



AUTUMN 2020

BRIGADE

State of disaster in
north-east and east



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PHOTO: COURTESY OF DELWP



**SAFETY
TEAMWORK
ADAPTABLE
INTEGRITY
RESPECT**



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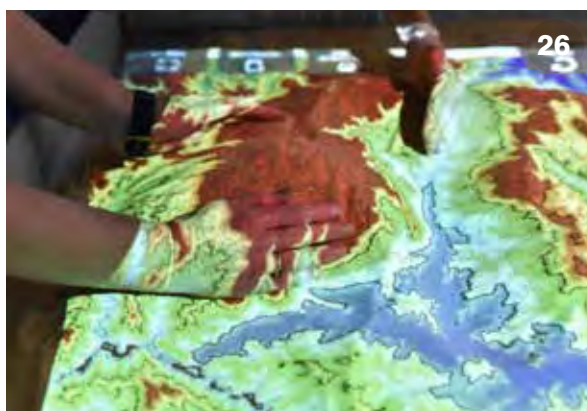
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FRIGHTENING FIREFIGHT



PHOTO: LEANNE SCHOMACKER

When an out-of-control bushfire swept through Mallacoota on Tuesday 31 December 2019, Divisional Commander Stewart Kreltszheim was in charge of the response. Stewart describes his experience.

It's Tuesday afternoon, New Year's Eve, and I'm inside a crowded community hall which days earlier was full of vulnerable, elderly and young people. Even when I yell using a megaphone I can't be heard above the rapturous applause and cheering as a wave of relief sweeps over every individual.

The firefront has passed. Everyone is safe. Although the extent of the impact of the fire is still unknown, the threat on their lives has passed and the consequences can be dealt with in the coming hours and days.

My experience at Mallacoota was the most frightening firefight I have been involved in. However, the efforts of emergency services members who drew on all their skills, stayed disciplined and followed their training, combined with the cooperation of the community, were sensational. Off-duty medical personnel came forward, individuals presented where their expertise could be used and everyone chipped in.

With 16 tankers in three strike teams from District 2, District 13 and District 14, two local tankers and two Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMV) slip-ons, plus support from a great Victoria Police and Ambulance Victoria contingent, Mallacoota faced its greatest challenge. It survived to welcome in 2020.

I arrived in Orbost on Sunday 29 December and was briefed on my role at Mallacoota coincidentally by a fellow 1993 recruit course member, Commander Rick Owen, who had working tirelessly to hold the fort.

It all started following a lightning strike north-west of Mallacoota. The resulting fire ran rapidly to the coast. My conversation with Rick raised the potential of a wind change and its impact on Mallacoota, which reminded us of a similar tragic situation at Anglesea in 1983.

On Monday morning I travelled to Mallacoota, avoiding being cut off, as leaving community members and tourists were directed towards the NSW border and the township of Eden. By Monday afternoon there was no option to leave, as we could see the 16-kilometre high smoke plume from the local streets.

We attended a community meeting on the footy oval and advised people of the severity of the risk, what to expect, what we didn't know and what we wanted them to do to help. For example, we asked them to put identification labels all gas bottles for return later and put them in the water to prevent explosions. With power disrupted and poor telecommunications on some networks we

identified when we could issue warnings, though the window of opportunity was closing and potentially unreliable.

We decided to use our tanker sirens only when we knew the fire was upon us, and we briefed community members on what action to take. Those who missed the briefing took action when they heard the sirens.

We posted lookouts around the townships and we planned three circles of defence – outer area, the main township, and the neighbourhood safer place. We were advised that a large number of people had flocked to the coast further to the north which was likely to be cut off, so a couple of tankers and one of our strike team leaders were positioned there.

As the sun rose on Tuesday morning I commented that at least we'd be able to fight the fire in daylight – a statement that proved futile. I'd seen the plume modelling but I didn't expect the smoke to be so thick. The smoke and haze quickly blocked out the sun and plunged the region into darkness.

Our lookouts, who were local FFMV members in the smaller and quicker FFMV slip-ons, reported that the fire was approaching from the west and south-west. When we understood the severity of the firefront we immediately retreated to the perimeter of the township, our first fallback line, to protect residential houses. Our crews performed diligently despite being hamstrung by fallen power lines and some exploding gas bottles.

Throughout the firefight I received great situational reports from the strike team leaders. I was based at Mallacoota Fire Station (the local command facility) where the important lines of communication needed to stay open to our strike teams and incident control centre at Orbost. This was where I had the frightening experience of defending the station from fire.

With personnel on hoses putting out spot fires in the insulation of the station, shouting to deliver messaging to the communications team inside the building and hear detail back, it was an intense emotional experience.

Mallacoota was interface firefighting in its purest form. We knew we had no aircraft support available and no chance of additional support, so our strategy was developed with the knowledge of what resources we had available.

I am extremely proud of the efforts of our people in Mallacoota. They held the lines and stuck to their tasks. Thanks to their endeavour they saved lives and prevented a lot of the township infrastructure from being destroyed.

STORY STEWART KRELTSZHEIM

A holidaymaker's experience

We arrived in Mallacoota on Boxing Day, where our family rings in every new year. Last year there were 14 of us and six dogs.

On Sunday 29 December we spent the day at one of Mallacoota's beaches and arrived home mid-afternoon. About this time a text advised that there was fire in Wingan River and that it is too late to leave Mallacoota. Staying was our safest option, with the Princes Highway closed outbound.

Twenty-four hours later when the sky began to be blanketed by a haze of smoke, we all received an emergency text ordering an immediate evacuation to the designated spots and forbidding us from leaving Mallacoota.

On New Year's Eve we didn't have to wait until midnight for fireworks. After watching anxiously as a red glow grew stronger, the daylight broke revealing a relatively calm and normal morning. Apart from some smoke and the occasional piece of ash or debris flying over, it seemed the fire had not hit as anticipated. Little did we know that this was the beginning of what can only be described as hell on earth.

We sought out a member of CFA, who informed us about the threat but that firefighters on the ground didn't yet have eyes on the fire heading towards 4000-plus people squeezed into the corner of a small coastal town. The winds had shifted and another fire from the opposite direction was threatening to join the Wingan River fire to create an enormous ring of fire that would inevitably surround an entire town and everyone in it.

The heroes in yellow assured us they would fight this monster to the very last line



PHOTO: BELINDA GILLESPIE

by circling the entire wharf with their red trucks and fending it away from the people experiencing this fearful version of nature.

By 7am the sky had darkened into a thick smoke and the ash-burnt leaves were becoming more obvious. It was not long after that we witnessed daylight suddenly turn into the pitch-black dead of night. It is something I'll never forget and never be able to comprehend.

Out of the thick darkness, the horizon turned into a blood-red glow emitting over the blackness – another incredible sight to behold. It didn't take long for the red glow to completely blanket our entire surroundings.

I dropped to my knees on the wharf and took a moment to look up at the blood-red sky and I just silently pleaded for this to end. From the refuge of the boat my wife turned to me and asked if we were going to die. I didn't have an answer.

Later we were informed by an emergency services officer that the enormous firefront had swung approximately one kilometre from the wharf. We were aided by a changing wind at the final moment and a frontline barrage by multiple red trucks and our heroes in yellow.

Over the next several hours we couldn't do anything but witness the devastating aftermath of this beast. Multiple houses ignited one after the other, falling like bright, glowing dominoes. It was hard to watch.

I remember finally resting a little easier when a hero in yellow jumped out of his truck with a big smile on his ash-covered face. He was an older fella. He looked like a real stalwart. The kind of person you would look at and think 'they don't make them like that anymore'. He was chatting to a bystander and his demeanour was comforting.

It was around this time that numerous people were able to return to their homes and camps to assess the damage. We'd been advised our house was still standing.

The events of the day felt like they took an eternity – it was so much in such a short time.

This is an extract from the original story. To read the full story go to [Facebook.com/Short-story-Brent-Nano-111664727066039/](https://www.facebook.com/Short-story-Brent-Nano-111664727066039/)

STORY BRENT NANO



PHOTO: MATT EDWARDS

Extreme conditions in north-east



PHOTO: AARON WALLACE

Kiewa Fire Brigade members joined one of many strike teams to battle extreme conditions on 30 and 31 December 2019 in the north-east. Kiewa brigade Captain Aaron Wallace (pictured with brigade member Paul Hadley) was on the strike team and talked to *Brigade* magazine about the nights' events.

"These conditions were unprecedented. In my 25-plus years with CFA I've never seen anything like it. This fire generated its own weather," Aaron said.

Eight members of Kiewa Fire Brigade joined firefighters from Allans Flat, Beechworth, Stanley and Wooragee on Strike Team 2455.

"The conditions were extremely destructive. They lifted our tanker up on two wheels as if it was nothing."

Firefighters battled extreme conditions in the Walwa area for more than 18 hours and managed to save several properties. However, while defending one house there was little they could do.

"We continued to defend the property but once the fire had lifted the entire roof off we knew it was too late.

"Unfortunately we lost the property but were able to get all our members out. There was some damage to the tanker and we had to call an ambulance due to fire-related injuries to one of our members. That was the first time I've had to push the emergency button on the radio; something I hope I never have to do again.

"Anything the fire wanted to take, it did. It turned trees to sticks. You have to expect the unexpected; the situation can change so quickly.

"We took cover anywhere we could. Being outside the tanker when it hit made it impossible to get back into the tanker. Once the fire passed and conditions eased, we regrouped and made our way back into the tanker. The crew administered first-aid to our injured member as we made our way to meet the ambulance in Walwa."

After a 10-minute break for a quick drink, the crew continued to defend properties.

Gary Wattie from Baranduda Fire Brigade was on a different strike team.

"I was on strike team 2480 to Walwa, right through Mount Alfred, Nariel Valley and Corryong driving our tanker for a hellish 21.5



PHOTO: MANDY WALLACE

hours," Gary said. "It was the craziest firefront I've ever seen – I could see continuous fire line from as far left out of the rear passenger window to as far right as I could see."

"There were some amazing saves and catastrophic losses of livestock. On one property our crew saved two houses, a machinery shed full of tractors, a plastic-wrapped hay shed, a pile of plastic wrapped hay, two bulls and a number of cows trapped by the fencing."

Aaron pointed out that it's not just about fighting fires. "CFA is being more proactive to inform residents about these fires and having a fire plan. It's so important to be aware and informed in these times.

"People think they can stay and defend, but a garden hose and footy shorts aren't going to help you with fires like these."

STORY HOLLY PENKETH



Fireys battle through November Code Red day

Firefighters fought more than 150 fires across the state on 21 November 2019 as Victoria experienced its first statewide Total Fire Ban of the bushfire season and a Code Red Fire Danger Rating in the Mallee and Northern Country.

With temperatures hitting 43 degrees in the north of the state and strong winds, the conditions were always going to be challenging.

There were more than 2,000 CFA firefighters and 500 vehicles on the ground as most of Victoria was subjected to very hot and dry conditions.

"Conditions were so windy at times that firefighting aircraft couldn't be used," CEO and Chief Officer Steve Warrington said.

"This meant the achievements of our ground crews were even more remarkable.

"To get through this given the conditions was a phenomenal effort by everyone across the state."

A significant grassfire ignited at around midday on 21 November in Strathallan, which eventually escalated to an Emergency Warning for Fairy Dell, Nanneella and Strathallan. The fire burnt more than 400 hectares and threatened local communities as it crossed Burgoine Road, Rochester-Strathallan Road and the railway line. Six families were evacuated.

The fire was brought under control and the warning was downgraded to an advice message at 7.30pm, though firefighters remained on scene overnight.

Emergency Management Commissioner Andrew Crisp APM visited the area later in the month to thank District 20 CFA members.

Rochester brigade Captain Luke Warren said it meant a lot that the commissioner took the time to travel to Rochester.

"It's great to get a thank you from our community and from CFA, but to get thanks from someone such as the commissioner at state level was a real morale boost for all involved on the day," Luke said.

By 7pm, 46 warnings had been issued for fires during the day including five Emergency Warnings, 12 Watch and Act warnings, 27 Advice messages and two Community Information notifications.

The Code Red conditions in the Mallee and Northern Country resulted in the closure of 229 schools and early learning centres.

The strong winds damaged buildings, brought down trees and impacted power supplies across the state. More than 130,000 households were without power because of weather conditions as the

storm front moved through the state.

SES received almost 2,100 requests for assistance because of the extreme weather conditions with Mill Park, Epping and Creswick the most impacted areas. Of these, more than 1,400 were requests for help with fallen trees.

"CFA also had resources engaged in fighting fires in New South Wales and Queensland on the same day so our crews should be justifiably proud of their incredible efforts," Steve said.

STORY MITCHELL GASTIN



PHOTOS: KEITH PAKENHAM AFSM

NSW deployment reunites lifelong friends



PHOTO: MIKE JANSZ

As the bushfires in NSW tore through the state, more than 2,000 CFA volunteers were deployed to help support the NSW Rural Fire Service. Lifelong friends Graeme Prentice, Geoffrey Stewart and Ronald Cole joined different strike teams in Victoria, unaware they would bump into each other and work shoulder-to-shoulder in NSW.

Graeme, Geoff and Ron have been members of CFA for more than 45 years. They all transferred or joined Bayswater Fire Brigade in the early 1970s and fought fires alongside each other for many years. All three members have carried out numerous roles including captain, apparatus officer, foreman, lieutenant, group officer, VFBV delegate, training officer and secretary.

After Graeme moved to Point Cook Fire Brigade and Ron moved to Romsey Fire Brigade the three mates have seen a lot less of one another. So when they all bumped into each other in Singleton for their NSW deployments they couldn't believe their eyes.

"It felt really good," Graeme said. "The three of us haven't worked together for years.

"There are always people you know in CFA, but it was nice to have faces I've known from the start."

"I couldn't believe it," Geoff said. "It was Ron that spotted me first and then he told me that Graeme was there. I didn't expect us all to be there together."

The three first spotted each other in the Singleton base camp in Sydney. Graeme and Geoff were both deployed to Glenreagh where they carried out asset protection and knocking out spot fires together. Ron went on to Glen Innes.

"We left each other not knowing if we'd catch up again. When we were at Sydney Airport waiting for the same flight home, we picked up our conversation exactly where we'd left off," Geoff added.



The distance between the three of them means they rarely meet up so seeing each other on deployment was extremely special.

"It's always good to see the pair of them," Ron said.

"Once you spend a few years together in the brigade, the amount of time you spend apart doesn't change anything," Geoff said. "It was just like old times: Graeme, Ron and Geoff on the fireground together again.

"I believe friendship in CFA is a different kind of bond. "Volunteering is a common interest and we have all done it for so long. It's hard to explain unless you're in it."

Graeme, Geoff and Ron arrived at Melbourne Airport together and parted on a high, hoping their paths will cross again soon.

STORY HOLLY PENKETH



DOMINO EFFECT AS TRAINS COLLIDE

PHOTOS: DAVID VILE, DUST AND DIESEL PHOTOGRAPHY

On 29 January 2020 a goods train on the main Melbourne to Sydney line between Chiltern and Barnawartha came to an abrupt stop when numerous carriages towards the rear of the train derailed. Shipping containers came adrift from the goods train and collided with an oncoming passenger train as it went through the main crossing in Barnawartha.

At 5.44pm several rear carriages of a north-bound Pacific National freight train derailed one kilometre south of Barnawartha in Victoria's north-east. The momentum of the derailment flung freight containers across the tracks. Some came to rest two kilometres from the main accident scene. The force also tore up large sections of the track.

Shortly after the derailment, a V/Line passenger train travelling from Albury to Melbourne on an adjacent track struck containers from some of the derailed wagons.

The accident brought back painful memories for a few of Barnawartha's older firefighters who attended an incident in June 1982. On a foggy morning, a goods train collided with the Spirit of Progress killing a driver and fireman from the goods train. That accident occurred only a few kilometres from where this derailment happened.

Luckily the train driver was able to bring the train to a stop before it reached the broken tracks ahead. None of the 17 passengers on board was injured, but the crash sparked a grassfire which quickly ran along both sides of the tracks, threatening homes and travellers on the Hume Freeway.

It was a case of *deja vu* for Barnawartha Captain Phillip Colvin, as it had all the hallmarks of the Indigo Valley fire which broke out in the area in December 2015. He recognised the risk of the fire getting away and quickly called to make tankers 10.

"I arrived to find the crossing in town fully blocked by the goods train," Phillip said. "I could see the passenger train pulled up as well – at that time we didn't know if it was derailed too, but I could see it was still upright and it appeared to have suffered minimal damage.

"A big cloud of smoke was visible towards Chiltern so I made my way back through the town to get to the other side of the fire.

"It was clear right away that I needed people to attack the grassfire. It was burning on both sides of the railway line, between the rail line and the Hume freeway on one side and towards houses on the other. I also needed to stop it jumping the freeway and taking off the way it did during the 2015 Indigo valley fire. I also needed to stop it jumping the freeway and taking off the way it did during the 2015 Indigo valley fire. I also needed to find out what the goods train was carrying, it was full-on for a while."

The incident was split into north and south sectors to allow crews to better manage the fire. Damage to the tracks and the location of the crash forcing responders to take a six-kilometre round trip to access both sides of the scene. The district commander was on scene quickly to assist and his support was greatly appreciated on the ground.

The train was then swept to ensure no dangerous goods were on board.

More than 20 trucks from Barnawartha, Browns Plains, Chiltern, Cornishtown, Indigo Valley, Rutherglen, Shepparton, Springhurst, Wodonga and Wodonga West attacked the blaze, bringing it under control in about 20 minutes.

