interactions on an ongoing basis,” Paul said.

With the launch of the Preference Centre, Sally Pickering, General Manager, Communications and Stakeholder Relations, believes this relational experience will grow and be strengthened for subscribers.

“New and existing subscribers can customise and select their topics of interest and MyCFA will send them curated content based on these themes,”

Sally said. “Receiving emails from MyCFA will become a much more personalised experience depending on subscribers’ interests.”

Current subscribers will soon receive an email asking them to update their preferences via their existing MyCFA profile. New subscribers will undertake a two-step process to sign up to MyCFA.

CFA encourages local brigades to help build up our database of subscribers by signing up community members. This will enable us to build more accurate profiles of our local communities. For help go to members.cfa.vic.gov.au/mycfa or look out for an email in coming weeks.

STORY LERNA AVAKIAN

UPDATE ON MAJOR PROJECTS

In each issue we update the progress being made on a selection of our major projects. More information about all our projects is on Members Online: members.vic.gov.au/CFAProjects

Next generation wildfire PPC

About 24,000 operational volunteers will receive the new wildfire PPC. Up to December 2023, the Wildfire PPC Project had received 13,000 orders and had distributed garments to 3,000 operational volunteers in 246 brigades. This rollout continues.



Breathing apparatus/cylinder exchange

Volunteers want increased flexibility and convenience when refilling used BA cylinders. To address this need, CFA is planning to introduce a BA cylinder 'swap and go' process. A working group has developed a draft project plan. VFBV has representation on the working group to ensure volunteers help to develop a viable solution.

Next steps include recruiting a delivery manager and developing a business requirements document.



Fire Medical Response

The FMR program will equip certain brigades with the equipment and skills needed to provide better cardiac arrest outcomes in regional Victoria. Initially, select brigades in districts 2, 11 and 22 were consulted and offered the program. To date, five brigades have enrolled in the program with others still considering the offer.

In early 2024, CFA will finalise the procurement of equipment, consult on the standard operating procedure, complete the training program and begin the vaccination program for FMR responders.

CFA Pocketbook app

CFA is developing an online app that gives volunteers essential operational tools and information – at any time, in any place – including policies, procedures and calculators. The app will also work offline. A proof of concept was completed last year.

Proposals were received from vendors at the end of last year and the app began development in January 2024. The aim is to launch it in May 2024.



Radio replacement

About 18,000 CFA radios, including mobiles, portables, bag radios and local bases, will be replaced across Victoria.

The new radios will have enhanced features and functionality.

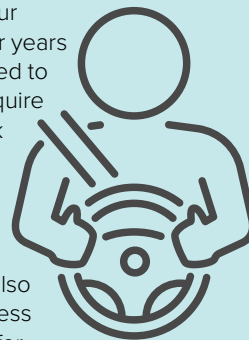
Towards the end of last year, radio orders were submitted and training packages began to be developed. The rollout plan has been established and elearning and face-to-face training modules are being finalised. Delivery of radios will start this quarter.



Driver training and licensing

As part of the Upskilling and Protecting Our Firefighters initiative, \$8.8 million over four years and \$1.9 million ongoing has been allocated to offer volunteers more opportunities to acquire driver training skills. Funding for new truck driver licences began last year and 366 members have approved funding.

Three new Driver Educator courses will be launched this quarter to increase the number of volunteer educators. CFA will also assess how we can provide more awareness training of driving risks to make driving safer.



Juniors go wild on camp



The annual camp for Hoddles Creek Juniors has become a cornerstone event that the brigade's Juniors eagerly anticipate and discuss throughout the year. In November 2023, the day they had all been waiting for finally arrived.

Tents and bags were loaded. Parents waved off their Juniors, and phones and technology went into a lock box as they boarded a bus ready for a busy, four-day long weekend away.

When they arrived at Rubicon, the first task was to set up camp. After this, the Juniors headed down to the river to cool off before returning for dinner.

Day two was the day all the Juniors had been looking forward to the most. With bathers on and towels in hand, they headed up to Jerusalem Creek where they were met by Adam (Mount Evelyn brigade), Trent and Taryn (Hillcrest brigade), and Commander Booth (District 13), who had prepared two boats and two jet skis in the water for some fast wave riding and tubing. Through these activities Juniors built confidence, overcame fears, pushed their boundaries and had a lot of fun.

After this amazing day of water sports, it was back to camp where, unfortunately, the weather had taken a turn for the worse. The Juniors pressed on with their evening activity, but it was cut short by a severe storm that threatened to wash away the camp. A late-night call was made to Thornton brigade asking for emergency shelter in their engine bay. However, a chance encounter with the manager of Camp Jungai, a local outdoor education camp, resulted in a warm dry lodge being offered to the Juniors for the night.

The Juniors showed an amazing level of courage and teamwork as the camp was evacuated. By around 1am everyone was asleep in dry comfortable beds.

The following morning spirits were a bit low, but a pancake breakfast and some words of encouragement were a great help. The Juniors set off on an 8km hike along a river. Always seizing the opportunity for a learning experience, they applied their tree hazard training, identifying and discussing different types of trees along the way. They also had the opportunity to put their new first-aid skills into practice when a few of the older Juniors faked a first-aid emergency. This was a perfect opportunity for the younger and newer Juniors to take more of a leadership role and show off what they had been learning.

"My first camp with CFA Juniors was great. I got to use some of my training in first-aid on our hike," Amy-Lee McGregor said. "We had a lot of fun water skiing and it was nice of the local CFA captain to help us when we were hit by the storm."

This Juniors camp was filled with unforgettable memories.

"It was the best camp I have been on," Thomas Couzens said, "and I hope next year we can do more fundraising and go on two camps."

Junior camps are a great opportunity for our youngest members to put their skills into practice, build stronger bonds between participants, develop teamwork and build confidence.





Faces of CFA

PETA WATERHOUSE, MARYKNOLL AND
DISTRICT RURAL FIRE BRIGADE, DISTRICT 8

What is your CFA role?