"It was a challenging incident," Phillip said. "The destruction caused by the Indigo Valley fires was never far from our minds, but the weather and time of day were on our side this time and we were able to get on top of it quickly.

"It was also extremely lucky no one was seriously hurt. The train driver was able to pull the passenger train up and the goods train wasn't carrying anything dangerous."

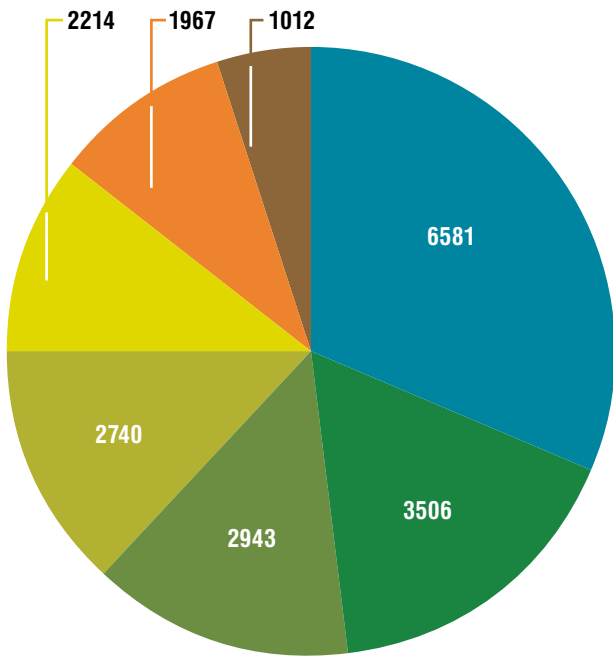
Crews stayed on scene for several hours using used thermal imaging cameras to check for remaining hot spots. An advice message issued to affected communities was lifted at 8.18pm.

SES, Victoria Police and Ambulance Victoria also attended the scene.

STORY SHAUNNAGH O'LOUGHLIN

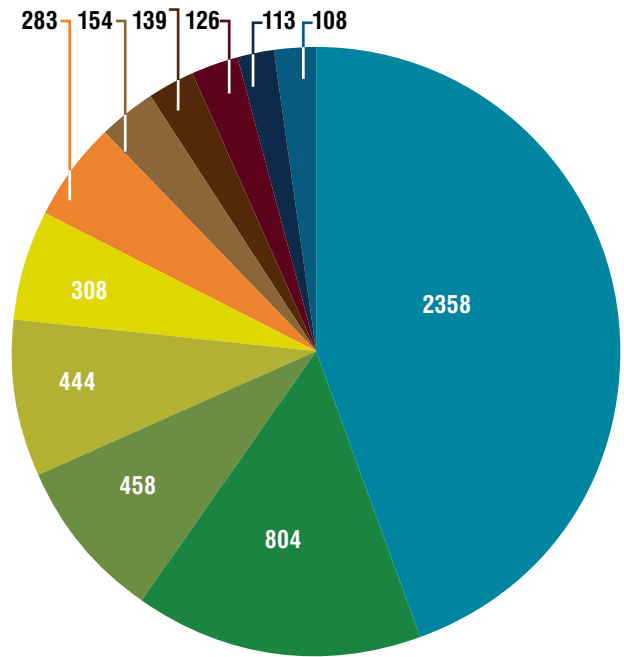


INCIDENTS BY TYPE



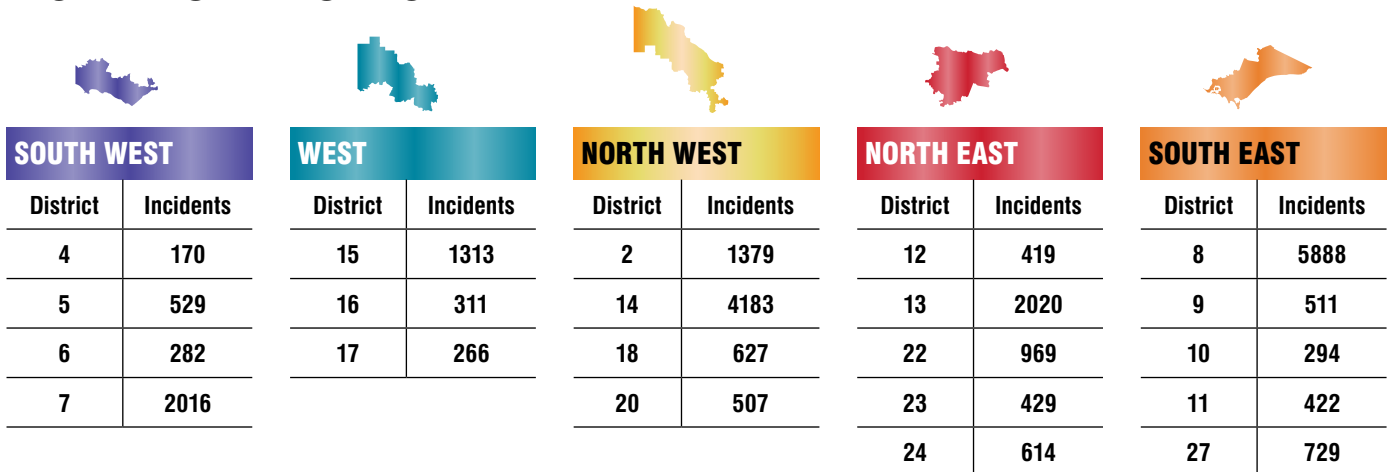
Fire and explosions	
False alarms/false calls	
Motor vehicle accidents/rescue	
Good intent calls	
Emergency medical response	
Hazardous condition	
Service calls	

ORIGIN OF FIRE



Paddock, open area, lawn	
Road, car park	
Engine area, running gear, wheel area of vehicle	
Kitchen, cooking area	
Scrub or bush area	
Undetermined	
Garage, carport, vehicle storage area	
Passenger areas of vehicle	
Court, terrace, patio	
Bedroom	
Lounge	

INCIDENTS BY DISTRICT



Brigades are reminded to submit their incident report as soon as possible after attending an incident. Brigades on strike teams also need to submit a report to the Service Delivery Reporting Centre (SDRC). Call **1800 628 844** between 8am and 10pm.

Triumph over adversity



The 2019-20 fire season will go down in history as one of the most extensive bushfire seasons we have faced.

Our people, whether fighting fires here or on deployment interstate, made a significant and critical difference in some of the most challenging conditions we have experienced for many years. Not since the Great Divide fires have our people been involved in such a sustained period of firefighting, not only at home but across multiple states.

Our work started in late October when we heeded the call to provide support to colleagues in NSW and Queensland. Many of our people, both operational and support staff, completed multiple deployments, standing side-by-side with their colleagues from Australia and overseas to defend communities far away from their families with commitment and resolve.

At home, our own battle was just about to begin. More than 1.5 million hectares of Victoria was burned and there was widespread impact in the north-east and East Gippsland as a result.

I felt immense pride to see the convoys of CFA trucks from all over the state moving into position in East Gippsland ready to protect communities when record-breaking temperatures and unpredictable weather hit just before the New Year. Thousands of our firefighters fought the blazes; there were no districts or regions or even organisations on the frontline, just people working together for a common goal.

So many amazing stories of triumph over adversity, mateship and camaraderie have come across my desk since - far too many to recount them all, but there were a couple of big highlights for me.

The first highlight was about how we tackle fires. Traditionally our focus is on fighting fires, but this summer we did something differently. We made the very tough decision to accept that we couldn't put out the fires. Instead we put our sole focus on the communities about to be impacted by the fires. One example was at Mallacoota.

Two days before the fires hit Mallacoota we embedded three strike teams in the town. Our members identified all the critical infrastructure in the town from medical facilities to power poles. They knocked on every single door and spoke to community members explaining the plan to keep them safe. The community was with us; they heeded our calls to evacuate their homes, stayed with us behind our fallback lines and followed direction when the firefront arrived. And because of that not one person lost their life.

We placed a huge emphasis on health and wellbeing this season, working with our partner agencies, including those deployed interstate, to embed peer support within our task forces. Peers were on hand to help with any concerns within their task force from wellbeing and health to food to accommodation. This took a massive effort, but it paid off – the feedback we have received on this strategy has been extremely positive.

During the fire season there were no boundaries between anyone at CFA. Every brigade, district, region and department in CFA contributed. Everybody backed each other. We had brigades provide members and trucks for long-haul strike teams; staff assigned to State Control Centres in Queensland and NSW; we had staff from headquarters working in district offices: everyone in CFA had a part to play in ensuring everything ran as smoothly as possible.

But underlying these amazing stories is the biggest highlight for me: every single one of our people made it home safe.

At CFA the safety of our people is our number one priority. We estimate that 90 per cent of our people completed their hazardous tree awareness and entrapment drills before the season began, up from 30 per cent in the 2018-19 season. I have no doubt that our pre-season safety training requirements not only prepared us to protect lives and property but also ensured our people returned home to their families and friends after their job was done.

The stories from the fire season are moving from tragedy and triumph to regeneration and renewal. There are huge challenges ahead, but as I toured East Gippsland with the CFA Board in February I saw the passion and resolve of the people who call these areas home, to work together to rebuild. Just like us at CFA, there is a strong focus on ensuring the community is central to everything they do as they move through the recovery process.

Thank you to all our people and their families for their incredible contribution during our challenging fire season and indeed every day. I am extremely proud to lead our great organisation. And I hope you are proud to be a part of it.

CHAIR



Greg Smith AM

I am immensely proud of the way CFA has responded to one of the most challenging summers we've faced. As an organisation we have been recognised as one of the country's leading fire agencies, and our values of safety, teamwork, adaptable, integrity and respect have been on display across Australia and seen around the world.

The impact of this summer on our members has been significant. Board members heard first hand accounts from our volunteers and local brigades during a visit to some of the hardest hit communities in East Gippsland. These accounts reiterate the importance of CFA in our communities.

Even as our communities start coming to terms with one emergency, we are now facing a global pandemic. The safety of our staff and volunteers has always been our number one priority, and we quickly established a pandemic management team to coordinate our actions throughout this new challenge. The Board expects this team to ensure all CFA members receive the most up-to-date information and advice.

Despite these unprecedented emergencies, we continue to work through the journey of reforming Victoria's fire services. This includes welcoming Victoria's first Fire Rescue Commissioner Ken Block who will take the reins of Fire Rescue Victoria.

We recognise there will be many unknown elements throughout this reform process and we are carefully considering the impacts for both CFA and FRV personnel. We are also in regular contact with the VFBV in relation to matters of mutual interest. Our various stakeholders have a lot to contribute to the process that CFA has to manage and deliver for the benefit of the community.

We have been seeking feedback from all CFA staff and volunteers on our long-term strategy *Our Community, Our CFA: 2020 and beyond*. This is a starting point to shape the future of our organisation and help to identify what we stand for. It also reinforces CFA's four strategic goals:

- We put the community at the centre of everything we do
- We deliver programs and services that make a positive difference
- We provide a great place to volunteer and work
- We are a progressive emergency service.

As a Board we are proud of the resilience of CFA staff and volunteers throughout these extraordinarily trying times.

ED STRATEGY, PLANNING AND RISK



John Haynes

Strategy, Planning and Risk (SP&R) replaced the directorate known as Volunteers and Strategy in July 2019. Our directorate is made up of four teams: Strategy, Planning and Investment, Business Intelligence, Performance Improvement and Risk and Insurance Services. Together we support all levels of CFA to plan for the future.

Our Community, Our CFA: 2020 and Beyond was released on the CFA intranet for our members' feedback in December 2019. This draft document includes our vision and mission, long-term strategy, narrative and brand, and creates a clear direction for the whole of CFA. It defines who we are, what we do, where we are going and how we will get there.

I encourage you all to read through this document, talk about it with your brigades and provide feedback on what we got right and what needs more work. It's important that all people who volunteer and work at CFA feel part of shaping our story.

The teams in SP&R work closely together to sustain and improve service delivery by gathering intelligence, informing our investments and driving performance improvement. We support decision-makers to make evidence-based decisions that will allow us to meet our long-term strategy. This strategy will be brought to life through three steps: planning service delivery based on community fire risk, making operating models flexible and agile, and building our capability strategically.

To be successful in supporting CFA, the SP&R directorate relies on strong input from our frontline members all the way through to our Executive and Board. For our volunteer members, your input occurs every time you pick up the phone to report a fire or incident to the Service Delivery Reporting Centre. The data in these reports is analysed and used to inform decisions across the organisation, such as where we should build new fire stations or allocate our vehicles and equipment. It also helps us to identify trends in fire activity, so we can see what incidents are occurring and help you to develop educational programs that will stop incidents in the future.

The quality of data collected in fire incident reports is critical to us understanding if the programs and services we deliver are making a positive difference to the community.

SP&R identifies opportunities to improve or sustain performance across the organisation to reach our vision. Opportunities are identified in a range of ways such as after-action reviews (AARs) and research and audits, all of which highlight existing actions that need to be continued or done differently to reach better outcomes.

The goal is to develop plans to manage risks and embrace opportunities to innovate and create safer Victorian communities.

ACO NORTH EAST REGION



Ross Sullivan

It has been a long and arduous fire season for CFA, our emergency services partners and communities – especially in the North East of Victoria. It started in September with regular and continuous deployments to help our NSW and Queensland neighbours.

Despite the river in between, we live as one community and interstate deployments are common for us. However, this season the scale of the fires and the level of assistance we gave were remarkable.

Fire landed in our own communities in December 2019, with significant areas and communities of the Upper Murray decimated. Firefighters, incident managers and specialist crews from across Victoria were called upon, often at short notice, to protect communities in the Upper Murray and the Ovens and King valleys.

Here are some of the remarkable features of the fires:

- In the Upper Murray and Ovens Valley fires no one lost their lives and there were no serious injuries.
- There was a sustained impact of smoke on the community including a significant economic impact on tourism, agriculture and community health.
- A multi-agency workforce supported communities at a difficult time. Much of this support came from other parts of the state and country to unfamiliar communities, and acted with courage and grace to help people in need.
- Innovative work was carried out in fire-affected and isolated communities. New ideas included 'emergency caches' with resources (such as a satellite phone) to support isolated communities and rapid road reopening resources ready to deploy.
- There was an incredible response from across the world to support our firefighters and affected communities through donations of money, goods and labour to help rebuild communities.

Recovery activities are well underway to help communities return to their pre-incident health. Several CFA people lost homes and farms and we are throwing our arms wide open to offer support and to put them in touch with vital support networks.

I appreciate the willingness shown by volunteers and staff to commit to firefighting efforts both locally and far from home, and the support from families, friends and employers who allow them to be deployed. The opportunity to support other parts of the state and country has been invaluable in gaining experience and passing on knowledge to others.

Our people were in the middle of the fires that impacted communities and I encourage those who need support to take advantage of the various services on offer.

Our thoughts go to the families, friends and colleagues of the three FFMVic members who were tragically killed this fire season, as well as those who lost their lives in NSW.

OPERATIONS MANAGER DISTRICT 20



Peter Taylor

As we continue to work through the 2019-20 fire season in District 20, it's good to reflect on what we have achieved and the underpinning factors that support our efforts every day in protecting our communities and others' lives and property.

District 20 has a diverse landscape with strong agricultural sectors of grain, dairying, beef, sheep and wool production, along with some large-scale intensive agriculture, tomato, olive, grape and wine production, with solar power production and tourism centred along the Murray River townships. These sectors underpin the economies of our communities across the district and support the direct or indirect employment of people within the community.

This diversity means our people bring a broad range of skills, knowledge and experience to their CFA roles. This enables them to deal with the daily challenges they face in a professional and capable manner, reducing any impact of incidents and returning communities to normality.

An inspirational example of this was the way our crews responded to fires in November 2019 at Nanneella and Strathallan on our first Code Red Day since the 2009 bushfires. The Grass Fire Danger Index was higher than 200 and we had little or no aircraft support. The responding crews quickly established control, sectorised the fire, tasked resources to achieve the best outcome all in incredibly difficult conditions.

Both fires were contained in a matter of hours with only 450 hectares burned and no loss of houses or life. It was an incredible achievement.

These types of outcomes don't just happen. It takes a team unified in purpose, cooperation, skill, courage, discipline, preparation, training, and the application of sound knowledge and experience under pressure. In many ways we are starting to reap the rewards of a number of our initiatives: planned skills maintenance programs in both wildfire and structural skills; Captains Peer Mentoring Program; pre-season briefings and exercises based on our lessons learned; and a strong commitment to open and honest after-action reviews after incidents.

There are many examples where our teams have achieved similar great outcomes across our district. But more than this we have taken a lead role in the initial NSW fire deployments and then backed this up with ongoing strike team support for several weeks. Then the Gippsland and north-east campaign fires commenced with ongoing support heading to multiple locations for multiple weeks.

All these significant outcomes were supported by a much larger team – our families, friends, partners and loved ones – and support from affected communities. Everyone plays a part. I'm very humble to be part of our team and thank everyone who contributes their time, effort and passion.



THANK YOU

**We are in awe of your bravery,
selflessness and commitment.**

To every volunteer firefighter who has risked everything to protect Australian communities since the devastating bushfires began last year – **thank you**. You have our deepest gratitude and respect.

Read your messages of support at fmbank.com.au/brigade from everyday Aussies. It's our small way of saying thanks.

At Firefighters Mutual Bank* it's our privilege to serve you, just as you serve us.