Currently I am the 2nd deputy group officer for Cardinia Group. My portfolio is group training coordinator, which is a busy role. But I enjoy it because I watch members grow their skills and confidence both on and off the fireground.

Why did you join?

A couple of good friends in Rovers Scouts said it was the next step. I'm a primary school teacher and at home over the summer holidays, During this time I often heard the CFA siren ringing and ringing and ringing, and I thought helping CFA was something I could do. Little did I know I would end up on the brigade management team for the next 19 years.

What incident has had the greatest impact on you?

This is difficult to answer because I've been to a few. The Black Saturday fires were devastating. Also, working night shift on an army base in NSW had me on my toes, and a bus load of school children colliding with a truck was heart-breaking. However, I think the Bunyip Complex Fires had the largest impact on me. I was captain at the time and a crew leader heading off on a strike team to Garfield when news came in that the wind had pushed the fire one kilometre from the township of Maryknoll. I felt like I had the whole town on my shoulders.

Who have been your mentors in CFA?

Who hasn't been a mentor? I learn something new at every fire call or training session I attend. Husband and wife duo Lisa and Steve Hicks, Brian Petrie and John Ruys have all shown me great leadership, pushed me and supported my time in CFA.

What have been the highlights of your time in CFA?

Maryknoll is a small community. It has been wonderful to get out in the community and help wherever possible. As a brigade

we have been involved in tree planting days, dismantling the local playground, competing as a team in local trivia nights (and winning I might add), playgroup demonstrations and tennis competitions just to name a few.

It's always satisfying working as a team to help the community in other ways other than a fire service. Before having children, I enjoyed my time as a rescue operator responding with Nar Nar Goon. I enjoyed being able to problem-solve incidents (although often it was not a pleasant experience). With my girls growing up this is a skill I would like to pick up again.

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

You are never too old to learn new ways. Every fire call or training session is an opportunity to learn. Take every opportunity you can to enhance your skills. Listen and question the older, more experienced members of your group. They won't always be around to hold your hand.

What do you like to do in your spare time?

As a group training coordinator, primary school teacher and parent, I don't have much spare time. School holidays are for getting all your fire brigade work done aren't they? I enjoy the outdoors and go camping and kayaking whenever I have the opportunity.

I've driven from Maryknoll to Cape York on the tip of Queensland and I lost count of how many fire stations I passed.

What is your next goal in CFA?

My goal in CFA at the moment is to complete the strike team leaders course when it becomes available.

Creating new opportunities for women volunteers

After a successful 12-month pilot program, the Women in Leadership mentoring program will continue its mission to support the learning, growth and skill building of women at CFA.

In our ongoing commitment to foster diversity, equity, and inclusion, the Women in Leadership mentoring program was introduced to empower and support our women volunteers in leadership roles across all levels of our brigade and district roles. Twenty-two partnerships were paired in the inaugural program.

The process began with an expression of interest, followed by a meticulous selection and matching process. In November 2022, mentees and mentors met for the first time. Every region and all levels were represented – a Board member, deputy chief officer, captains, brigade management team members, firefighters, Fire Rescue Victoria personnel and CFA employees. At the initial workshop, participants were introduced to each other, focused on self-awareness and created their partnership agreements.

Throughout the next 12 months, participants committed to participating in monthly one-to-one engagements and three face-to-face workshops, ensuring a holistic and personalised approach to mentorship and skill development. The results of this initiative have been truly inspiring, with tangible outcomes that reflect the success of the program. Notable achievements include the appointment of two new women captains, showcasing the impact of mentorship and support on career progression.

“Women hold just 2 per cent of captain roles across the state, and we must do more to advance women and girls into leadership roles for the sustainability of future brigades,” Diversity and Inclusion Manager Terri Wright said.

Beyond job titles, the initiative has contributed to increased confidence among participants, a crucial factor in breaking down barriers that may hinder career advancement. Remarkably, mentees from the program have seamlessly transitioned into mentors themselves, creating a continuous cycle of empowerment and support.

Dani Watkins, a mentee in the inaugural program, said the success of her

partnership made her decide to become a mentor in the 2023-24 program.

“The program and my mentor taught me truckloads about the strengths I already have, as well as steering me in the right direction to fill my skill gaps,” Dani said. “I loved every minute of it and was excited to apply again when the opportunity arose. Last year’s program gave me the confidence to apply this year as a mentor, to give other women the same opportunities for support and encouragement that I received.”

Outcomes from the final workshop included a discussion about positive changes forged from mentoring partnerships, learning new knowledge to carry forward, and solving shared challenges unique to women in the emergency services.

Establishing a network across the state has further solidified the success of this

initiative. The creation of a community of practice allows the participants to share experiences, challenges, and successes, and foster a sense of camaraderie and mutual support.

This program is a direct outcome of the comprehensive External Review of Culture and Issues Management and the Gender Equality Action Plan. It reflects our commitment to addressing challenges identified in these reviews and fostering an inclusive environment.

Funded as part of the Volunteer Leadership Development project, the second intake for 2023-24 has now started. The program is open to all women volunteers across CFA (and men who want to take up mentor roles), with the aim of bridging the gap between gender equality in leadership and promotion.

STORY GRACE CASEY AND TRACEY RUSE



STRONG YOUTH-ADULT PARTNER

The Volunteer Sustainability team often hears brigade members say they are going to target recruitment to people aged over 18. But brigades can benefit greatly by considering the potential that young people bring to CFA. Story by Kirsten Dudink and Elaine Hamilton

There are currently more than 6,000 senior members aged over 18 who joined between the ages of 11 and 15, and more than 8,000 senior members who joined at age 16 or 17.

Some brigades have been facing challenges recruiting young volunteers and keeping them engaged. There are concerns that the time and effort invested in recruiting young volunteers might be wasted if they leave for university or move out of town soon after. However, engaging youth is key to the sustainability of our brigades.

So how can we shift our attitudes and approaches to youth recruitment and retention? CFA has partnered with the HeartWood Centre for Community Youth Development (HeartWood) to learn more about how we can better understand young people, so brigades can create a positive experience for young volunteers and encourage them to stay involved in the community. One of HeartWood's recommended 'tools for growth' is youth-adult partnerships.