Visit fmbank.com.au/brigade or call **1800 800 225**
8am to 7pm, weekdays and 9am to 3pm, Saturdays



**Firefighters
Mutual Bank**

Serving those who protect

*Membership is open to citizens or permanent residents of Australia who are current or retired employees and current volunteers of a fire and/or emergency service or family members of members of the Bank. Firefighters Mutual Bank is a division of Teachers Mutual Bank Limited ABN 30 087 650 459 AFSL/Australian Credit Licence 238981.01651-BRA-FMB-0220-BrigadeMag-182.5x272

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THANK YOU CFA

The fires in Australia this summer stirred strong emotions in people around the world. Here's a sample of good wishes from the hundreds that CFA received.

3

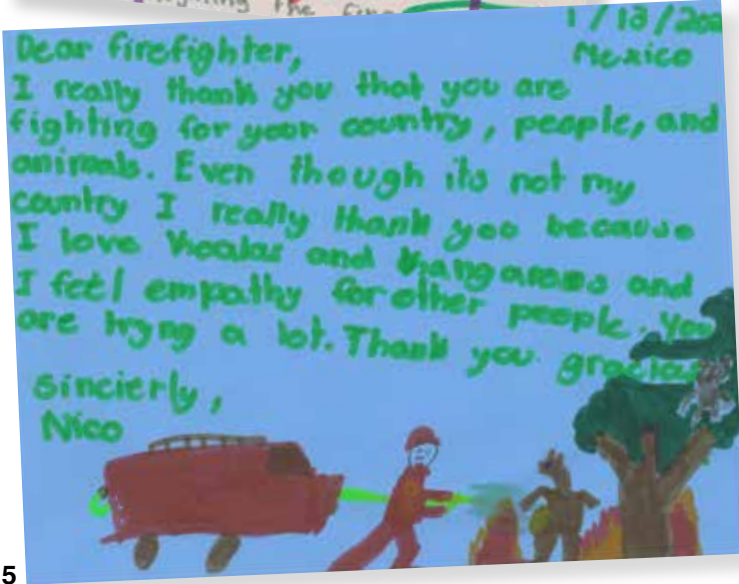
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Clifton Hall School
Newbridge
EH24 8LQ
Scotland
Monday 20th January 2020

Dear CFA
I'm writing to say that you thank you
for saving not only saving people but animals too. So how
you great you have helped people that black and thin even
though the fires are rising you are still here! Don't
stop! We can you be with you, you have hope! People are
donating there money to help you and if you where
not there what world we do. So I'm just writing to
say thank you

Your sincerely
Nico 6/1



Dear firefighter,
I really thank you that you are
fighting for your country, people, and
animals. Even though its not my
country I really thank you because
I love Mexico and the animals and
I feel empathy for other people. You
are trying a lot. Thank you greatly
sincerely,
Nico



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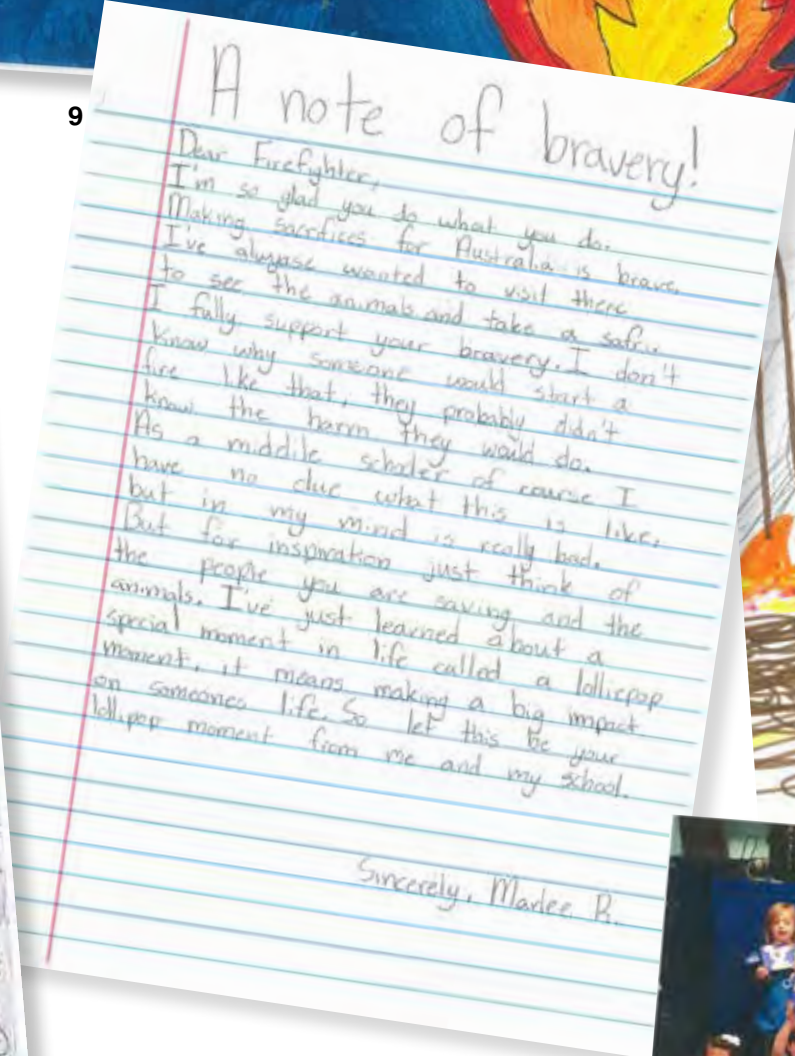
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10



11

- 1 Addenbrooke Classical Academy, Denver, US
- 2 Desertserges National School, Enniskeane, Ireland
- 3 Apple Blossoms Early Learning Centre, Melbourne
- 4 Bennington early Childhood Center, Vermont, US
- 5 American School Foundation, Mexico
- 6 Clifton Hall School, Edinburgh, Scotland
- 7 Hendrik Pierson College, Netherlands
- 8 Windsor High School, West Midlands, England
- 9 Harrison Middle School, Arkansas, US
- 10 Brookwood School, Massachusetts, US
- 11 Girl Scout Daisy Troop, Pearl River, New York, US



A strong foundation

GENERAL FIREFIGHTER OVERVIEW

- ✓ Flexible delivery options
- ✓ Face-to-face training, eLearning or a combination
- ✓ Safety embedded throughout course
- ✓ Practical training including foundation skill drills
- ✓ About six hours of theory
- ✓ 10-20 hours practical training
- ✓ Tools and learning resources for brigades
- ✓ Ability to track personal development

It has been 18 years since CFA introduced Minimum Skills Wildfire training for all new operational volunteers. This training was developed following the death of five volunteers at Linton in 1998.

Minimum Skills has stood the test of time in terms of skills training, safety and development and more than 35,000 people have completed it since it launched.

However, modifications at a local level over the years, although well intended, have meant that the delivery of Minimum Skills across the state is inconsistent. It's also now out of step with new learning technologies which means it can take a long time for some participants to get through the program.

A review of Minimum Skills identified a range of potential improvements. A project team including training instructors, VFBV, Learning Governance and Practice and an instructional designer was formed in 2018 to redevelop and modernise the program, leading to the design and development of the new General Firefighter training.

General Firefighter is now the essential foundation for the future training and development of CFA's operational members. It provides access to contemporary, comprehensive, consistent and flexible training that gives new members the knowledge and skills required to safely and effectively participate in their first turnout.

New members can start the course after they complete their CFA and brigade induction and program orientation. General Firefighter is estimated to take about 22 hours to complete depending on the learning pathway chosen. Foundation skills drills and brigade familiarisation will then be scheduled at the brigade level.

Following a skills consolidation session and course assessment, new members will complete further online and face-to-face safety awareness sessions as well as CFA's Child Safety Standards learning module, before being fully qualified to attend their first wildfire incident.

The rollout of General Firefighter has begun in the South West and North West regions and will continue to be implemented on a region-by-region basis, taking into consideration those areas hardest hit by the 2019-20 fire season.

A three-month transition window will allow any members completing Minimum Skills to complete their course as General Firefighter is phased in. Minimum Skills is expected to be fully phased out by 1 July 2020. As is the case with Minimum Skills, District Learning and Development staff will continue to work with brigades to manage and deliver the training to their new members.

Executive Director Training DCO Gregg Paterson said General Firefighter aimed to improve volunteer retention by keeping new members engaged throughout their training.

"The existing course can be time consuming for new members because of the amount of paperwork and the current assessment processes," Gregg said.

"Through the use of online learning and new approaches to program delivery, we're aiming to reduce the amount of time it takes for new members to complete the course and therefore reduce the risk of losing them before they complete the program.

"Safety is also now a core component of the training, highlighting our commitment to being a safety-first organisation and ensuring that our new volunteer recruits turn out to their first incident with the ability to maintain their personal safety and work effectively in a crew.

"Our brigades represent the diverse communities that make up Victoria. Each has its own individual characteristics, risks, challenges and strengths. Some are busy with incidents and others are relatively quiet. But whatever the brigade they all have a common need for skilled, competent and prepared firefighters, whether it is to fight one incident a year or a hundred.

"I am very excited about the future of training at CFA and confident that through General Firefighter we can prepare our people to safely perform their firefighting roles with passion, enthusiasm and commitment."

The development of General Firefighter has included extensive consultation with brigades and key stakeholders with a primary focus on firefighter safety, role requirements and expectations of new members. Consultation has also been conducted with VFBV, UFU, and DELWP.

STORY: SHAUNNAGH O'LOUGHLIN



PHOTOS: BLAIR DELLEMIN

Shaping our future



From 1 July 2020 CFA will be only a volunteer firefighting organisation protecting Victorians during fires and other emergencies. CFA will continue to be the primary responder to large parts of Victoria.

To date, much of the CFA and sector focus has been related to matters of day one implementation, but equally as important is the need to develop a plan to deliver on our future aspirations and operating model. CFA is continuing to work with volunteers and staff about Fire Services Reform.

We are focusing on the crucial activities that will allow us to deliver safe operations from day one, and we have established 15 working groups:

FRV operating model
CFA operating model
FRV organisational structure
CFA organisational structure
CFA staff transferring to FRV by ministerial direction
Secondment model
Safe systems of work
Day one training and induction
Dispatch, callout and escalation
Allocation statement
Heads of agreement
FRV branding
Industrial relations
Budget
Entity establishment (Registration Board, District Review Panel, Implementation Monitor)

Fire District Review Panel

Appointed by the Minister to provide advice to the Minister about whether the FRV fire district needs to be changed or reviewed.

FRV Strategic Advisory Committee (and Terms of Reference)

Provides advice to FRV in relation to cultural change, workforce diversity and flexibility, organisation governance, engagement and integration with the broad emergency services sector, and future direction of FRV.

Fire Services Implementation Monitor and Plan

The team is assessing the progress of the implementation actions and the impact on the financial sustainability of FRV and CFA.

Firefighters Registration Board and Scheme

Administers the scheme and provide registration of employees of FRV that will be made available to CFA under secondment arrangements.

CFA is also collaborating with the Victorian Government and other emergency services agencies on four other groups, above.

Our strategic goals

Over the past year we have transitioned from six strategic objectives to our current four strategic goals. These goals and their underlying priorities define what CFA will become and will drive our organisation.

During 2019-20 and into the future, CFA will also focus on developing an outcomes-based approach to measuring our performance against our strategic goals. The illustration, below, shows our goals and the priorities for each.



WE PUT THE COMMUNITY AT THE CENTRE OF EVERYTHING WE DO

- › Deliver three Local Government CEO forums
- › Improve data capture capability for community engagement activities
- › Implement outcomes of Cladding Taskforce (Structural Risk Assessment Program)
- › Undertake community Perceptions Survey
- › Promote CFA's strategy, brand and refreshed narrative
- › Update CFA publications
- › Deliver a Community Engagement State Forum
- › Identify, record and monitor hazardous materials waste facility sites



WE DELIVER PROGRAMS AND SERVICES THAT MAKE A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE

- › Plan and deliver Vegetation management activities
- › Pilot and evaluate the Victorian Fire Risk Register - Structure
- › Implement the Community Engagement Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting System
- › Deliver the Rural Decline and Aging Pilot
- › Develop and plan delivery of the Alpine Service Delivery Strategic Plan
- › Deliver new advice on smoke alarm installation
- › Continue the Residential Engagement and Smoke Alarm Pilot (RESA)
- › Review of response tables to improve service delivery
- › Development of our operational incident and regional management capability
- › Support the delivery of Safer Together Program
- › Deliver a Fire Service Memorandum of Understanding



WE PROVIDE A GREAT PLACE TO VOLUNTEER AND WORK

- › Implement Programs that reinforce CFA's values
- › Implement an Action plan to address findings of the People Matter Survey
- › Support the engagement and cultural safety of diverse groups
- › Support the Indigenous Burning Program
- › Continue work to create a safe environment for children
- › Roll out the Safe Working from Heights Program
- › Continue to implement the Structural Helmet Program
- › Develop a program that promotes holistic wellbeing
- › Implement the volunteer workwear project
- › Continue the CFA intranet refresh
- › Rollout of e-learning modules
- › Deliver the Spirit of CFA Awards
- › Modernisation of CFA/VFBV Championships
- › Open the Emergency Services Organisation Memorial



WE ARE A PROGRESSIVE EMERGENCY SERVICE

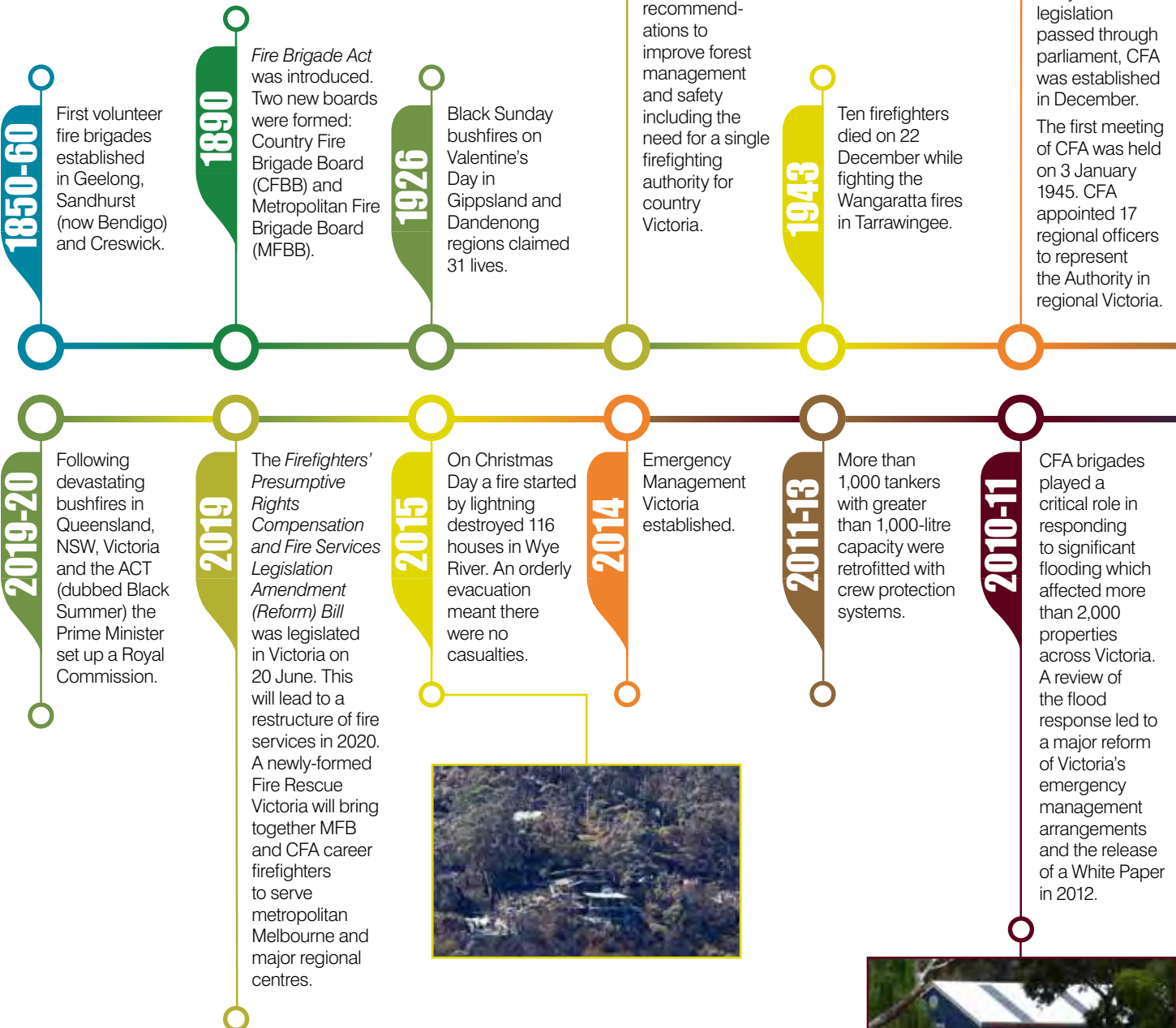
- › Build a Compliance Obligations Register
- › Review and improve governance arrangements
- › Continue to scope a new Enterprise Resource Platform
- › Continue the rollout of the Brigade Capability Planning Application
- › Finalise and evaluate pilot of Annual Brigade Review
- › Determine the research needs of CFA
- › Implement Year 2 of the Connected Brigades Program
- › Develop a plan to ensure our volunteer leaders are equipped to provide strategic leadership and drive improvement





History of CFA

As we celebrate 75 years since CFA formed in 1945, we look at the events that have shaped our organisation.





1947

CFA started to build its own trucks. The first tanker was based on an Austin Series 1 truck chassis and fitted with a 1,300-litre water tank.

1958

The *Country Fire Authority Act* passed as legislation, formalising the powers, duties and responsibilities of CFA and its personnel.

1969

On 8 January more than 200 fires started across Victoria with the worst in Melbourne's urban fringe. Twenty-three people were killed, including 17 motorists who were trapped on the freeway at Lara.

1977

On 12 February widespread fires occurred across the Western District causing five deaths and the loss of 123 houses and substantial numbers of other buildings and stock.

1983

On 16 February Ash Wednesday fires swept through parts of Victoria and South Australia killing 75 people including 13 firefighters. Subsequent inquiries led to a much greater focus on community education, risk management, house loss investigations, structured training and standard protective clothing.

1997

Fires spread throughout the Dandenong Ranges on 21 January killing three people and destroying 41 houses.

2009

On 7 February 173 people lost their lives in the Black Saturday fires, the worst natural disaster in Australian history. Fires destroyed more than 2,000 properties, more than 60 businesses and burnt over 400,000 hectares. More than 19,000 CFA members and thousands of members from other emergency services were involved in frontline firefighting, incident management and support.

This disaster emphasised the importance of educated and engaged communities, appropriate building standards and timely warnings. Following a Royal Commission, substantial reform began in the Victorian emergency services sector, including the introduction of a Fire Services Commissioner in 2010.

2006-7

Victorian fire agencies responded to more than 1,000 fires. The Great Divide North and the Great Divide South fires burnt over 1 million hectares and became the longest continuously burning bushfire complex in the state's history. All new tankers with greater than 1,000-litre capacity included crew protection systems as standard.

2005-6

More than 500 fires broke out leading to the loss of four lives, 57 houses, 359 farm buildings and more than 64,000 stock.

2003

In early January CFA and Department of Sustainability and Environment crews responded to more than 80 fires in the north-east started by lightning. These alpine fires burnt more than 1.3 million hectares and destroyed 11 homes over seven weeks.

1998

On 2 December five firefighters from Geelong West Fire Brigade lost their lives fighting a bushfire in Linton. This tragedy led to a major reform of CFA training, occupational health and safety, risk management processes, and protective equipment.



New standard-build FCV



CFA's Fleet and Protective Equipment department has recently completed production of 20 standard-build field command vehicles (FCVs) in conjunction with Victorian-based manufacturer Quikcorp. These vehicles were funded from VESEP and Enhancing Volunteers Grants Program (EVGP).

Sixteen vehicles were built last year and feedback from the brigades that used them was considered and incorporated into the new version of the FCV.

The standard-build FCV is built on a Ford Ranger XL (3.2-litre 4x4) cab chassis with some additional features including side steps, snorkel, dual batteries, all-terrain tyres and nudge bar. The Ford Ranger has been tested and evaluated to ensure it meets the capability requirements of a CFA FCV – it has a high level of safety and durability to meet CFA's unique operating environment.

The standard-build project was originally developed to:

- standardise the FCV fleet to give us a common platform for incident management
- provide a body module design that can be easily changed over between cab chassis
- have a lightweight construction without compromising its strength to maximise payload.
- be GVM and ADR compliant
- be fit for purpose and cost effective.
- minimise damage to cab chassis during fit-out to enhance future resale value.

The FCV body incorporates whiteboards, stowage storage solutions, Engel fridge (with slide/tilt bracket), 12-volt connector

and USB chargers, 12-volt to 240-volt 100W inverter, under-tray drawer and fire extinguisher.

This new version also has the flexibility to relocate the Tait radio microphones from the cabin to the body. This means the operators can take advantage of the incident management capability built into the body and use whiteboards and workspaces without having to operate using portable radios during incidents.

The red/blue emergency lighting configuration has been developed to give 360-degree emergency lighting when working on scene. All scene lighting and emergency lighting have been tested and approved by the CFA Communications Department to ensure they don't interfere with digital radio.

In addition to the standard Ford Ranger features, the cabin includes two Tait radios, reverse camera, portable radio charger, additional 12-volt charging points, flashing headlights control, siren and UHF radio.

The CFA standard-build program has many benefits for brigades. Choosing a standard-build vehicle means it will comply with regulations and be fit for purpose. Also, CFA will project manage the build allowing brigade members to focus on more important matters. The brigade retains its existing FCV until the new vehicle is delivered.

For more information about CFA's standard-build program email Project Manager Steven Hill: s.hill@cfa.vic.gov.au

STORY STEVEN HILL



PHOTOS: KEITH PAKENHAM AFISM

Using three dimensions to engage communities



The Simtable is an engaging and interactive 3D simulator used by CFA and DELWP to demonstrate bushfire behaviour and suppression options.

Before the Simtable technology was available fire agencies relied on two-dimensional animations of fire spread shown on a computer screen to demonstrate bushfire scenarios. Burn tables have also been a popular way to explain fire behaviour to community members and for training purposes using real fire. However, burn table sessions are restricted to outdoor use (so are dependent on the weather) and they need a lot of imagination to relate a small fire on flat surfaces to real landscapes.

In comparison, a Simtable shows fire behaviour on three-dimensional landscapes that participants can relate to, and it can be set up anywhere, at any time of day. The Simtable can also be used for other scenarios such as flooding, smoke and traffic movement.

Purchased in 2015 from the US, our Simtable is the only one of its kind in Victoria and took a few years to develop. CFA fire behaviour analysts worked with the US developers to program it for Australian fire behaviour models and fuels. The software uses the same models used in Victoria to predict bushfire spread when managing emergency response.

The Simtable comes in three parts: a computer and projector on a stand, a camera and a portable sand pit which is placed on a table. It works by projecting an image of a landscape onto the sand.

The image is contained in a window with controls and menus that the operator uses to run the bushfire.

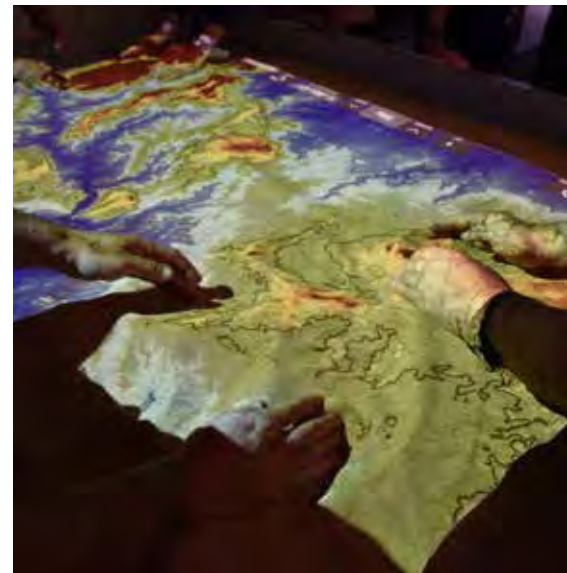
One of the main advantages of the Simtable is its level of interaction. Participants are invited to shape the sand by hand to match the landscape projection. Historical and potential weather and locations for a fire start are then discussed. The Simtable operator then sets all the controls using a mouse. The camera detects the spark or flame provided by the hand of the operator as it hovers over an agreed ignition point.

The bushfire then grows in real time or it can be sped up, and weather conditions can be varied as the fire progresses. The simulated fire responds to topography and fuels, moving faster uphill, and is spread by spot fires ahead of the main fire. Suppression activities can be added to the scenario so that participants can see their impact.

It has also been requested by community groups to generate discussions about risk and response.

"The power of the Simtable to engage communities with their local risk and strategies to survive is incredible," North West Region Service Deliver Coordinator Rohan Thornton said. "It's the best bushfire engagement tool I have ever used."

The Simtable is also an effective tool to train firefighters. It has been used in CFA planned burn training and by Forest Fire Management Victoria to prepare its firefighters for the fire season ahead.



Simtable operator Mitch Emmett started out running sessions to help with community engagement in his role as vegetation management support officer for the North East region. "People loved it and through word of mouth it didn't take long for the calls to come from across the state," Mitch said.

Project manager Terry Ouroumis said the demand already exceeded the availability of the machine and facilitators to operate it, and CFA wanted to expand the program so that more people can access it.

For more information about the Simtable and its application email: sim.table@cfa.vic.gov.au.

STORY OWEN GOODING





New memorial at Treasury Gardens

The new Victorian Emergency Services Memorial in Melbourne's CBD is now open to the public. The new memorial will become a place of sanctuary and reflection for emergency services members' families and the broader community to pay their respects to fallen members from CFA, MFB, SES, Forest Fire Management Victoria, Ambulance Victoria, Life Saving Victoria and Marine Search and Rescue.

Many members of the public have already visited the space in Treasury Gardens, and the official opening is planned for later this year.

The memorial's development and design was carried out by CFA with input from EMV, City of Melbourne, Heritage Victoria and emergency services organisations. The construction of the memorial was managed by the City of Melbourne to ensure a historical link to CFA's history. The memorial includes the original plaques from the CFA Firefighter Memorial at Fiskville.

The concept for the memorial is healing and reflection and the design evolved to become a garden memorial.

In the centre of the memorial there's a ferny garden bed with a unique mist fountain in the heart of the space. New trees and plants give shade to visitors while sitting on the walls.

An entry marker, including a map and text denoting the memorial has been featured at the entrance. Each section has a short statement about each agency and the names of the fallen.

A misting system keeps the ferns hydrated and white lighting is used at night.

CFA CEO and Chief Officer Steve Warrington said it was crucial for CFA people to have a place to pay their respects.

"It is important for us to continue to honour, respect and remember those who lost their lives in the line of duty," Steve said. "This new memorial site at Treasury Gardens is an appropriate setting for us to pay our respects."

STORY HOLLY PENKETH



Active bystander training

CFA joined with other emergency services in December 2019 to raise awareness about the UN's commitment to end gender-based violence through the 16 days of Activism.

On 10 December, the last day of the 16 Days of Activism and Human Rights Day, Women's Health East gave an active bystander training session to CFA staff and volunteers. This half-day session equips people with the skills and confidence to identify and respond to instances of gender inequality and behaviour that disrespects women.

"This huge focus on bystander intervention, on creating a culture change, is to ensure family violence and violence against women is not normalised," Acting Executive Director People, Culture and Safety Garry Cook said. "This applies in our homes, in our workplaces and in our communities."

The active bystander tools can be used to challenge any form of discrimination, harassment or bullying. These tools are designed to reinforce healthy, respectful behaviours and focus on what people in the workplace and communities can do to make a difference.

The feedback received from those attending was overwhelmingly positive. Attendees said they gained a greater awareness of what they can do in different situations if they feel

comfortable and safe. They felt more confident about calling out inappropriate behaviour.

Paul Webster, Chair of the South East Region Inclusion and Fairness Council, also attended the session.

"Everyone has a role to play. We all see things in our daily lives that are not OK, and this training has given us all confidence to speak up, not just for women but for anyone who's being treated unfairly," Paul said.

Some simple steps to becoming an active bystander include:

- noticing the situation (being aware of your surroundings) – that means looking up from your phone and making a conscious decision to be present
- interpreting the problem (do I recognise someone needs help?)
- feeling compelled to act (seeing yourself as being part of the solution to help – considering the difference that your actions could make by being an active bystander)
- knowing what to do (consider what you would do and when you would do it)
- intervening safely (taking action but being sure to keep yourself and those around you safe).

ABR pilot progresses

The Annual Brigade Review (ABR) Project is nine months into its pilot phase and the results so far have been encouraging.

To comply with Section 29(b) of the CFA Act, a formal brigade inspection and reporting process was introduced in 2004. The ABR broadens the scope of this process to more fully identify brigade health and capabilities.

Of the 240 brigades nominated to participate in the pilot, more than 140 have already held their sessions. More than 90 staff members and about 1,500 volunteers have been involved with the ABR.

"This is an outstanding achievement considering the very early start to the bushfire season, particularly in South East and North East regions," Assistant Chief Officer Trevor Owen said. "Our staff and brigades have demonstrated their willingness to have a go at something new."

The pilot is now being evaluated and the project team has received more than 760 feedback forms from volunteers around the state. More than 40 staff and volunteers have also participated in phone interviews with more to come.

The data will be analysed by the project team and an external specialist. However at first glance it's overwhelmingly positive.

Wendouree Fire Brigade participated in an ABR session last November. "It would appear that the ABR process may well turn out to be a huge benefit moving forward," Captain Garry Drabsch said. "I enjoyed the presentation and look forward to the next episode."

One of the key highlights for many volunteers was that members outside brigade management teams had the opportunity to participate in the discussions.

"The ABR led to open discussion regarding issues that are currently affecting the brigade. It was good for brigade members

to be involved in further planning and development," First Lieutenant at Myrtleford Fire Brigade Kim Buffet said.

Deputy Chief Officer Peter O'Keefe is leading the project with ACO Trevor Owen.

"Volunteers and staff have taken the time to share their views and experiences and to provide genuinely constructive feedback and suggestions about how to improve the process," Peter said. "It's great to come on board at the implementation stage of a project knowing it's been in very capable hands."

"We'd also like to thank those who have maintained their commitment to it throughout this very challenging summer," he added. "We cannot overstate how important your contribution will be to this project."

STORY HOLLY PENKETH





Australia Day 2020 Honours

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

PETER SHAW

Peter has been a CFA volunteer since 1974 and is currently a member of The Basin Fire Brigade and Group Officer for Knox Fire Brigades Group. His record of service, experience and achievements makes him one of the state's elite in fire and emergency management.

Peter, pictured at the Bairnsdale Incident Control Centre, is a CFA life member and received a National Emergency Medal for his role in the 2009 bushfires.

An exceptional leader throughout his career in Victoria Police and work with CFA, Peter has developed critical experience in emergency and incident management, major collision investigation and protective security. He is a Level 3 Incident Controller and has distinguished himself by demonstrating outstanding operational ability to manage incidents effectively.

Peter is also known for his ability to inspire others and his willingness to go well



beyond what's expected. He's passionate about improving service to the community. He is currently serving his second term as a volunteer member of CFA's Board, which recognises his standing among CFA's volunteer community and his commitment to the future of CFA, the emergency management sector and the Victorian community.

While captain of Bayswater brigade, Peter encouraged his members to think about

the specialist roles they could take on that would enhance the operational capability of the group, and he was influential in ensuring a strong working relationship with MFB in delivering high-quality service to their shared community.

In his capacity as Knox Group Officer, Peter has made innovative changes that have improved operational capabilities, increased readiness and shortened strike team response during critical periods.

Peter said he was honoured to have been nominated and considered worthy to be put up for the award.

"It is fantastic to be part of an organisation that has the ability, often at very short notice, to rally from across the state to support each other and the communities of not only Victoria but across Australia," Peter said.

"My appointment to the Board has been a significant highlight of my time at CFA, providing me with the ability to have a role in taking this great organisation forward."

GEORGE O'DWYER

George O'Dwyer is a CFA volunteer and Department of Environment, Land, Water & Planning (DELWP) employee, and a testament to the strength of emergency services working together for the benefit of the community.

He has been a CFA volunteer firefighter with Barongarook West Fire Brigade since 1995 and worked for the past 14 years for DELWP.

He has carried out the role of public information officer (PIO) in incident management teams since the roles were established after the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission. He was the first Victorian officer to achieve the incident management team level 3 PIO status.

Since 2005 he has been at the forefront of leading change in Victoria and has actively provided support across CFA, DELWP and Victoria State Emergency Service to build capability in community engagement, warnings and advice, and public information.

He has played significant roles in community fire recovery including after the 2005 Mt Lubra fire and the 2009 Victorian bushfires. He demonstrated outstanding leadership, working with community

members in Wye River on Christmas Day 2015, supporting evacuation, relief and early recovery.

"I'm extremely humbled by the thought of being nominated for the Australian Fire Service Medal and more so for receiving this prodigious award," he said.

"The AFSM is a great honour and I wish to give my respects to my fellow firefighters for their commitment to communities, whether it's on the fireline or as part of an incident management team.

"In accepting this award, I also acknowledge the personal hardship caused through physical demands and mental anguish associated with a bushfire reality, understanding that impacts are endured by many people including firefighters, who never forget, are always reminded, and who just learn to cope at best. This award has much meaning for me personally and professionally.

"What keeps me going are the many relationships I've developed as part of my CFA and FFMV experiences. These relationships remind me to maintain a clear focus on community aspirations towards safer and stronger communities, with the hope that people will make good decisions because they trust the relationship."





AFTER THE FIRES: how

Although severe fires can kill a species of plant or tree, many more will persist and even thrive. Nature is always able to recover from fire.

In March 2019 more than 14,500 hectares of bush and open grasslands were burned and homes, sheds and outbuildings destroyed, when lightning sparked a fire in the Bunyip State Forest in the state's south east.

The rolling hills of an area known for its farms and equestrian training centres were left blackened, and the features of the landscape merged into one. The fire killed or damaged most of the plants in its path .

However, only seven months later the landscape paints a very different picture – as shown by the photos of the Bunyip fire. Apart from a few telltale signs – a lick of fire on an errant fence paling, a blackened trunk of a tree or a gate not yet rebuilt – you wouldn't know that fire had ravaged the area.

Green shoots extend from the base of trees like recently planted saplings. The landscape is lush and green and the dense valleys at the bottom of rolling hills are a sanctuary for both new and recovered tall tree ferns.

Plants have evolved with fire for millions of years. Some

trees and plants have adapted to survive fire while others such as the mountain ash depend on fire to germinate and survive. The fire intensity, fire history, and the plant species fire response mechanism will determine if it will survive or die

The sapling-like shoots from the base and canopy of burned trees is known as epicormic growth. It's the plant's response to damage and the stress caused by the fire. The growth is born from buds that lie dormant beneath the bark, sometimes within only a few weeks of a fire going through.