As mentors and coaches, supportive adults share interests and experiences in an environment of equity and mutual respect. They support young people by connecting them with their brigade peers and the broader CFA network. By being role models for upcoming generations, adults can help young people develop leadership skills and gain valuable experience in their areas of interest. These partnerships help to create a sense of community and belonging, which is essential for the wellbeing of young people.

There are also benefits for older members. Adult members who work with young people in healthy partnerships are often inspired, energised and more committed to CFA and the communities they serve. The following experiences of four current CFA members illustrate how positive youth-adult partnerships have deeply influenced and shaped their lives.

CFA offers a three-hour professional development workshop called 'Valuing Youth and Young Adults as Volunteers', developed in partnership with HeartWood. It's an engaging and interactive workshop that covers topics including shifts in thinking, appreciative approach, the Community Youth Development Model, and taking action. If you would like to learn more about building healthy youth-adult partnerships, as well as other tools for growth to support positive youth development, contact your regional Volunteer Sustainability Team.

EAGLEHAWK FIRE BRIGADE 2ND LIEUTENANT LAURA CORBY

Laura has been a volunteer with CFA for 17 years, starting as a Junior member with Echuca brigade at age 11. She transferred to Eaglehawk brigade in 2016 and has since progressed from 4th to 2nd Lieutenant and is currently the Building & Assets Coordinator. Laura's father and siblings were all firefighters and she was brought along to most brigade events.

"CFA was a second family, a place to make friends and meet people from different towns who had a similar childhood as me, growing up in a fire station. From that age I started to make lifelong friends. I didn't know it at the time, but I would later end up fighting some big fires alongside them and I think this has formed a bond that is different to a usual friendship.

"One of the best things about starting as a Junior is watching the people ahead of you rise through the ranks, becoming senior members, firefighters, lieutenants and even captains. With motivated and encouraging leaders around me, it felt natural for me to also progress to a leadership position. I encourage the younger members around me now.

"CFA has given me a sense of community and shown me what giving back to help others feels like. As a volunteer, I have been challenged, strengthened, encouraged and motivated by others. I now have a skill set that I use in other areas of my life, including my career path."



PHOTO BLAIR DELLEMIN

SHIPS HELP SUSTAIN BRIGADES



NEWSTEAD FIRE BRIGADE CAPTAIN DOUG RICHARDSON

Doug has been the captain for 37 years. He was first elected captain at the age of 25.

"I joined Newstead brigade when I was 16. Two other boys from my school joined at the same time and we are all still members today. We came from farming families and our fathers were members of our local brigade. We grew up with the fire brigade because it was part of family life. I joined because it was my way of doing my bit for the community. It always has been about that.

"It helps to start young as a volunteer, especially if you're looking for a way to contribute to your community. It's life building because CFA offers so many life building blocks, so many opportunities. It's about the long-term relationships you can make and not necessarily with your own brigade members – you could meet a new person on the fireground or on another strike team that you click with. The longer you stay, the longer you build on those blocks."

NORTH WEST REGION DEPUTY CHIEF OFFICER GAVIN THOMPSON

DCO Gavin Thompson joined CFA as a Junior with Bayswater Brigade in 1986 and transferred to Boronia brigade as a senior member in 1990. He progressed to 1st Lieutenant as a volunteer member and in his career service, he advanced to Deputy Chief Officer, North West Region since 2016. Gavin's father was a volunteer with Ferntree Gully brigade and then Boronia brigade, which inspired him to join CFA.

As a young volunteer, Gavin was able to meet many volunteers and staff from across the district, and starting young helped him on his career path.

"As a Junior at Bayswater brigade we had a small, but tight outfit," Gavin said. "We weren't a traditional Junior brigade undertaking competitions, but instead were focused on developing skills to transition into the senior ranks. Bayswater brigade was a progressive and well led brigade.

"Training was an integral part of what we did and there were plenty of opportunities. The chance to train and develop skills with the station staff at Boronia brigade was also a great experience and cemented my decision to embark on a career as a firefighter.

"I was exposed to leadership in many forms and situations, and it was beneficial to listen to experienced members as I grew older."



DISTRICT 18 ASSISTANT CHIEF FIRE OFFICER GAVIN WRIGHT

ACFO Gavin Wright joined Plenty brigade Junior Rural Running Team in 1983. Gavin was captain of the brigade from 1999 to 2007. This experience led him to join Victoria Police, before transferring to CFA as a commander. Gavin has been the District 18 ACFO since 2020. He was inspired to join CFA by his parents and school friends, who were also members of Plenty brigade.

By his late teens, CFA became a significant part of his life, not only the social side, but he was also very active operationally. He was being encouraged to gain new skills and take the first steps into lower-level leadership roles by some mentors within Plenty brigade and the Whittlesea Diamond Valley Group.

"The competitions taught me teamwork and some basic firefighting skills. This was the beginning of feeling like I was part of something bigger, that CFA was like one huge family.

"The experience of being around adults who had a sense of purpose and discipline was a great example to myself and the other Juniors. The moment I turned 16 I joined the senior membership.

"When I was a young member, I was the beneficiary of many experienced career and volunteer firefighters taking the time to pass on lessons and tips to me and I feel an obligation to do the same for the next generation. My main motivation now is focused on supporting volunteers and providing those who are in, or moving towards, a leadership role, with the skills and experiences they need to be successful.

"I think it is great to be part of CFA when you are young, because it's a great place to learn both practical skills and life skills. If the brigade is made up of good people who are committed and experienced, they are constantly, without even being conscious of it, setting a great example for the Junior members. There is a high probability that these Junior members will then go on and display the same behaviours throughout their journey with CFA and in their broader lives.

"I would encourage brigades who want to recruit more young people to first make sure they have the right environment and behaviours in place. If they do, then the time they invest in the young members will reap benefits in both the short and long term."