CFA's Team Leader Vegetation Management Owen Gooding said these dormant buds are an important stage in the healing of the plant or tree, keeping it going until the canopy recovers.

"Eucalyptus trees may be great conductors of fire but they're also great survivors of fire," said Owen.

Like the eucalyptus, other woody species have evolved to protect dormant buds from fire under bark. In non-woody plants, such as grass trees and tree ferns, the new growing tips are protected from fire by the trunk.

"New life also springs from underground," Owen continued. "Soil insulates parts of plants which can re-shoot after fire.



PHOTOS: KEITH PAKENHAM AFSM

nature recovers

Grass, lilies and some ground ferns are often the first signs of life after fire. Other species persist because fire stimulates germination of a seed bank that lies dormant in the ground. Some plants are stimulated to flower after a fire. Grass trees are a great example.”

Eucalyptus trees have a second mechanism to survive after a fire. They can re-sprout from their roots and the woody swelling at their base called lignotubers. Their ability to regrow and replenish from both beneath the bark and their root systems ensures they grow new leaves and branches within weeks to feed the rest of the tree.

Longer fire seasons and the increasing dryness of the landscape means habitats will always be changing. We need to be prepared that this change may not always be what we want or expect.

“A fire’s footprint is a shape on the map, but we know that the areas burned within that footprint are patchy. The fire intensity varies and some areas are not burned. It’s these patches that plants and animals use as a home base of sorts to repopulate and persist,” Owen said.

Fire is a disturbance that can change the diversity of species. If the fires are too frequent in an area, individual

plants may not mature and there’s a risk of a species dying out locally. The patchier the fire landscape the greater diversity of animal and plant species because there are more opportunities for a species to persist.

“There’s a tendency to think of the bush as a natural, ideal state, but it’s dynamic. It has always changed and it always will. Fire is a key player in that story.”

STORY: SHAUNNAGH O’LOUGHLIN

Above: Bunyip State Forest fire 2019 during the fire, immediately after the fire, and seven months later. **Below left:** Grass trees. **Below right:** Frond of a ground fern unfurling.



PHOTOS: OWEN GOODING



The heart of CFA's response

CFA's new logistics centre has risen to every challenge thrown at it during its first year of operation after moving to double its capacity from 3200m² to 8000m².

Its staff were in the middle of the move from Knoxfield to a new site in Scoresby, right alongside EastLink, when the Bunyip State Forest fire broke out last year. But the staff didn't miss a beat. They successfully completed the move (with support from the Infrastructure Services team) while supplying firefighters and incident management teams with everything they needed to set up a staging area and manage and respond to the biggest fire of the 2018-19 bushfire season.

This season State Logistics Centre staff were put further to the test as the state experienced an unprecedented fire season where more than 1.5 million hectares burned across Victoria, mainly in East Gippsland and the north-east.

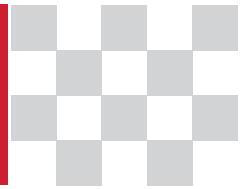
Eighty-five per cent of CFA's firefighters' needs can be supplied by the State Logistics Centre, which carries more than 1,900 line items to support CFA's 55,000 members across more than 1,200 sites. It planned all stocks at 2009 levels for the summer season, which proved to be a wise strategy to meet the unexpected demand.

Between 1 December 2019 and 31 January 2020 the centre distributed:

- more than 120,000 litres of drinking water and more than 154,000 sachets of hydrating powder
- more than 2,300 pieces of wildfire PPC, 3,800 pairs of wildfire gloves, 1,000 pairs of boots, 650 wildfire helmets and 4,600 goggles
- 1,000 hoses (which would reach from Melbourne's CBD to Werribee if rolled out)
- more than 33,000 litres of foam concentrate that would make 39 million litres of foam
- more than 46,000 P2 firefighting masks and an additional request for 450,000 community masks distributed on behalf of the federal government.

STORY LISELOTTE GEARY





The importance of debriefing

Debriefing is a key component of post-incident activities and has been used widely in CFA for many years. Debriefing also helps us see wider trends and identify better ways of working. Given the level of operational activity this summer across the state, it's particularly important to collect information.

Debriefs identify key feedback (called observations), learning opportunities and good practice. We use this information not only in CFA, but also across the emergency management sector to ensure learning and improvement occurs. During debriefing individuals or groups reflect on their experiences and explore the lessons from the experience in a safe environment.

Debriefing includes:

- information gathering – capturing observations from assurance activities and individual observations for review
- identifying lessons and trends – what we can learn from you and what you can learn from everyone else
- improvement/change – identifying what needs to be learned and checking that change has occurred.
- learning lessons – sharing lessons learned, outcomes, changes and improvements.

Debriefing should be guided by the following principles to ensure the process stays positive and constructive:

Learning focused: Focus effort on learning and improvement activities that explore what went well and learning opportunities.

System focused: Examining systems of work rather than individual performance.

Adding value: Providing evidence-based information for the agency.

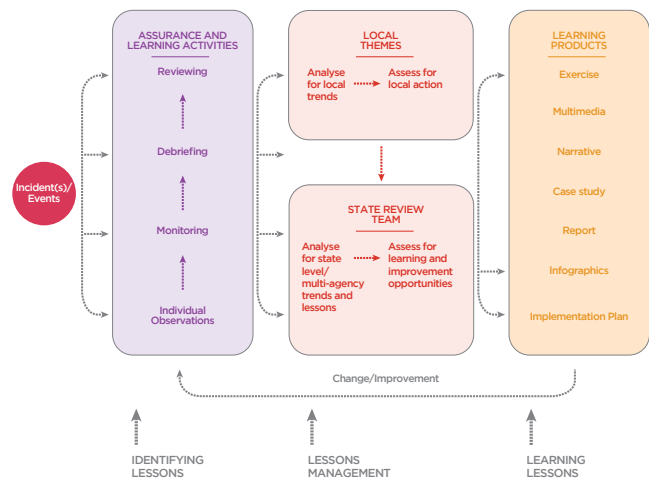
Minimising burden: Using existing mechanisms to capture data where possible.

Trends-based: Using multiple information sources to identify lessons.

Future focused: Explore events to identify aspects to sustain and areas of improvement.

Consistency: Using consistent processes, tools and themes to enable trends analysis across events and experiences.

The outcomes of the debriefs will inform the ongoing cycle of learning and improvement within CFA and the sector by validating and evaluating existing doctrine, arrangements, policy, procedure and incident/emergency management application. The outcomes will provide evidence to inform a range of activities including training, exercising, briefings and numerous products as shown in the diagram below.



We know that doing debriefs so soon after the recent fires will place additional burden on already exhausted CFA members, but the key to real improvement is conducting debriefs as soon as possible.

Throughout the state numerous debriefs are being conducted until May 2020 and we encourage the brigades, strike teams, IMT personnel, districts, groups and regions to participate.

Ask your brigade, district and region what they are planning. Debriefing activities will be undertaken through various processes, including face-to-face debriefs, online surveys or individual input, so if you have something to share please put your hand up.

If you want to give your observations before the debriefs go to:

www.surveymonkey.com/r/2KD9CCW

You can also scan this QR code for the survey:

All information collected will be shared with your district/region for analysis.



Fatal Pimpinio bus crash

Introduction

A bus driver was killed and several passengers injured when a bus collided with a truck's dislodged trailer on the Western Highway in Pimpinio last year.

There were 44 passengers on board when it hit the B-double in the early hours of the morning, sparking a major multi-agency response led by Victoria Police.

Although the accident ended in tragedy, CFA was proud of how our volunteer members came together to support the partner agencies in a multi-casualty event.

Incident overview

In the early hours of 11 July 2019 a B-double truck was travelling along the Western Highway when its trailers dislodged and rolled onto its side. The two trailers were at right angles across the road blocking traffic in both directions. The driver attempted to warn oncoming vehicles but there was no lighting in the area.

A Firefly bus crashed head-on into the B-double truck shortly after 2am. The front of the bus was impacted by the trailer's wheel and undercarriage leaving the driver trapped.

Horsham, Vectis, Dimboola and Dooen brigade members worked alongside SES, Victoria Police and Ambulance Victoria to rescue more than 40 passengers. The passengers were removed through a side window. Four passengers were airlifted to Melbourne and others received treatment at Horsham hospital.

Despite paramedics' best efforts, the driver sadly died while still trapped. Thanks to the driver's selfless actions, however, he took the brunt of the impact and no other passengers were killed.

The responding emergency services personnel came together and worked as one team. SES, CFA, Ambulance Victoria and Victoria Police members were in the bus and initiated the extrication of the passengers, ensuring it was completed smoothly, quickly and compassionately.

What worked well

Child welfare: A young girl was extricated from the vehicle some time after her mother, both of whom were understandably distraught. A CFA member from Dimboola brigade provided immediate care and support for the young girl until she was reunited with her mother.

Support: It was bitterly cold and the wind was blowing across the highway. All CFA and SES members quickly procured all available blankets, giving comfort and support to passengers in the makeshift triage on the roadside. The District 17 store was completely stripped of all its blankets by morning. Several passengers commented on the responders' compassion and professionalism.

Strategy: Crews discussed strategy in the truck while driving to the incident, which they found useful. When they arrived they parked a significant distance from the crash until they verified it was not a hazmat incident.

Interoperability: The interoperability between the agencies was excellent – smooth, coordinated and given the circumstance, calm. An example was set from the top down, with senior members from Victoria Police, Ambulance Victoria, SES and CFA working together.

Emergency Management Team (EMT): With so many agencies on scene the CFA operations manager organised a series of EMT meetings. These worked well to create support.

Member wellbeing: This was a difficult and emotional incident, but all CFA members performed well under trying conditions. They were well led by the two brigade captains who were on scene. In the aftermath of the event, peer support was activated for member welfare. Responders were encouraged to talk about their experiences and seek help if needed.

Google Translate: The accident involved a number of non-English speaking passengers. Google Translate helped emergency services personnel communicate with passengers despite the language barriers.

Lessons identified

Conflicting information: In the initial response agencies received various inaccurate descriptions of the incident and were unable to confirm passenger numbers and how many were injured. Responders arrived at the scene unaware of passenger numbers and the seriousness of the incident. At one stage agencies were given a misleading estimate of multiple fatalities and 60 injured. They didn't receive an accurate description of the incident until half an hour later.

Bus access: Getting into the bus to rescue passengers was an issue. Police officers tried to use the emergency break tool but it broke. The other emergency access points were not safe, so until SES arrived responders couldn't get into the bus. Passengers with fractured legs and other injuries had to exit by climbing down a ladder.

Training opportunities: Brigades should consider training with other large brigades from other groups to get to know members and talk about strategies for large-scale incidents. Brigades should also check whether members need to discuss ladder storage as part of their training. One brigade had stowed its ladder upside down.





Safety: Crews need to flush out B-class induction hoses before storing them to avoid a potential splash hazard. They should also consider stowing foam induction hoses in lower lockers rather than at face height.

Agency tabards: Not all agency personnel wore tabards at this incident which made identification difficult during the night.

Rostered duty officer (RDO): Although an RDO is required to be available, no one was rostered on so the District 17 operations manager contacted the Assistant Chief Officer and took on the role.

Conclusion

The preparation, response and recovery actions undertaken were carried out in a professional way. There was very good cooperation between the agencies and members adapted to a challenging environment. The whole event ran smoothly and calmly. Several passengers commented on the compassion shown by crews. All members performed their duties extremely well under the trying conditions.

Firefly coaches thanked all agencies involved for their hard work during a difficult time.

Questions for your brigade

After reading this case study, consider what actions you would take.

- Would you do anything differently if your brigade responded?
- If there was a language barrier between you and the passengers, how would you communicate with them? What could you do if Google Translate was not an option?
- How could you comfort distressed passengers? If you were in their shoes what would you find reassuring?
- Have you completed training with other brigades to prepare for large scale incidents? If not, is anything preventing you from undertaking this training? How would this training benefit your response and teamwork?
- It was difficult for responders to access the bus. What would your strategy be in this situation?
- Following a fatal and traumatic incident such as this, what could you do to look after yourself and your crew members? Would you recognise the signs if you or another responder was not coping?

2018-19 east Victoria fires

In 2018-19 east Victoria experienced about 4,750 fire-related incidents which burned more than 260,000 hectares. The first fire began in early August in Gippsland. By January dry lightning created many new fires, some of which continued until the end of March.

Incident overview

In September 2018 the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC (BNHCRC) advised that East Gippsland had experienced two consecutive years of record low rainfall during autumn and winter. The forests were significantly more flammable than usual and the area was rated 'above normal fire potential'.

Eight significant fires started between January and March 2019 in east Victoria. As expected, underlying dryness, heavy fuels, high temperatures, and strong and erratic wind conditions led to rapid and intense fire development.

Rosedale-West Boundary Track South (4 January)

The Rosedale fire burned more than 12,100 hectares over 153 days, destroying an estimated \$22 million of plantation timber. Night-time fire bombing was used for the first time in Australia on this fire.

Nunnett-Timbarra River bushfire (16 January)

A lightning strike sparked a fire which burned almost 22,700 hectares over 139 days. More than 110 interstate and international firefighting crews were deployed to the incident.

Thomson-Jordan Divide Road (25 January)

Lightning strikes ignited three fires in the Thomson Catchment complex. Most of the 6,400 hectares burned were in Melbourne Water catchment areas which threatened water quality and supply from the Thomson River. The Mount Baw Baw Alpine Resort was closed and campers throughout the area were advised to leave.

Walhalla-Stoney Creek Road (30 January)

Two houses and three outbuildings were destroyed in the Walhalla fire, which burnt 8,700 hectares. The fire, which was caused by lightning, burned for 129 days and led to the closure of two schools, nearby roads and popular camping grounds.



Dargo Complex (28 February)

The Dargo Complex consisted of three individual fires started by lightning. The fires burnt 114,000 hectares and destroyed one shed during the 106 days before the fire was declared safe in June. Interstate firefighting crews assisted for almost three weeks.

Mayford-Tuckalong Spur (28 February)

The Mayford-Tuckalong Spur fire was another fire ignited by lightning. It was declared safe after 98 days, having destroyed 14,000 hectares. Campers were evacuated from camp sites on Kings Spur Track and walking track and roads were closed for an extended period.

Bunyip State Park Fire/Gembrook-Helmet Track (1 March)

Fire in the Bunyip State Park, again started by lightning, destroyed 29 houses, 67 outbuildings and burnt 15,600 hectares. Residents from Gentle Annie, Gembrook and Labertouche were evacuated and more than 100 people attended an emergency relief centre. The Princes Highway was closed for two days but traffic restrictions remained in place for several days after it reopened.

Yinnar South-Budgeree (2 March)

Two houses and three outbuildings were destroyed during an 81-day fire in Yinnar South. It burnt an area of almost 2,000 hectares. Despite the significant impact of the fire, the overall response was managed appropriately given the scale of the incident, unpredictable fire behaviour and extreme conditions experienced during the fire.

What worked well

Emphasis on recovery: When a deputy incident controller was established early at an incident, with specific responsibilities, it was thought to be a positive initiative. This allowed solid planning for the return of displaced people and a broad understanding of the issues that were likely to be faced in the community as recovery commenced.





PHOTOS: KEITH PAKENHAM/AFSM

to change over crews when relief crews were available, keeping crews on the fireground for longer periods. It can be easy to dismiss the dangers of fatigue when battling an intense fire, but fatigue can cause you to make deadly mistakes. The impact of 17 hours without sleep is equivalent to the effects of a blood alcohol level of 0.05. Fatigue management must be implemented and taken seriously.

Roster expectations: Some people on the EM availability roster were unclear about what was meant by being available. Expectations did not appear to be understood as they also differed between agencies. There seemed to be differences in understanding in the terms being contactable, available to start work and being on-call. Further education and information is required.

Managing concurrent emergencies: Managing concurrent emergencies places significant strain on agency resources, particularly when those emergencies have a significant duration. When facing these difficult circumstances agencies rely on sharing and having flexible resources to ensure risks are managed to achieve the best outcome. Changes to shifts and arrangements to address resource gaps is a short-term fix that can cause strain on resourcing capacity. Examples included changes to shift lengths (eg 14-hour shifts to cover night shifts), adjustment to rostered rotation lengths (eg from 7-2 to 5-1-day rotations) and the use of Class 1 resources for a Class 2 emergency.

Incident management training: There weren't enough adequately trained people in AIIMS and the various AIIMS roles to fill all the incident management team rosters or manage ICC facilities, particularly for campaign events or concurrent emergencies.

Returning vehicles: There were challenges with resupply and recommissioning of firefighting vehicles. This was exacerbated when vehicles were not returned in a ready state (including incomplete logbooks).

Conclusion

The conditions during the east Victoria fires were extremely challenging and placed a great strain on our resources. There are many positives which we can take from these events and all firefighters should be proud of their efforts. However, we can also use these incidents as an opportunity to learn from our experiences and improve our capability.



Hazardous trees refresher: Short hazardous tree refreshers were provided when mobilising crews to fires. These were particularly useful for crews who were responding from outside the Gippsland area to support operations. When working among trees the potential for trees to fall or drop limbs on crews and vehicles is a real threat. The use of a short refresher as a part of pre-deployment process was thought to be good practice.

Teamwork: At several incidents team members had positive attitudes, were committed to the tasks and worked as a team. These positive working relationships helped the team complete their tasks successfully. However, there were also observations that some multi-agency teams didn't support diversity and inclusion, making some team members feel uncomfortable or unwelcome. Teamwork is crucial in emergency situations.

Use of live streaming: Community meetings were live streamed on social media for residents who couldn't attend. This increased the meeting's accessibility and was well received by the community. Live streaming was a better way to communicate than simply recording and uploading the meeting, which can be a slow process.

Night-time aerial fire bombing: At these fires, night-time aerial water bombing was deployed to the bushfires for the first time in Australia following successful trials in 2018. This new capability enables aircraft equipped with night vision imaging systems (NVIS) or night vision goggles (NVG) to assist ground crews for longer and when fire behaviour is typically less intense. It demonstrated that it was beneficial and that operations could be conducted in a systematic and safe way.

Lessons identified

Fatigue management: Fatigue management was a challenge during these fires. At times there was a failure to factor in deployment times and commute lengths which led to shifts of more than 16 hours. It was also observed there was a reluctance

Structure Fire at Norlane

Summary

Despite the best efforts of responding crews and sufficient resources for this type of incident, a house fire in the Norlane suburb of Geelong tragically resulted in the death of one occupant and severe injuries to another.

A key contributing factor to this unfortunate result was the lack of working smoke alarms to alert the occupants, the rapid development of the fire to flashover and near full involvement of the house prior to the arrival of the brigade. Search and rescue operations were also hindered by clutter and hoarding in the house.

A sequence of events led to a hose being contaminated with body fluids at the scene. When the hose was returned to the station a firefighter was exposed to the fluids. Quick action and expert advice mitigated the risk of illness from this event.

Incident overview

On 13 September 2019, two Corio Fire Brigade pumpers and a Geelong pumper responded to a house fire in Norlane just after 6am.

When they arrived the weatherboard house was already 90 per cent alight and the flames were spreading to the neighbouring house on the north side. This was quickly extinguished and damage to the neighbour's house was contained to the external weatherboards.

The front windows were broken which indicated a possible flashover had occurred, and the crews were told someone was still inside.

The fire had burnt through the fascia where the powerline and service fuse attached to the building, leaving a live wire lying on the ground. With no fuse puller currently available to them, the team could not move the wire. A firefighter stood next to the hazard to prevent anyone from walking over it. The lack of a fuse-pulling kit with insulated poles prevented the first crews on scene from moving the wire to a safer location.

While their colleague guarded the live wire, two teams donned breathing apparatus (BA) and entered the house. The first team entered through the window in the front living area, the room where the fire was thought to have started, and the second team entered from the back. Inside the house visibility was "pretty much zero" because "the smoke was really thick."

The clutter in the house – which scored very high on the hoarding scale – added to the difficulties.

Crews used thermal imaging cameras for navigation and made their way to the bedrooms where they'd been told the person was. The Geelong pumper arrived with a fuse pulling kit a few minutes after the first crews. Firefighters moved the live wire to a safer space – which they cordoned off with traffic cones and drop pulled the fuse of the neighbouring house.

Concurrently, the primary search (BA team two) quickly found a man in the backyard who had escaped by himself. He suffered from severe smoke inhalation and burns. He told firefighters that his mate was still inside in the front of the house. At this point the first BA team were still actively searching the front bedrooms as they were told by neighbours that they believed there was someone in that location. The crews searched the bedrooms again but there was no one there. They again asked the rescued man about his friend and he said he was in the front room.

A firefighter grabbed his torch and shone it through the smashed living room window, crouching down to see below the smoke



level. He spotted a badly burnt man. It was clear that the man was deceased. The firefighter radioed the BA teams who were still searching for the man. They made their way to the living room to help extinguish the fire and locate the body. The crew in the living room then focused on scene preservation, setting up the area so that nothing was disturbed too much for the subsequent fire investigation to take place into the origin and cause of the fire.

The police, who were at the incident, had briefed the crews about minimising disturbances to the scene. The crews tried their best to black out, but because of the clutter it became clear they couldn't put out the fire without disturbing the scene.



PHOTO: FROM FIRE INVESTIGATION MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (FIMS) REPORT.

They discussed this with police and found a solution. Firefighters took a series of photos themselves – which they showed to the police for approval. With photographic evidence of the scene the firefighters started blacking out properly.

When they had finished they began to give their statements to police and pack up. The burnt victim was not retrieved by firefighters. He was left in situ as directed by police. This meant careful hose management while still extinguishing the fire.

During the firefight a length of hose touched the dead man and was potentially contaminated with his body fluids. The length of hose was cut off so it could be decommissioned and properly disposed

of. The crew had intended to bag the hose but because of a set of circumstances the hose wasn't bagged and was left at the scene.

Several days later a well-meaning council worker found the hose and returned it to the fire station. The firefighter who greeted them had not responded to the Norlane fire, and took the hose from the worker while not wearing gloves. When he told the other firefighters about a returned hose, they realised he had handled the potentially contaminated one. They told him to wash and sanitise his hands, which luckily had no cuts, abrasions or open wounds.

Staff members wearing gloves disinfected any surfaces that had been touched by the hose or their colleague. The hose was

placed in a biohazard bag and placed in the biohazard bin. The brigade also contacted the council to alert the worker who had handled the hose.

In line with standard operating procedures, the on-duty CFA medical officer was contacted, and they advised that it was highly unlikely contact with the hose would have resulted in contamination. The firefighter had no open wounds and, given the length of time between the fire and the return of the hose to the station, any microbes or viruses initially present would have died.

A joint fire investigation was conducted by Victoria Police, Forensic Services and a CFA fire investigator into the origin and cause of the fire. There were no working smoke alarms located during the investigation. One smoke detector was located on the floor in the hallway, and there was no battery inside it rendering it inoperable. It is believed that hoarding contributed to the high fire activity.

What worked well

The firefight: Crews were fully committed to the objectives when faced with a difficult situation and with the pressure of knowing the occupant or occupants were still inside the burning building. Safety was a high priority and size-up and RECEO were closely followed.

Peer support engagement: The rostered duty officer (RDO) notified the OIC of the incident to ensure that firefighters involved in the incident were supported when required. The RDO placed the welfare of personnel as a high priority.

District 7 community engagement: The District 7 Community Safety team had visited the house two weeks before the fire and offered to check and install smoke alarms as part of the district's wider campaign to identify and support at-risk residents. Sadly, the occupant declined to let the crew in and said they had two working smoke alarms. This was not the case. Members of the Community Safety team did everything they could to support this member of the community. Other houses took up this offer.

Inter-agency cooperation: Firefighters were briefed by the police and prioritised scene preservation after search and rescue was completed. When it became clear it would not be possible to completely extinguish the fire without disturbing the scene, the firefighters worked above expectation with police to find a solution that addressed both of their needs (extinguishment and scene preservation). Police, Ambulance Victoria and the power company all arrived in a timely manner.

Lessons identified

BA bracket issue: The second pumper was a service exchange vehicle (a spare). The crew who received the spare noticed it had a faulty BA bracket. This was reported and repaired. However, on the way to this incident the BA bracket didn't work again, and quick-thinking crew donned BA from the pumper's external locker storage instead of inside the cabin, reducing any delay in fighting the fire.

Contaminated hose: There was a communication breakdown that led to a biologically-contaminated hose being left at the scene, and this later led to a potential contamination of personnel and fire station areas. The hose should have been bagged at the scene and removed. No one person was to blame for this unfortunate situation. Human error is sometimes unavoidable, though you can help prevent errors by being diligent, by double-checking and by maintaining situational awareness until you leave the scene.

Information confusion: VicFire informed the crews that one person was trapped. There was some confusion because crews

found one person in the backyard and later found out from this person that there was another person inside the house. It is rare for the information provided by VicFire from the initial callers precisely match what is occurring on the fireground. At this fire the incident controller employed continual size-up and continually checked facts to update their situational awareness.

Live wire: Due to the current project rollout, only one of the three responding trucks was carrying a fuse pulling kit. Needing this equipment is common with homes and power supplies of this age and type, and in this case not having the kit caused a delay in completing a size-up. They had to ensure the area surrounding the live wire was restricted and the crews could safely enter the structure. This issue will be resolved following the completion of the rollout of training and equipment for electrical safety and fuse removal. However, this risk will always be present in this type of environment and must form part of the continual size-up considerations of incident controllers.

Smoke alarms: There's no guarantee that a working smoke alarm would have led to a different outcome for the two occupants, but it is a possibility. This story highlights that some members of the community continue to live in houses without working smoke alarms. We must continue our efforts to engage with different stakeholders in new ways to address this issue and end preventable house fire deaths.

Conclusion

This was a complex fire scene with the added pressure of 'persons reported'. Crews performed bravely, safely and appropriately and dealt with the issues that arose. Despite their best efforts there was a loss of life. In sharing this story those involved in the incident hope everyone can learn from their experience.

Questions for your brigade

After reading this case study, consider the actions you would take.

- Would you do anything differently if your brigade responded to a similar incident?
- How would you undertake a risk assessment?
- What process should you follow if you have suspected contaminated equipment? Review with your team the policy regarding contaminated items.

SOP11.08 – Sharps, syringes and contaminated products - Disposal of:

www.members.cfa.vic.gov.au/mycfa/

[Show?pagelid=displayDoc&docid=002983](http://www.members.cfa.vic.gov.au/mycfa/Show?pagelid=displayDoc&docid=002983)

Bulletin 004/2017: Interim Contaminated PPC Laundering (Decontamination) Protocol:

www.members.cfa.vic.gov.au/mycfa/

[Show?pagelid=displayDoc&docid=028181](http://www.members.cfa.vic.gov.au/mycfa/Show?pagelid=displayDoc&docid=028181)

- Are you working with your community team to identify your community risks?
- Are you aware that you can report high levels of clutter to CFA? For more information go to

www.members.cfa.vic.gov.au/mycfa/Show?pagelid=hoarding

www.members.cfa.vic.gov.au/mycfa/

[Show?pagelid=displayDoc&docid=028949](http://www.members.cfa.vic.gov.au/mycfa/Show?pagelid=displayDoc&docid=028949)

This case study was developed from the after-action review that was completed by the responding crews who wished to share their experience. If you have any lessons to share, contact Lessons-Management-Centre@cfa.vic.gov.au

Thank you to the Corio crews.

Smart alerts

Volunteers will soon have free access to a new app designed to help them respond more effectively and efficiently to fires and incidents.

The development of the new Supplementary Alerting Service (SAS) for CFA, SES and Ambulance Victoria members is well advanced with the new app expected to be released mid-year 2020.

The SAS application is being developed to work alongside CFA's existing pager network Emergency Alerting Service (EAS) to provide improved performance and reliability.

The app will support members responding to incidents by giving them access to more detailed information including the ability to see who's turning out and a number of their competencies relevant to that response. Additional features will include chat functionality, dashboard reports, access to pager message history and robust privacy protection measures.

Operations Manager – Operational Communications Jason Lawrence said the integration of the EAS and SAS would meet the needs of members.

"The SAS app will provide a common platform that is freely accessible to all our

people and will be used by the agencies we work alongside every day," Jason said.

"The EAS will still be the number one means of communicating emergency call-outs and dispatch because of its reliability, so members will be still expected to carry and use their pagers.

"Both pagers and the SAS app have an important place in providing an efficient and effective service to the communities we serve."

The development of the app included workshops with key stakeholders including volunteers to determine the requirements of the app. More than 1,750 volunteers also had their say about the design through a survey, and this feedback helped to further refine its look and feel.

Developer Ernst & Young has tested multiple prototypes to come up with the end design and is currently working on the final stages of development and testing.

A significant amount of work is also underway to integrate the app with our systems, the EAS, and SES and AV systems.

STORY SHAUNNAGH O'LOUGHLIN

LEARNING LESSONS FROM THE PAST

The outcomes of 130 years of inquiries, reviews and coronial inquests into emergency management and natural hazards have been captured in a new database compiled by the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC.

Ensuring lessons from the past are not forgotten, the online Inquiries and Reviews Database gives emergency services the upper hand in learning from the past to create a better future. It contains more than 300 inquiries and reviews from all states and territories between 1886 and 2017, in addition to full recommendations from 55 inquiries carried out from 2009 to 2017. You can carry out a custom search of more than 1,300 of these recommendations.

The database can be used:

- to compare equivalent recommendations between inquiries, themes and jurisdictions
- to track inquiries across jurisdictions, years and types
- to download and work with all inquiries and recommendations to suit the particular needs of an organisation.

CRC researcher Dr Michael Eburn from Australian National University was part of the research team that helped develop the database. He believes it will ensure emergency managers continue to learn from the past.

"Inquiry recommendations get lost or distorted over time, so having a place where practitioners can find and search the actual text of inquiry recommendations will help with understanding the past to keep learning for the future," Dr Eburn said.

When searching bushfire inquiries between 2009 and 2017, most recommendations relate to 'doctrine, standards and reform', with 106 individual recommendations. 'Incident management teams' and 'emergency management agency and authority' also have many related recommendations, with 71 and 64 respectively.

CRC Research Director Dr John Bates said the database was an accessible resource for practitioners.

"The database's multifunctionality is really what makes it exciting for researchers and agency personnel alike," he said. "Combining past lessons learned and recommendations from major inquiries into bushfires, flooding and cyclones in one place gives a holistic overview for emergency management in Australia."

Explore the Inquiries and Reviews Database at bnhrc.com.au/utilisation/ddr.

STORY GABRIEL COLGAN-ZITO



Healthy eating initiative

Each year CFA's Health Services offers different health education workshops for the Healthy for Life, Health Watch and Health Ready Programs. Based on feedback from various program participants the educational workshop for 2020 will focus on healthy eating.

The Healthy Eating Initiative is an evidence-based education resource for all CFA members. The session focuses on population nutrition guidelines sourced from Eat for Health Victoria, Nutrition Australia, The Dietitians Association of Australia and Better Health Channel Victoria.

The initiative covers the Australian dietary guidelines, carbohydrates, diet and disease, and healthy eating myth busting.

Participants receive the Healthy Eating Initiative booklet and have the opportunity to take part in practical learning activities that increase knowledge and individual skills to help people eat more healthily.

For more information about the Healthy Eating Initiative, Healthy for Life, Health Watch or Health Ready Programs, go to the Health Services page on members.cfa.vic.gov.au.

Mental health training for leaders

Almost half the people in Australia will experience a mental health condition in their lifetime and everyone will be impacted in some way, so it's important to talk about mental health. None of us is immune to impacts on our wellbeing – we're all human after all – and our people, particularly those in first responder roles, are impacted more than most.

CFA is delivering two new evidence-based mental health training programs: The Working Mind First Responders and Mental Health First Aid. Initially a pilot project, these programs aim to support a culture of openness and care, reduce stigma, and support wellness by providing resources for self-awareness and early intervention.

Although the training is aimed at leaders, and the target audience is brigade management team members at Class 3, 4 and 5 brigades, we encourage all interested members to nominate as they will be enrolled if there's space.

A team leader at CFA Burwood headquarters thought the training was worth every minute. "I thought the Working Mind First Responder training was absolutely fantastic," they said. "The common language it creates that allows us all to check in with each other at all levels within our team, looking out for each other in the mental health and wellbeing space, is everyone's responsibility."

"The Working Mind First Responders course was good and gives brigade leaders the tools to help members in their brigade and to

support them in their time of need," Second Lieutenant of Ararat brigade Jeydon Nancarrow said.

We started rolling out these courses to both staff and volunteers across the state in 2018 and during 2020 we will run many more sessions especially for volunteers.

By completing these courses we hope people will:

- see their own wellbeing improve by enhancing their self-awareness
- feel more comfortable about getting help when they realise they need support
- feel more comfortable supporting their teams and crews.

"Mental Health First Aid was a full-on course but it's so important and relevant," a member from District 15 said. "It's given me the confidence to provide initial support to my mates who might be experiencing a mental health problem or emergency."

District 7 member Olivia Psaroudis found the Working Mind First Responders course really powerful and she benefited from talking to colleagues during the session.

"It felt really good to be able to sit down with co-workers and discuss some really tough topics and being able to learn that perhaps one's experience with mental health is completely different to another's," Olivia said.

"It was perfect timing as I was battling with some of my own mental health issues at the time of the course and it was really special to be able to discuss so openly things we can do and signs we can look for when it comes to one's mental health. I think it really was the perfect reminder that we are all only human."

To take advantage of the opportunity to participate in these training sessions keep an eye on the Learning Hub at <https://learninghub.cfa.vic.gov.au/pages/login.jsf> for a course near you in 2020. To find out more email wellbeing@cfa.vic.gov.au.

These courses are funded under the Fire Services Statement, the State Government's \$60 million investment in the Victorian fire services.

Peers on deployment

During this challenging fire season our firefighters have sustained an incredible work rate both in Victoria and interstate. But as committed as our firefighters are, they can't do it alone. One of the many groups of people supporting their frontline efforts are our peers.

When on deployment to a major fire, peers can carry out numerous invaluable duties:

- Visiting local brigades and speaking with captains to help them understand the work of the Peer Support Program and to give peers insight into what support is needed.
- Phoning strike team members to allow for follow-ups to occur and referrals to other peers or agencies to be made.
- Providing support to everyone working in an ICC.
- Networking with community liaison members and members of other emergency services organisations at the start and end of each day.
- Liaising with members of the community through formal and informal visits.
- Creating and strengthening links with communities and brigades through sharing meals and enjoying the hospitality offered.

Pam Young, a peer from district 12, gave the following insights from her time deployed to the Tallangatta staging area in north-east Victoria.

"Being in the same place for the whole deployment was valuable," Pam said. "It meant people could see a familiar face rather than a new one each day.