Training new talent in the NT

It's a long way from Gippsland to Darwin, but CFA volunteers Di Billingsley and Phil Graham were happy to make the trek in the name of training.

Di is a firefighter, past captain of Boolarra Fire Brigade and group training officer for the Merton Group. Phil is 1st lieutenant at Heyfield Fire Brigade and group training officer for the Riverslea Group.

Heading north at the end of October 2023, the pair spent two weeks in the Northern Territory, using their in-depth knowledge of firefighting training techniques to help our interstate colleagues get members ready for the fireground.

With five days in Alice Springs and five days in Darwin, Di and Phil spent their time delivering the Bushfires NT equivalent of CFA's General Firefighter training, called 'Firefighter 1 (FF1)', to both rangers and volunteer firefighters. They also gave feedback about how Bushfires NT could improve its training package for future recruits.

CFA was asked for help because at the time most Northern Territory-based trainers were busy fighting ongoing fires in the territory. Di and Phil were chosen to take part because of their extensive experience delivering training.

Jumping at the opportunity, Di and Phil admitted they had mixed feelings in the lead-up to the trip.

"I was mostly excited for the new adventure," Di said. "I've been delivering

training for years and I knew Phil had been too. We'd been given the training materials before we left and it was a lot to take in, but I knew we had a good support network both in Victoria and the NT."

"I'll admit I was a little apprehensive to begin with," Phil said, "largely because of the amount of information we were given. However, I was confident that once we got on the ground we'd make it work."

The two were put straight to work when they touched down in Alice Springs.

"When we arrived, we met Josh from Bushfires NT who had been working on the fires at Tennant Creek. We were straight into it, familiarising ourselves with their equipment, vehicles and processes – basically understanding how things worked. So it was flat out right from the get-go."

In their first five days, the pair trained 21 rangers and volunteer firefighters from around Alice Springs, including some who had travelled up to seven hours to attend. As well as practical work, Di and Phil undertook a mountain of marking and reviewing assessments, in addition to reviewing the coursework itself to look where potential improvements could be made.

Wrapping up their time in Alice Springs, the duo headed to Darwin.

"We spent the first part of our time in Darwin putting together some recommendations about things that needed to be developed or clarified in the FF1 documentation, training and

processes," Di said. "Then we delivered training to seven people on the Thursday and Friday, nine more on the Saturday and Sunday, then put together our report and recommendations and flew home."

Though their trip was relatively short, both Di and Phil agreed that it was valuable.

"I think I learned a lot that I can apply to my volunteering back in Victoria," Phil said. "Especially things like grassfire behaviour and the tactics used to fight those fires. I learned so much from both Bushfires NT and the students we were teaching."

"Like any deployment, whether it's a strike team or incident management team, you're helping out in a time of need," Di said. "You're developing yourself as a person and learning things that you can bring back and share with your own organisation and your brigade."

"There's always a good sense of camaraderie – people are really welcoming, helpful and friendly. I think because we all operate with the same values and mindset – community first, safety first – I had some fantastic experiences and met some great people. We had so much fun."

Phil agrees. "It was a fantastic experience all round. To help them out in a professional capacity was wonderful. I took away a great deal from it and I hope I was able to give to the Northern Territory people as much as I took away."

STORY TIAHN WRIGHT

Improving our communications to members



Improved digital search capability for Members Online, regular quarterly editions of *Brigade* magazine and exploring new options for localised communications are some of the actions CFA is taking following feedback from members in the 2023 Communications Survey.

We received responses from 878 members, with some key results remaining consistent with past surveys. Satisfaction with the quality and number of communications remains high, with Members Online and *Brigade* magazine continuing to be the leading platforms for accessing information.

Members expressed concern with the search functionality on Members Online, along with lack of information about CFA training.

The CFA Executive has approved 10 recommendations following a detailed analysis of the survey results. These include measures to improve search functionality, regular *Brigade* magazine editions, newsletter strategies, strengthening governance about CFA content availability and raising awareness about the capability for members to promote their activities and achievements through Member News.

We are currently carrying out a program of work to improve search functionality and curate content on Members Online to maximise the likelihood that users receive the information they're looking for first time.

CFA has many thousands of pages of content across Members Online and the website which require owners to be identified and content to be reviewed and updated. A training program has been established to support page owners to easily make updates to keep content up-to-date and relevant.

There will also be forums and engagement sessions for CFA members to provide feedback and raise awareness of issues they come across, and a search help page and contact point for members who want assistance.

Our popular *Brigade* magazine will return to four issues a year, with distribution aligning with the release of the Chief Officer's Quarterly Operational Update. The magazine will include exclusive feature stories that highlight CFA's people and programs.

CFA's Communications and Stakeholder Relations team will also offer templates to regions and districts to help them produce consistency in newsletter communications and information, while also making them easier to produce.

Inclusion of a Members Only news area was one of the key additions of CFA's upgraded content management system. There is a button on the front page of Members Online where any member can upload a story, video or images from their brigade or department. The Communications & Stakeholder Relations Member Engagement team is also available to review and edit content, as well as identify other avenues to promote your activity.

Internally, Member News is also a place to publish organisational updates, with links to relevant further information or forms, ensuring this content will be found in search requests from users (something that cannot be achieved through email).

Finally, we want to thank everyone who participated in the 2023 Communications Survey. If you have any questions or further feedback contact internalcomms@cfa.vic.gov.au

STORY BRADLEY THOMAS

Science podcasts focus on bushfire research

The severity, complexity and changing nature of Australia's bushfire seasons and the research that informs planning and response are showcased in a new podcast series.

The Debunks series of podcasts, produced by Cosmos and 9Podcasts, speaks with Natural Hazards Research Australia's (NHRA) CEO Andrew Gissing, as well as NHRA researcher Dr Hamish Clark (University of Melbourne) and previous Cooperative Research Centre postgraduate alumnus Dr Steve Sutton, to get to grips with issues such as the Australian Fire Danger Rating System, community and individual preparedness, fireproofing property, Australia's fire history and the influence of climate change.