"Walking up to the main street, I not only gave a smile and hello to locals but also to those in the Parks Victoria and DELWP offices and the town's relief centre at the hall.

"I was there when needed by CFA, FFMVic, SES, St John Ambulance (who carried out first aid at the staging area) and the catering team who put in long hours. I also often consulted the staging area manager to source something that was needed and to find out contact details – knowing who to go to is invaluable.

"I was able to acknowledge the work being done by everyone. Whatever their role, what people were doing was crucial and important. Everyone needs someone to talk to without being judged for how they feel. As a peer, when this happens I'm doing my job."

Hilldene brigade member and peer Lesley Read (pictured below with District 24 peers Greg Dale and Penny Perfrement) was deployed to the Hawksbury region of NSW. "Our days started at the staging area and then we travelled around and chatted to as many of the crews as possible, keeping an eye on everyone," Lesley said.

"As the trucks arrived back at the staging area at the end of the day we talked to each crew to check that everything was OK and to find out if there was anything they needed.

"We had a couple of hospital trips, chased up some speciality needs like gloves, sunscreen, hydration sticks, and sorted out some funny situations like ripped pants and the need for sugar-free lollies. We tried to keep things light where we could and hopefully everyone felt they could come to us.

"I was lucky to have a great team. We worked as one. All three of us had similar ways of handling situations as they came up; nothing was too hard or too small."

CFA PEER SUPPORT UP TO 29 FEBRUARY 2020

Average deployment time per person: 5 days

Total peer contact hours: 6,192

NSW

Deployment: 10-30 November 2019

Peers deployed: 30

Clinicians deployed: 0

VICTORIA

Deployment: From 1 January 2020

North-east

Peers deployed: 24 on 28 individual tours

Clinicians deployed: 3

Gippsland

Peers deployed: 47 on 55 individual tours

Clinicians deployed: 8



The importance of P2 masks

During the 2019-20 fire season many fires caused smoke to cover large parts of Australia leading to hazardous air quality. Members of the public and CFA firefighters were so concerned that they asked for advice from CFA's health and safety advisers.

The two most common questions were, "What can I do to best protect myself from the adverse effects of smoke in the air?" and "Do P2 masks really work in a smoky environment and on the fireground?"

The NSW and Victorian Government health departments both recommended using P2 masks. This is also CFA's minimum protection requirement.

When worn correctly disposable P2 face masks (also known as P2 respirators) can filter out very fine particles from the air. They help reduce exposure to bushfire smoke, poor air quality and associated health effects.

But it's important to know that these masks are not perfect. Unlike the mask used in breathing apparatus, P2 masks don't have a perfect seal which means their effectiveness depends on the quality of the fit. For example, facial hair restricts the seal to the person's face. However, using a P2 mask with an imperfect seal is still much better than using nothing.

Some concerned volunteer firefighters have asked whether they could protect their health more effectively by using a P3 canister-style respirator on the fireground. Mark Tarbett, CFA's State Manager for PPE/C, explains the differences between the two types.

"A P3 canister-style respirator gives the same level of protection from airborne particulates as a P2 disposable respirator," Mark said.

"The P3 designation means this mask is a reusable full or half rubber face mask fitted with replaceable filter cartridges which provide protection from particulates, gases and vapours depending on the filters fitted.

"P3 respirators fitted with a cartridge-type filter need greater effort to breathe through, and it can be difficult to achieve an ongoing facial seal because of sweat and facial hair."

The 3M 9322+ (Aura) P2 Disposable Respirator is the only unit currently approved by CFA for use in bushfires. This respirator was selected in 2013 after user trials with CFA firefighters found it had excellent particulate filtration ability and exceptional facial fit. A face mask must also be certified to the AS/NZS 1716 standard.

For more information search the intranet (members.cfa.vic.gov.au) for the publication *Safety Tip: Smoke exposure*.



Regional member wellbeing advisers can help you

Regional member wellbeing advisers (MWAs) are part of the Organisational Wellbeing team. Although they report centrally to Burwood headquarters they are very much focused on the regions.

MWAs are embedded in each region and work across all the districts in their region. Being a regional resource helps to build relationships and to gain a better understanding of local needs – no district, region or brigade is the same as another.

An MWA can help by:

- offering a range of educational and awareness programs
- promoting strategies to improve and maintain positive mental health and wellbeing

- providing coaching and support to all members including leaders
- raising awareness of CFA's wellbeing support services and how to access them
- promoting and providing support for regional wellbeing initiatives such as R U OK? Day, Movember and Mental Health Week.

MWAs can also deliver a range of training packages including:

- Let's Talk About Wellbeing overview session
- Mental Health and Resilience
- Strengthening Team Relationships
- Conflict – Resolution and Management
- Having Courageous Conversations
- Change and Transition.

They also deliver Mental Health First Aid, The Working Mind First Responders and Psychological First Aid.

Regional MWA contact details are:

Acting Team Leader Trudy Deller
(0447 513 186)

Anne Duff, SE Region (0447 331 457)

Chris Bull, NW Region (0429 072 413)

Melisa Sincock, NE Region
(0429 078 404)

Michelle Taylor, West Region
(0400 082 088)

Miriam Day, SW Region (0436 429 095).

We encourage you to pick up the phone and have a chat with your MWA about how we can help you and your brigade.

ROADWORTHY FOR LIFE

Until the middle of 2019 district mechanical officers (DMOs) were asked to attend Healthy for Life Program sessions at integrated stations along with career firefighters. But in July 2019 CFA designed a new health program specifically for DMOs called Roadworthy for Life.

By the end of 2019 CFA's Health Services team had visited all DMO workshops across the state to deliver this tailored program.

What makes this new session different from Healthy for Life is that participants are taken through specific functional movements that are common in the day-to-day tasks carried out by DMOs. The participants are given recommendations and strategies to improve job-specific movements, reduce the risk of workplace injury and improve performance.

The program has received overwhelmingly positive feedback from DMOs. "A great workshop with practical demonstrations," said one. "The advice we received was very useful and included exercises relevant to my job," said another. "The practical nature of the session and learning about switching on muscle groups was beneficial," said a third.

During the first half of 2020 the Roadworthy for Life Program will include cardiovascular health checks and recommendations for healthy lifestyle changes to reduce the risk of chronic health conditions.

Based on the feedback received, the functional movement screening session will continue to run as part of the Roadworthy



RECOVERING FROM INJURIES

For many years CFA's Compensation Team has helped CFA employees and volunteers with their WorkCover and volunteer compensation claims. Although the team processes invoices and pays loss of earnings, these administrative tasks account for a very small percentage of the team's overall time.

The team is focused on returning our injured people back to health, capacity and wellbeing. This involves a wide range of activities including:

- maintaining regular contact with the injured person
- contacting doctors to ensure the person receives appropriate and timely reviews and treatment
- helping the person to access local treatment providers
- referrals to rehabilitation providers to assist with return to work
- purchasing and delivering aids and appliances
- arranging for specialist reviews
- supporting the injured person's choice to obtain other medical opinions
- drafting return-to-work plans
- encouraging employers to provide suitable duties for injured workers and to continue to employ them as they recover from their injury
- finding alternative employment and facilitating training or upskilling.

Team members also frequently offer a sympathetic ear and just listen to what the injured person has to say when things aren't going well.

In other words, the Compensation Team organises and manages medical practitioners and other providers to deliver treatment and services to help the injured person recover from their injury, while also giving a high level of support to the injured person as they recover.

After reflecting on the wide range of services it offers, the Compensation Team changed its name in 2019 to the Injury Recovery and Support Services Team. A few other changes were made at the same time.

To improve the point of contact between injured CFA members and the team, we now have regional injury recovery advisers who manage both WorkCover and volunteer claims in their regions.

We now also have specialists who handle the required processes when a claim is first submitted and to calculate and pay loss of earnings. Having these roles ensures our injury recovery advisers can focus on what they do best – helping our injured employees and volunteers to recover from their injury and promote a positive return to their normal day-to-day life.

You can contact the Injury Recovery and Support Services Team by phoning 9262 8244 or emailing injuryrecovery@cfa.vic.gov.au.



Scott Richardson, Group Officer, Beeac Fire Brigade, District 6

faces of
CFA



What is your CFA role?

I'm group officer of the Beeac and District Fire Brigades Group. Previously I was first and third deputy group officer. I held the role of captain and group officer at the same time but I stepped down from being captain so I could give 100 per cent to the group officer role, helping other brigades.

I was elected as the captain of Beeac Fire Brigade when I was 21 years old and held the role for 20 years. I've also been a Junior coordinator and recruited and trained our Junior teams for the Championships.

Why did you join?

My dad was captain of Beeac brigade so I grew up around the brigade. I wanted to be part of the community and help the community at times of need, whether during an emergency or just to offer a helping hand. I started in the Junior ranks in the running teams and worked my way up through the seniors.

What incident has had the greatest impact on you?

Of the hundreds of jobs I've attended some will always remain with me – a house fire, a running grassfire, the campaign fires of Enfield, Wye River and Black Saturday. Each one leaves its own memories, some better than others. But in a small community such as Beeac even a small incident can have a lasting impression and impact.

Who have been your mentors in CFA?

Many people have helped me become the firefighter and leader that I am today. My dad and Communication Officer of Beeac Fire Brigade John Smith have been very influential. But the most inspirational people are all the volunteers who put themselves on

the line every call. They leave their families and loved ones for a local incident or deployment because of their sense of community and because they know the gesture will be returned by other volunteers.

Not long after I was elected captain Mark Gunning (currently the operations manager in District 6) arrived and was very supportive. To this day he supports me in my role as group officer.

Malcolm Fallon (a retired operations manager) was also hugely supportive of me when I was a captain and especially when I stepped up into the group roles.

What has been the highlight of your time in CFA?

On a personal level I would have to say meeting my wife Lucy.

I built a strong brigade where we all worked together as one team, no matter our rank or abilities, to achieve our goals and we guided our Junior members to come up through the ranks.

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

No matter what rank you are or position you hold you work as part of a team to achieve the best outcome you can for your community – whether that's for CFA or at a personal level.

Communication is always the key. Whether on a call or at a social event, don't be frightened to ask for help because there is no silly question. Also, if you have any concerns after the call has finished always ask for help – someone will always be around to listen and help.

INTERVIEW BY DUNCAN RUSSELL

Photo taken in 2010 during Beeac's 150-year celebrations.

FROM TURNING OUT TO TYING THE KNOT



In early March 2020, wedding bells replaced brigade sirens at Mirboo North Fire Station when brigade members Andrew Salinger and Amie van Antwerpen held their wedding reception at the station.

Andrew has been a CFA member for more than 13 years and Amie joined the brigade in 2019 shortly after moving into the area from South Australia. They both joined the brigade because they wanted to support their community.

"I remember first wanting to join CFA when I was 14 years old," Andrew said. "I joined the brigade as soon as I could and haven't looked back."

Andrew and Amie are both firefighters and have attended several incidents together, including deployments to New South Wales last summer.

"It's nice knowing she's on the truck with me," Andrew said. "Although sometimes it has its challenges, it's nice to be able to come home together and talk about the incident."

The couple tied the knot down the road at Mossvale Park and then held their wedding reception at the fire station.

"CFA is who we are," Andrew added. "The brigade is our second family and it was great to be able to celebrate at the station."

Members made sure brigade equipment was accessible in the case of an emergency, but fortunately no call-outs were made during the celebration.

"We were thinking of places we could hold the reception and the station was our first choice," Andrew said. "We managed to get some amazing photos of the wedding party with the fire trucks. Who can say they've done that?"



PHOTOS: MORGAN FISHER PHOTOGRAPHY

Andrew and Amie started their honeymoon travelling around Victoria before finding out they had been successful in securing a place on the Sydney Royal Caribbean Cruise. The cruise was free for CFA members as a thank you for their enormous efforts in the recent bushfires.

"We're looking forward to more memories in the brigade as Mr and Mrs Salinger."

STORY HOLLY PENKETH



PHOTO: MITCH GASTIN

Jodie stands tall during New South Wales fires

More than 2,200 CFA members sacrificed their time to support New South Wales emergency services between October and December 2019 during the devastating bushfires. Diamond Creek volunteer Jodie Harris was happy to lend a hand on three occasions.

The 19-year-old was balancing two jobs and studying online when she decided to drop it all for a total of 15 days to help NSW communities.

During her first deployment in early November, Jodie flew to Armidale at Glen Innes Base Camp where she helped to consolidate containment lines and carry out back burning at the Kangawalla fire under the supervision of NSW RFS members.

"It was a huge eye-opening experience," Jodie said. "It was my first interstate long-haul strike team and I was fortunate to be deployed with Diamond Creek brigade Captain Peter Clarkson and Plenty brigade member Ash Bray who made me feel comfortable about taking on this new experience.

She said she always tries to take on new experiences with CFA and so leapt at the opportunity to help interstate.

"I was doing a lot of different activities that I hadn't done before back home, so it was incredibly rewarding to travel to a new place and help others in their time of need.

"I met a range of people with different levels of experience who gave me guidance and the confidence to be an active participant in the firefighting efforts."

Jodie joined Diamond Creek brigade as a Junior member and has been an operational firefighter for the past three years.

In her second deployment Jodie went to Coffs Harbour before travelling to Grafton in late November. She stayed in a tent at Grafton Showgrounds while she was involved in back burning and blacking out efforts at the Myall Creek fire.

In early December she made her third trip north to the Braidwood area where she spent three days battling tough weather conditions. She carried out a

large amount of back-burning and control line works at the Braidwood fire, about 40 kilometres north-west of Batemans Bay.

Back at her brigade Jodie spends some of her time helping Diamond Creek's Junior members become tomorrow's firefighters.

"I would encourage anyone who's thought of doing any volunteering in the community to consider giving it a go because there are many new learning experiences that develop you as a person," she said. "You become part of a team of like-minded people who work together like a family and you might end up loving it.

"There are so many capable people out there who would make great CFA members and would absolutely love being a part of such a supportive community.

"My time with CFA has helped me to gain important life experience and a unique range of job-related skills. Not only have I developed independence and communication skills, but my role in CFA has allowed me to work effectively as part of a team to achieve common goals."

STORY MITCH GASTIN

ARTHUR'S REUNION AFTER 50 YEARS



This is the story about a reunion and a grand old fire truck with a secret life. It began in the Woodend area when Macedon Ranges identity Arthur Hayes (of Hayes Tuckerbag supermarkets fame) was 19 years old, and he discovered a characterful Hotchkiss truck which began life in Paris in 1913.

At the time the truck was being used by a local electrician to power a saw bench, and before that it helped water the magnificent woodland garden of Flint Hill in Woodend. When Arthur bought it in the 1950s it had also worked as a pumper for Melbourne Fire Brigade.

It wasn't originally meant to be a fire truck, but one of a batch of trucks manufactured as gun carriages. Hotchkiss, a well-known French arms and car manufacturer, made the trucks to fulfil an order from a South American country which was undergoing a considerable amount of upheaval. But the conflict subsided before the trucks could be delivered, and the MFB bought and imported a handful of the vehicles.

As far as we know the MFB disposed of them around 1945 and Arthur bought one in a very sorry condition in 1957 for £50 and set about restoring it. That was a large sum back then, especially for a lad in his late teens, but the unique appeal of the Hotchkiss was too strong for him to resist.

Arthur got it working again, restored the body and, because anything goes when you're 19, he painted the wooden wheel spokes white. This feature became the key element to their reunion many years later.



During this partnership Arthur enjoyed a number of outings with his Hotchkiss, including the 1960 Golden Fleece Rally from Melbourne to Queenscliff. About 80 vehicles took part in the event and Arthur is proud that the Hotchkiss ran perfectly. After about 10 years, Arthur sold the truck "probably for about the cost of a slab," and he thought that he'd never see it again. Fast forward to the present and Arthur, who still likes buying the odd vintage vehicle, was contacted by a friend. "I think I've found your fire truck for sale online," the friend said. What gave it away were the white wheel spokes.

Arthur Hayes, in the driver's seat, took his Hotchkiss to Newham Fire Station where it was admired by CFA members and passers-by

PHOTOS: VAL HORNBUCKLE

Buying the Hotchkiss for a second time cost Arthur \$26,000, and he was surprised that all its brass fittings were still there.

"Just think ... we first met when I was 19 and we're back together again when I'm 80," Arthur said.

So why did he buy it again? "Well, I've got three grandchildren."

STORY VAL HORNBUCKLE

Going for gold



In late January brigades from Yarra Valley Group got together for their annual Firefighter Olympics.

The Yarra Valley Olympics started more than 10 years ago when Wandin Fire Brigade member Andrew Webber launched the event. Andrew, who's been a brigade member for more than 40 years, was inspired by his father.

"My father used to be part of the Lilydale Group and was involved with a family day they used to run," Andrew said.



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF YARRA VALLEY GROUP



"I remember going when I was a young boy. The day was a way for brigades and the community to come together and practise in different team events.

"I thought it would be a great opportunity to get brigades together in a fun environment," Andrew added.

This year brigades from Wandin, Wesburn/ Millgrove, Gruyere, Hillcrest, Warburton, Yarra Junction, Silvan and Yellingbo attended the event at Wandin East Oval.

A range of timed, team and individual games took place. Games included hose bowling, bucket relay, target push (joining multiple hoses together to push a target the furthest distance in the quickest time), hydrant key relay and draughting (using a wheelie bin as a water source to pass through a hose and knock down a target in the quickest time).

"The events are a combination of different exercises we complete as firefighters," Andrew said. "It allows us to test our basic skills in a friendly competition.