In the episode 'Do I really have to leave when the rating is catastrophic?,' Andrew discusses individual fire preparedness rates, as well as the psychological obstacles to people leaving at-risk areas early.

"Generally, people aren't well prepared for natural hazards across the country. Most people are also unprepared to leave on the basis of a weather report," Andrew said.

Following the 2009 fires in Victoria, where conditions were outside the bounds of the McArthur Fire Danger Rating system, research informed the establishment of a more flexible index that ensured continuity of messaging and actions across states and territories.

Andrew states the importance of being prepared, but also individuals' responsibility to actively monitor emergency information.

"It's really good to have numerous ways to get warnings, so it's not just about the [emergency] app and it's not just about the text messages you might be getting. It's about having a battery-powered radio so you can listen to the ABC and other emergency broadcasters to get current, local information."

Adjunct Professor Jim McLennan (La Trobe University and Black Saturday social research lead for the Bushfire CRC) raises the ongoing challenge facing emergency broadcasters and responders to leave early when conditions are dangerous, especially when residents haven't faced a fire threat before.

"The challenge for community safety units in the rural fire agencies is a bit like that of painting the Sydney Harbour Bridge – you never finish. You get to one end, and you start again at the other," Jim said.

In the episode 'Do hazard reduction burns really work?' Dr Hamish Clark outlines how prescribed burning works and why local details matter the most, such as fire regimes for any given area, the vegetation type and amount, as well as the terrain.

"A really important message is that the local landscape matters," Hamish said.

He also explains the risks associated with prescribed burning and why the weather is one of the most important influencing factors of whether a prescribed burn can take place. As fire seasons become longer due to the influence of climate change, the weather windows when prescribed burning can take place safely also are changing – too wet and the vegetation won't burn, but too dry and prescribed burns can escape and become a bushfire. Hamish also outlines the amount of planning and strategy required for every prescribed burn.

"You've got a kind of Goldilocks situation where you need the right weather conditions," Hamish said.

"That is the minimum bar to jump. You don't want to be doing it under the wrong conditions. But within that there is a very big planning system that goes into it. You're thinking about risk in the landscape and areas that you want to target. You're thinking about where communities are and where resources are."

Jim McLennan is featured extensively. He led the then Bushfire CRC's post fire social research after the 2009 fires in Victoria, where more than 600 residents were interviewed about their responses to warnings, behaviour during the bushfires and decision-making.

Jim spoke at length about the findings from this research, which included post-fire interviews with residents after fires at Lake Clifton (2011) and Perth Hills (2014) in Western Australia, Tasmania (2013) and Yass, Shoalhaven, Coonabarabran, the Blue Mountains, Southern Highlands and Port Stephens (2013) in NSW.

There are a further five episodes in the series on a range of topics. You can listen to the podcast on the Cosmos website (<https://cosmosmagazine.com/podcast>) or on your preferred podcast platform including Spotify (<https://open.spotify.com/show/4KrcI7TZInP2GJpoxNHvzF>).

STORY JOANNA WOOD, NATURAL HAZARDS RESEARCH AUSTRALIA





New show garden uses CFA's design ideas

CFA's Vegetation Management Team recently working with a local council to provide garden design and plant selection advice for bushfire-prone areas.

The Briars is a 230-hectare conservation park in Mount Martha, managed by Mornington Peninsula Shire Council. It includes a conservation site with wildlife sanctuary, a heritage homestead registered with the National Trust, gardens, a visitor centre, the Shire nursery, the Community Forest and the Eco Living Display Centre.

The nursery has a native garden at the entrance which the council wanted to redesign. Over the past seven years, CFA staff (including Dan Idczak, Sharon Merritt, Andy Govanstone and Chris Vassos) worked with nursery staff and Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria, to redesign and construct the garden based on CFA's publication *Landscaping for Bushfire*.

The 750m² garden highlights a design that includes local indigenous plants that make a good defensible space between a house and the bush, while also providing a habitat for wildlife and a beautiful, tranquil place.

Some of the key aspects of the garden are:

- breaking up fuel continuity by creating:
 - a dry creek bed that meanders through the garden separating the organic mulched area from the rock mulch and building
 - paths with crushed rock and stone borders to provide separation and prevent fuel corridors
 - seating area with crushed rock base
- less flammable materials near the building:
 - using rock mulch and succulent plants
 - using a natural water run-off area as a frog bog and water feature
- maintenance and selection of trees:
 - existing stringy and ribbon bark trees were candled to reduce the bark hazard and ribbon bark raked up
 - removal of shrubs near the building



- plants chosen:
 - had a high moisture content
 - can be managed for fire, such as Kangaroo Grass that can be burned to remove dead material and kept green over summer
 - Were low growing to keep flame height low and lessen travel into the canopy of trees
- to encourage native wildlife:
 - large logs were retained to provide habitat and protection
 - water was a key feature with a bog area for frogs and small ponds to provide drinking water
- signs giving information about each aspect of the garden and a reference to CFA's *Landscaping for Bushfire*.

The garden is open Wednesday, Thursday and Friday and the first Saturday of each month.

STORY SHARON MERRITT

Resources to engage industry

New resources have been developed to support brigades to engage with industry and commercial business owners about fire safety and their legal obligation to keep people safe from fire.

The six Building Essential Fire Safety Measures information sheets cover the requirements for and use of portable firefighting equipment including extinguishers, hose reels and fire blankets.

They also include information specific to building owner/occupiers about the requirements to maintain building essential safety measures and the installation of fire detection and alarm systems, fire doors, emergency lighting and fire hydrants.

The information sheets (available on the CFA website or the Community Engagement Content Portal) can be printed and given to building owners and industry contacts. Many include QR code links to live video demonstrations.

“CFA’s Community Infrastructure team provides prevention, awareness and education programs to support industry with fire safety advice and works closely with industry and industry bodies to reduce both the likelihood and severity of fire and other emergencies,” Head of Community Infrastructure Andrew Andreou said.

“These resources are designed to not only increase awareness of fire safety requirements among business and industry but to assist our members, including those who provide Fire Equipment Maintenance services, to reinforce this important fire safety information when working in their communities.

“These fact sheets build on our suite of education tools designed to promote fire-safe industries which includes a variety of industry



training opportunities, online training programs and guidelines that identify and provide recommendations for reducing fire risk.”

The information sheets are available at cfa.vic.gov.au/plan-prepare/building-planning-regulations/fire-equipment-maintenance or the Community Engagement Content Portal (cfa.vic.gov.au/cecontentportal).

STORY SHAUNNAGH O’LOUGHLIN

2024 smoke alarm campaign

In 2023 CFA and FRV delivered a second year of a three-year smoke alarm campaign. The focus was to encourage Victorians to install smoke alarms in all bedrooms and living areas by raising awareness of the fact that fires that start in sleeping areas – including bedrooms – are most likely to lead to fatalities.

Called ‘A Bedroom Essential’, the creative concept centres on home improvement and lifestyle trends, urging people to consider smoke alarms as an essential item that no bedroom is complete without. The design demonstrates that smoke alarms are a low-cost essential item that can keep you safe, by drawing a comparison to the cost of other items someone might buy for their bedroom.

Detailed evaluation of last year’s campaign, including research conducted after the advertising campaign, showed it performed well, though the key messages were thought to be less shocking and informative than last year. It also continued to prompt some action but purchase of smoke alarms fell significantly. Also 47 per cent of survey respondents said they didn’t intend installing smoke alarms in bedrooms because they already had them outside or close to bedrooms.

To try to address research recommendations, we plan to create a series of animations or videos that show the importance of having a smoke alarm in bedrooms, when the door is shut, and the hallway smoke alarm is insufficient. These will be used regularly during this year’s campaign.

The campaign will be promoted in two media bursts using social media and digital advertising, as well as media stories and promoted to culturally and linguistically diverse audiences.

Video and social media tiles will be produced as part of the campaign material and will be made available to our members on the Community Engagement Content Portal – cfa.vic.gov.au/cecontentportal.

To find out more about the campaign or the resources available email cfapromotions@cfa.vic.gov.au.



Brigade protects wildlife

Goongerah Fire Brigade, in a remote East Gippsland settlement, was badly impacted by the 2019-20 bushfires. Tucked away between two national parks the small community lost 10 homes and twice that many farm sheds.

As well as slowly rebuilding and repairing their properties, many locals have been putting in a lot of work installing nest boxes for wildlife.

"More than 100 boxes have been installed throughout the valley," field ecologist, wildlife carer and Goongerah Lieutenant Rena Gabarov said.

"They are hopefully helping the recovery of dozens of hollow-dependent species that were killed in the fires. Hollows are critical for about 80 species of Gippsland birds, mammals and reptiles."

The loss of thousands of hollow-bearing trees in the fires has heavily impacted animals such as the threatened gliders, large birds such as black cockatoos, and our rare and endangered forest owls, including the powerful and sooty owls.

The boxes were donated to locals and Goongerah brigade by people from all walks of life, including Fulham Correctional Centre, several Men's Sheds, Victorian National Parks Association and small businesses.

Goongerah Brigade Captain Tony Bunt said it's rewarding to see so many of these

boxes now being used by native birds and marsupials.

"It gives us a boost to see wildlife slowly returning that would otherwise have had nowhere to shelter and raise their young," Tony said.

However, another threat to the recovering wildlife has recently concerned the local brigade.

"Poison bait feed stations have been installed in our CFA shed by the maintenance crew," Rena said. "These rodent poisons are called second-generation anticoagulant rodenticides. They have been heavily restricted in other countries because of thousands of non-target species being killed through secondary poisoning."

A rat or mouse that eats the bait becomes slow and lethargic. They are then easily caught and eaten by owls, kookaburras and magpies. Domestic cats can also die from eating the poisoned animal.

"It was terrible to think that the CFA might be inadvertently poisoning our owls, butcher birds and kookaburras, so we asked to switch to a brand of first-generation anticoagulant rodenticide. These are just as effective and less of a risk to other animals. CFA was happy to do that," Rena said.

STORY JILL REDWOOD



Volunteer Recruitment Hub

CFA's Volunteer Recruitment Hub (VRH) is a purpose-built online platform designed to be an end-to-end onboarding process for new and transferring volunteers. Since its launch in 2020, the project team has continually gathered feedback from applicants, volunteers and district staff to identify ways to enhance the system.

The next phase of the VRH is now available and includes a range of system and functionality improvements to enhance the end user experience and further streamline the membership process. The latest additions include:

- an 'invitation to register' to allow brigades to invite a person to register which bypasses the expression of interest process
- inclusion of Headquarters and Coastguard brigade application processes within the platform
- greater visibility of progress of applications for brigades
- improvements to the timing and distribution of system-generated reminder emails, system navigation and menu structure
- improved access levels for brigades

- the option for applicants to use their Working with Children Check application (reference) number to progress their membership application while waiting for the WWCC application to be processed by the Department of Justice and Community Safety.

Training sessions to explain the new features were held in December 2023, and feedback from participants was positive.

"The VRH process has made it easier for brigades to process new recruits into CFA," said one participant. "The revisions look great and will enhance our volunteer experience," said another.

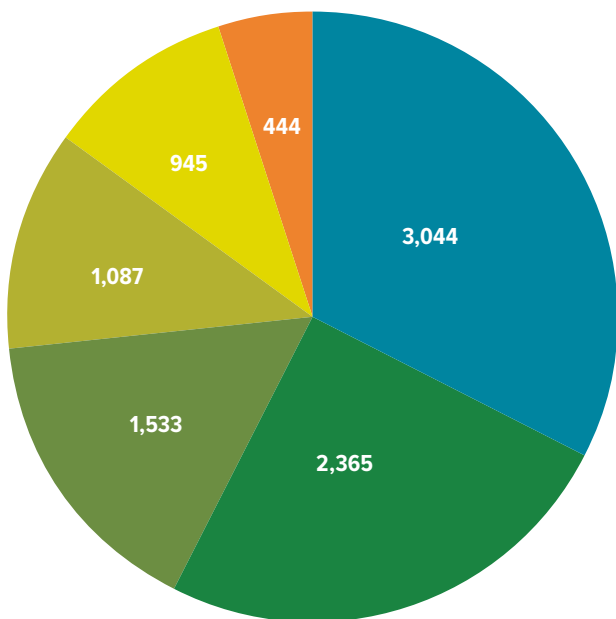
There are two new videos and updated FAQs to help district staff and brigades navigate the new release. You can view them on Members Online by searching for 'Volunteer Recruitment Hub'.

For more information about the VRH go to Members Online, contact your district representative or email volrecruithub@cfa.vic.gov.au.

Incident statistics

1 October 2023 – 31 December 2023

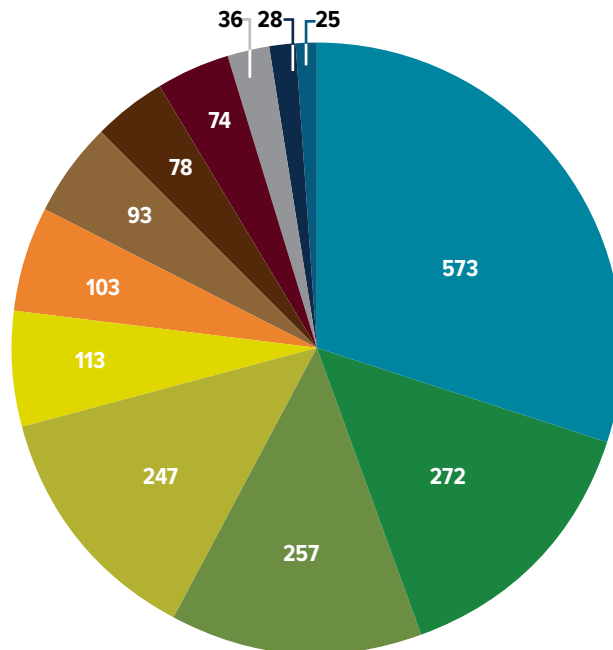
INCIDENTS BY TYPE



Service calls*	
Fire and explosions	
Motor vehicle accidents/rescue/EMS calls	
False alarms/false calls	
Good intent calls	
Hazardous condition	

* Includes 2,423 callouts supporting FRV, 36 supporting other agencies

ORIGIN OF FIRE



Paddock/open area/lawn	
Undetermined	
Road/car park	
Scrub/bush area	
Rubbish area/rubbish bin	
Kitchen/cooking area	
Engine area/running gear/vehicle wheel	
Area of a vehicle	
Crops	
Garage/carport	
Bedroom	
Balcony/porch/verandah	

INCIDENTS BY DISTRICT



SOUTH WEST	
District	Incidents
4	64
5	177
6	133
7	690



WEST	
District	Incidents
15	641
16	178
17	137



NORTH WEST	
District	Incidents
2	595
14	1,540
18	336
20	315



NORTH EAST	
District	Incidents
12	276
13	881
22	421
23	205
24	190



SOUTH EAST	
District	Incidents
8	1,987
9	273
10	204
11	201
27	271

New quick fill trailer thanks to local partnership

Beechworth Rural Fire Brigade has teamed up with the local correctional centre and a business to build a much-needed quick fill pump trailer.

Local business Billson's approached the brigade with the idea of donating a piece of equipment that the brigade needed. Brigade members didn't take long to suggest that a mobile quick fill pump and trailer would be a huge benefit for use on the fireground.

The brigade approached Beechworth Correctional Centre (BCC) to find out whether it could construct a trailer that would accommodate the pump and appropriate fittings. After getting the go-ahead, brigade members designed a purpose-built mobile unit.

Its features include:

- key start ignition panel wired separate to the pump
- independent fire hose reel
- electronic control panel with USB charging points, fuses and 12V power plug
- stainless steel water manifold with the capability to fill two trucks at once and clip on a third firefighting hose
- roof-mounted solar panel
- pull-out awning to shade the operator
- lockable overhead storage cage
- insulated food and drink coolers
- phone, radio and tablet charger.

The high-volume pump can fill a tanker in less than four minutes at 1,200 litres per minute.

“Our brigade has had long-standing support from the community of Beechworth, forging multiple partnerships with local businesses over many years,” Captain Bruce Forrest said.

“This partnership with Billson's and BCC is a good example of how the people of Victoria recognise the importance of how their local fire services volunteers contribute to the community.”

STORY BRET LACEY



New media training packages

CFA's Media and Social Media teams have developed two online training packages that launched in December 2023 on the CFA Learning Hub. These provide all CFA members with the necessary tools and skills to manage public communications for CFA and manage reputational risk online and in the media.

The social media training modules cover creating engaging content, reporting, setting up and managing a page, where to access content and how to handle issues that can arise on social media.

Alwyn Skilbeck is Bendigo Fire Brigade's social media page manager. Although he was well versed in social media, he found the training gave clear direction about how to manage social media on their newly-established page.

“We've set up a new page for our brigade, which meant we needed to ensure all page managers knew what they should and shouldn't post,” Alwyn said. “The training package is really interactive, so you stay

interested and I would say this is a must for anyone who uses social media for CFA.”

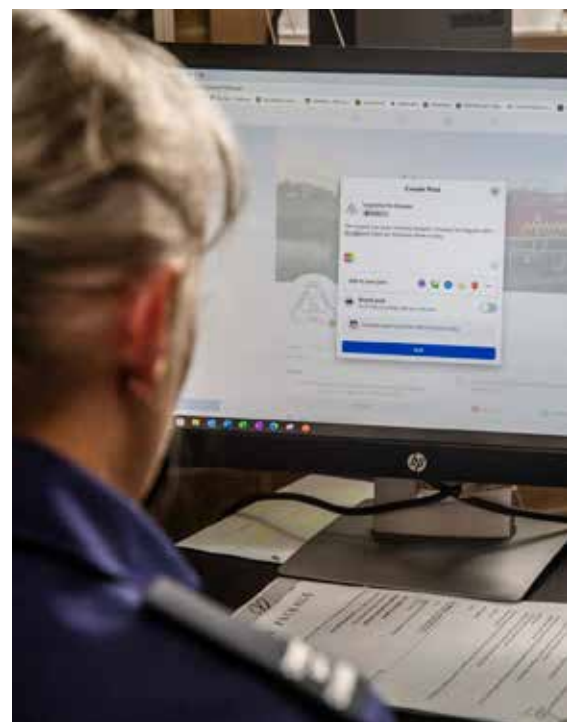
CFA's media team has also developed a training module for those who might engage with media on behalf of CFA. The training covers different types of media, how to develop effective key messages and how to deliver your key messages in a media interview.

Assistant Chief Fire Officer Stewart Kreltszheim said he thought the course was excellent and he will be encouraging members to complete it.

“It was a very engaging course to do. The content was interesting and the videos made it very practical,” Stewart said. “It's appealing to volunteers in various roles – it would suit anyone from a field commander to an incident controller who is about to walk into a media conference during a major emergency.”

Anyone can take the courses by logging onto learninghub.cfa.vic.gov.au.

STORY COURTNEY WALKER



Ferntree Gully Fire Brigade





- 1 Current Ferntree Gully Fire Station
- 2 First fire station, 1942
- 3 Part of the brigade's current memento cabinet
- 4 Chevrolet front-mounted pumper, 1942
- 5 The original 1926 bell used in an earlier station covering both Upper Gully and Lower Gully
- 6 House fire investigation, 1979
- 7 Championships running team, 1960s
- 8 Training at Ferntree Gully quarry, 1970s
- 9 Brigade open day, 2023
- 10 Brigade fleet, 1980s

Emergency Memberlink

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

By using Emergency Memberlink, you can receive discounts and benefits on a wide range of products and services in Victoria and interstate.

Details of the offers and full terms and conditions are at emergencymemberlink.com.au.

To join Memberlink phone 1800 820 037 or register online at emergencymemberlink.com.au. You can also access your Memberlink card on the website.

The Memberlink team welcomes feedback about the program and your suggestions about benefits you think would be of value to you, your family and your colleagues. Phone the team or leave a message on the Emergency Memberlink Facebook page.



- **InsureandGo** has 15% off travel insurance.
- There is now a wider range of **eGift** cards providing members with more choice and savings of up to 10%. These include major brands such as Bunnings, Harvey Norman, Village Cinemas, Endota Spa, EG Fuel Card, Drummond Golf and the Ultimate Gift Card range.
- **Westfund Health Insurance** has a 5% discount plus the two-month waiting period waived on extras cover.
- **Subscribe** has an extra 10% off the list price of magazine subscriptions including Better Homes & Gardens, National Geographic, Gardening, Home Beautiful and New Idea.
- \$300 excess reduction when you have your car repaired at **Sheen Panel Service**.
- **Experience Oz** offers at least 10% off hot deals on attractions, zoos and aquariums, Queensland theme parks, extreme activities, and much more.
- Exclusive discounts on home entertainment, audio, televisions, mobile phones, IT hardware, fitness trackers and whitegoods through the **JB Hi-Fi Corporate Benefits Programme**.
- Discounts throughout the year at **Specsavers Optometrists**.
- **Sixt Australia** has up to 20% off the best rate of the day on passenger and commercial vehicles.
- 15% off the best available rate at **Best Western** Australian and New Zealand properties.
- **Device Deal** in collaboration with **Arlo** has up to 30% discount on Arlo wire-free security cameras and products.
- Special hotel accommodation rates throughout Australia and internationally with **Hotel Planner**.
- Commercial pricing on a large range of household appliances and electronics through **The Good Guys Commercial Division**.
- 25% off reset and private bathing, revitalise Bath House bathing and Moonlit bathing during off-peak periods (Monday-Friday outside of public and school holidays) at **Peninsula Hot Springs**.
- **mycar Tyre & Auto** has 10% off servicing, mechanical repairs and TCP tyre purchases.
- Special corporate rates at Melbourne's majestic **Hotel Windsor**.
- 20% off flowers from **Petals Network**.
- **RSEA Safety** offers has 15% off full-priced items instore.
- 10% discount on **Electrodry** carpet dry cleaning services.
- Save 5% on adult Spirit and Flexi passenger fares on the **Spirit of Tasmania**.
- **Nissan Fleet** pricing on a range of new Nissan vehicles.
- 5% to 10% off the best unrestricted rate of the day at **Accor Hotels**.
- Plants, trees and garden products at true wholesale prices at **Plantmark**.
- **Searoad Ferries** has 10% discount on ferry travel between Sorrento and Queenscliff.
- Members receive 20% discount on unlimited ride tickets at **Luna Park Melbourne**.
- Exclusive pricing on whitegoods, kitchen appliances, audio visual, computers and mobile phones, home appliances and furniture through **Harvey Norman Groups & Associations Division**.
- Corporate leisure rates and reduced insurance excess on car hire with **Avis**.
- Up to 20% off the public website prices on the entire range of **Lenovo** notebook and desktop PCs, monitors and accessories.
- Discount of up to 30% on standard room only and bed and breakfast rates at **Radisson on Flagstaff Gardens Melbourne**.
- Take a further \$50 off the already discounted price on a **Driver Dynamics** defensive driving course.
- 10% off Australian car rentals with **Budget**.
- **The Bridgestone Business Associates Program** offers 15% off Bridgestone's website price on the full range of car, SUV and light van tyres.
- Up to 10% off all year round, plus additional savings during promotional periods on **Dell Technologies** laptops, desktops, monitors, printers and accessories.
- Free membership to **Travlect's** worldwide Travel Club.
- **Moonlit Sanctuary Wildlife Conservation Park** has 20% off day admission tickets.
- 30% discount on **Milleni** women's fashion bags and wallets and men's wallets.



Brigade

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