"The games finish with a tug of war between all brigades. Eight members represent each team in a knockout competition. It's a great way to end the day."

After all the games were finished and the scores tallied, the winning brigade was awarded the Yarra Valley Olympics trophy which it retains for the year.

"This year's winner was Silvan Fire Brigade," Andrew said. "But the real winners were all the brigades that attended and the communities they serve. It's a great way to keep our skills up and network with other brigades.

"Deployments are made up of a range of members throughout the Yarra Valley Group and it's great to know you'll be on the frontline with familiar faces.

"The community knows we will always work as a team, regardless of the name on the truck."

STORY HOLLY PENKETH

First captain in 70 years



PHOTO: MITCHELL GASTIN

Following the integration of career and volunteer firefighters at Ballarat City Fire Brigade in 1950, the position of captain has not existed in the volunteer rank structure. However, with fire services reform coming into effect in July, the position of captain was reinstated.

Nicole McGrath was successfully elected to the new position. She's currently the brigade's secretary and has spent 22 years with CFA in a number of roles including being a representative of District 15's women's reference group, a group secretary/treasurer and a lieutenant. She's also involved in running local bushfire workshops.

Nicole said it "just felt natural" to put her hand up when the position of captain was made available.

"I feel extremely privileged to be elected as Captain of this brigade and am excited for what's to come," she said.

"We have a fantastic team here and we have a lot of work ahead of us, so I'm looking forward to expanding our cohesive brigade. We're looking forward to our continued work in supporting our community as best we can."

Nicole will also become the first female captain in CFA's Eureka Group, which includes Ballarat, Ballarat City, Sebastopol, Wendouree and Buninyong-Mount Helen brigades.

Nicole said she has continued to learn about Ballarat City Fire Brigade's rich history, which spans 161 years of operation.

"After the brigade became integrated, we never expected to have

another captain, so this will be a big change in our leadership structure and I'm excited to lead the way," she said.

"Despite the coming changes, the brigade's unique and spectacular history will remain and we hope to continue to build our culture around that."

Officer in Charge Commander Anthony Pearce said Nicole has shown strong leadership skills during her time with CFA.

"She's been an important advocate for volunteers in the community throughout the entirety of her CFA involvement," Anthony said. "She has exceptional life skills outside CFA and has become an integral part of our community as well."

"This will be a great opportunity for her to lead from the front and advocate for increasing volunteer involvement in CFA and particularly the Ballarat City Fire Brigade."

Nicole has also been announced as the successful candidate for the Leadership Ballarat and Western Region (LBWR) 2020 leadership program. This is a community leadership program which runs from February to November 2020.

"I hope that my participation in this program will mean that the brigade gains someone who has the skills necessary to help effectively lead the brigade through change, to build resilience and to help it to adapt and modernise while still keeping members engaged," Nicole said.

STORY MITCHELL GASTIN

AUSTRALIA DAY PARADE

PHOTOS: MARK BLACKMAN AND KEITH PAKENHAM AFSM



Supporting the frontline

Kyneton Auxiliary always gives a helping hand

When local firefighters are hard at work protecting lives and property from bushfires there are often long-running and passionate community groups, much like the Kyneton Fire Brigade Auxiliary, working behind the scenes to offer their support in a variety of ways.

The nine-member auxiliary supports Kyneton Fire Brigade year-round by fundraising for much-needed equipment and also provides catering during incidents attended by the brigade.

Kyneton Fire Brigade Auxiliary Secretary and Treasurer Larina Strauch said throughout the auxiliary's almost six decades of service it has built its reputation for catering.

"Our catering is top-notch and we get involved whenever there's a staging area in Kyneton, which was the case when we sent a strike team to Mallacoota," Larina said.

"We are famous for our homemade slices. When the district and local brigade organise meetings the slice is often their first request."

The community group was established in the 1940s and became directly connected with the brigade in 1962 as an auxiliary brigade.

"We've had some fairly significant incidents in our district over the past 12 months and we've been happy to support our crews through it," Larina said.

"During the Black Saturday bushfires our auxiliary was on duty for eight days straight, making lunches and sending them to the field.

"It's important we continue to show our support and provide this service to our firefighters while they do the work of protecting our communities."

Members are always finding time to pitch in year after year. Larina noted that the



Kyneton auxiliary clocked 369 hours of catering during the 2015-16 financial year and their involvement has remained steady since.

"It's all about getting together and having that camaraderie among the group. We have meaningful interactions with the members of the fire brigade and have for a long time," she said.

"If you live in a smaller community joining a group like the auxiliary is a great way to give back."

STORY MITCHELL GASTIN

Ararat Auxiliary prepares for new facilities

Ararat Fire Brigade has been preparing to open the doors of its multi-million-dollar new station (see page 68 for more details) but it's not just the operational crews who've been looking forward to the upgrade.

Members of the Ararat Fire Brigade Auxiliary are ready to take advantage of the fully-functional kitchen. It will be a big improvement on the small but tidy space in the old station and will help the 12 current auxiliary members to cater for brigade dinners, fundraising barbecues and district training sessions. The new space was also used to provide lunches for the collectors and brigade members during the Royal Children's Hospital Good Friday Appeal.

Current secretary Rhonda Wall has been involved with the auxiliary for about a decade and said the group generally meets once a month during the summer period, though it hasn't been doing much lately because of the facilities in the temporary station.

"The auxiliary has provided much-needed equipment for the brigade and Junior brigade over the years," Rhonda said.

"It's a fine body of ladies who work tirelessly in the brigade's best interests."

And that tireless work has been going on for more than 100 years, with local records suggesting the origins of the auxiliary date back to 1878 when the Ararat Urban Fire Brigade Ladies' Auxiliary helped

provide coffee after a house fire. Other documents state it was formed in 1919 to help with the annual brigade ball.

Regardless of when it started the auxiliary is now looking forward to its next chapter in the new station.

STORY MARK BLACKMAN



PHOTO: BLAIR DELLEMUN

Snack Attack feeds hungry firefighters



A District 12 brigade team, affectionately called Snack Attack, re-energises firefighters on the frontline during significant incidents using its food catering capability.

Broadford Fire Brigade's food trailer can be despatched to incidents in District 12 to provide a range of meals and drinks to crews on the ground. Snack Attack is essentially a mobile cool room with a barbecue built onto the side of the trailer.

Broadford brigade's First Lieutenant Luke Crampton said the brigade's catering capability has been a "vital function" and a "great opportunity for brigade members to give their time without being on the frontline.

"Firefighters out on the fireground need nutritious and filling food to keep them healthy and working efficiently on the fireground," Luke said.

"We generally make up hamburgers with salad, roast beef rolls, bacon and egg sandwiches and sausages in bread.

"While the district allocates drinking water for crews on the fireground, our Snack Attack trailer also carries soft drinks and distributes them to members."

Luke said the feedback from firefighters has been excellent and emphasised the importance of having friendly faces to greet them and to cater for them.

"The district duty officer will generally determine whether the food truck is required. It's a proven, quick way to transport and prepare more than 100 meals for our crews at one time," Luke said.

Fortunately, the district hasn't seen many large-scale grass and bushfires or the need for Snack Attack to be used this bushfire season.

Most recently the Snack Attack trailer was deployed for 10 days when a fire broke out near the border of Districts 12 and 22. It provided three meals a day to crews.



PHOTOS: HAYDEN BLOOMFIELD

"Snack Attack was used during Black Saturday and has assisted at local incidents for many years," Luke said.

Fourth Lieutenant Jack Galbraith is one of the members who oversees Snack Attack's operations. He said its success is because of the effort of volunteers.

"The people who are involved in operating and catering the Snack Attack are a mix of operational and non-operational members," Jack said.

"Vehicles used to transport crews to and from the fireground assist in supplying the Snack Attack with more resources, which means Snack Attack can remain on the ground feeding crews."

The Snack Attack has also been pivotal in Broadford Fire Brigade's fundraising efforts in the local community.

"We always try to use it for a sausage sizzle fundraiser in the community every now and again," Jack said. "Everyone can easily identify the Snack Attack and it's also a good tool to boost the public's interest in joining CFA when they see us out and about."

STORY MITCHELL GASTIN

Supporting the frontline



PHOTO: MARK BLACKMAN

Rehab units on the rise

The reputation of CFA's rehab units is continuing to grow, with crews playing key roles on firegrounds during the challenging summer.

Greg Hopper and Angus McLean from Yellingbo Fire Brigade's rehab team were among those helping out in East Gippsland.

"We were activated as rehab personnel to go to the Gippsland fires to relieve the Yallourn North team which was working out of their vehicle at the peat fire," Greg said.

"We worked with District 8 personnel and it was really good. If they had a problem, we'd see them every hour and a half to check their hydration and their carbon monoxide levels.

"We all worked as a team and everybody knew what they had to do."

Greg and Angus are part of a 12-person rehab team at Yellingbo, which was the first brigade to receive a purpose-built rehab vehicle.

Although the rehab team supported East Gippsland this summer, the rehab unit itself wasn't deployed.

"What we had in our field command vehicle was enough to address any injury and of course provide the rehab we needed to do at the fires," Greg said.

Yellingbo brigade's purpose-built truck has equipment such as cooling chairs to help deal with radiant heat, electrolyte sticks for rehydration, and a snake-bite first-aid kit. But Angus said it was

the carbon monoxide monitoring equipment that played a key role at the peat fire in East Gippsland.

"Sometimes you can't see any flame at all; sometimes there's no smoke, he said. "You don't need to be in smoke to breathe carbon monoxide."

Angus has been with the rehab unit for five years and said it has definitely played a much bigger role recently.

"Initially we were struggling to get out the door to these kinds of jobs," Angus said.

"We'd get called really late and we'd rock up as everyone was packing up.

"But more recently, with more exposure about what rehab is and how important it is, we've been getting called to jobs much quicker."

There are now 19 rehab health teams across the state, with the newest locations at Woodend and Hamilton coming online this year. Another two brigades also have equipment that can be used to help with surge capacity during times of multiple major incidents. And the recognition is also spreading to interstate fire services.

"Tassie brought its specialised trucks over just for the peat fire. They don't have rehabs in Tassie, not yet at least, so I think it was good for them to see what goes on."

Yellingbo brigade is now working to get an upgraded vehicle, and Angus said there was a bright future for rehab services in CFA.

"It would be nice to see rehab units become a staple at every big job."

STORY MARK BLACKMAN



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF 'RUN FOR THE FIRIES'

Fun run forged in friendship

An annual community fun run established after the 2009 Victorian bushfires raises vital funds for Research and Kangaroo Ground fire brigades.

Celebrating its tenth anniversary in 2019, 'Run For The Firies' has become an institution in Eltham and Diamond Creek, with thousands turning out each year to take on its winding parkland trails.

Money raised from the event helps pay for equipment, building works and vehicles for both brigades. The event also helps increase awareness of fire safety and prevention and volunteering with CFA.

Run For The Firies started when members from both brigades were part of the same strike team in Kinglake in 2009.

"Immediately after Black Saturday we realised that Kinglake West brigade was under tremendous pressure with many members turning out to calls despite having been severely impacted by the fires themselves," Kangaroo Ground Captain Glenn Law said.

"Our brigades decided to help out. We initially each provided a truck with crews on 12-hour shifts. Then we reduced that to one truck with a joint crew on 12-hour shifts. This continued for several weeks.

"During these shifts we decided we should do a joint fundraiser, and Run for the Firies was born out of this."

The event attracts people of all ages, from keen runners and casual joggers, to those just wanting to give it a go. Participation in the first couple of years was mainly from locals who wanted to donate, however as the event grew it attracted more interest from serious runners.

The event has also expanded in recent years to allow for other community organisations to get involved.

"We had an amazing turnout at this year's event with more than 1,200 people of all ages joining us, up from 750 in 2018," Research Brigade Third Lieutenant Steve Hewett said.

"This year we encouraged registrations from 'virtual runners' which allowed people from other states and even overseas to register for the event and complete the run in their area of the world.

"We also had an increase in the number of brigades and emergency services workers participating; we even had employees from ESTA in Ballarat support the event."



Every participant who finished the course received a special 10-year anniversary medal that recognised the 2009 bushfires.

Both Glenn and Steve agreed that the day was a perfect way for emergency services and the community to join forces for a common goal.

"The day has a great vibe. Many of the runners say thank you for the work that we do, and it's a great way to work with the community," Glenn said.

"There are some amazing stories from participants about why they chose to enter – be it personal challenge, a special circumstance or because our local firefighters have impacted their life somehow."

Run For The Firies 2020 will be held on Sunday 18 October. For more information go to runforthefiries.com or [facebook.com/RunForTheFiries](https://www.facebook.com/RunForTheFiries).

STORY: SHAUNNAGH O'LOUGHLIN

Ten tips for succession planning

By developing a comprehensive succession plan a brigade can avoid future problems. Brigade experience shows that a successful succession plan needs to take a multi-pronged approach.

We interviewed the current captain of Johnsonville Fire Brigade, Chris Seymour, and former captains Bob Bassett and Rod Baylis. We also interviewed Mossi-Tambo brigade Captain Christine Bittner. The conversations focused on why these small communities in East Gippsland, with tin shed fire stations, are so successful. Thanks to all four for giving us their insights.

Based on what they told us we've drawn up a list of tips.

1. Listen to your elders

As a young CFA member, Captain Chris Seymour said he always hung out with the "old guys". The older members of Johnsonville Fire Brigade were approachable and generous. "Be inquisitive," Chris said, who wasn't afraid to ask questions about how they did it back then. These seasoned leaders were and still are his mentors. Chris studied these leaders' management styles and remarked that, "Everyone has their own style. Some good, some not so good but I learned from them all".

Mossi-Tambo's Captain Christine Bittner certainly agrees. "I often turn to my grandfather when I need to talk about issues, management style and more," she said. "I have many people I go to for help. I listen to everyone's opinion, gather information and accept support. CFA's support network is great."

2. Never stop learning (or teaching)

As a senior member of Johnsonville brigade, former captain Bob Bassett said he never stops learning. Bob said he still learns from other members every day – even from new recruits who bring new technology skills the brigade needs to embrace. He encourages everyone to take a leadership course. "We see what comes out of that training and go from there."

3. Watch and act

"Step back and watch your team – you can see the talent, you can see who can handle things and always work them a job above themselves," Bob said. "The talent may be good, but do they have what it takes to be a leader? A lot of members have the drive technically but don't have the soft skills of people management – and they may never have them."

4. Delegate, delegate, delegate... and repeat

Chris Seymour said with a grin that he had the "fortunate opportunity of working under a captain who was an outstanding delegator." He learned through hands-on experience and now he lets his lieutenants grow in the same way. By delegating responsibilities you give your team insight in what being a captain means.

Christine Bittner agreed that delegation was critical. "At first I tried to do everything myself as I was already managing the brigade prior to my appointment," Christine said. But now she steps back and



looks at people. "Who turns up? Who's keen? Other people have to learn to do the work. I threw a team member into a leader role at an incident and coached her, telling her that she knew what she was doing. Have a go but ask for help if you need it."

5. Be dynamic and flexible

Just like the fires they fight, the crew needs to be dynamic and flexible. That includes the captain who needs to run the team efficiently and effectively. "Do what's best for the team, be empathetic and understand it takes time to learn things," Chris said. "Put people where they have strengths and do what they enjoy – and then encourage them to do more."

6. The election is 'rigged'

Johnsonville brigade has a strong brigade management team (BMT) and it has been planned that way according to former captain Rod Baylis. "We have a four-to-five-year plan for strategic brigade achievements such as new gear or more members and then we stick to the plan," Rod said. "We openly discuss and plan elections in advance. We talk about what everyone wants: work-life balance, new challenges, status quo. We plan years ahead."

7. Park your ego at the door

"What is key is knowing when it's time to take a step back," Rod said. Bob reinforced this by adding that "succession planning is forward planning that involves the people, the vehicles, the group – where are we going? As I get older and slower it's nice to see people growing and taking more on. Be generous and find deep satisfaction that your team can do it without you." Chris added, "There should be no ego involved with switching jobs and doing what's best for the team for work-life balance".

8. Demote your captain (but keep them on board)

While a BMT needs to be dynamic and flexible, it also needs to remain stable. When captains step out of the role at Johnsonville brigade, they don't go quietly into the night – captains are expected to step into the first lieutenant role. By doing this, the BMT maintains stability.

Rod believes that staying in the same role for a long time isn't helpful. "If we have a four-to-five-year plan, the captain should have been able to accomplish the plan's goals in that period," he said. "Then it's time to give someone else a go. A captain should only be in the role for six years tops." In Johnsonville's BMT the third and fourth lieutenants are mentored by the second. The fourth is always an up-and-coming member of the team. This is the way things have been done for a long time.

Left: Bob Bassett, former captain of Johnsonville brigade

PHOTO: MARGARET SUMMERTON

Right: Mossi-Tambo brigade Captain Christine Bittner

PHOTO: MEG HOPMAN

Below: Former captain of Johnsonville brigade Rod Baylis and current Captain Chris Seymour

PHOTO: MARGARET SUMMERTON



9. For every action there is an equal and opposite reaction

Recruiting is to succession as succession is to recruiting. They are two sides of the same coin. One way to keep new sign-ups is to get them to complete their Minimum Skills as soon as possible. Johnsonville brigade does this in spades, as they train their recruits through accredited volunteer trainers on their team. “We run multiple sessions each year for new recruits,” Rod said. “We put recruits through Minimum Skills as fast as possible. Within four to five weeks of signing up we can have someone who is operational – which is very valuable to CFA.”

A recruiting tactic taken by Johnsonville’s current captain is to join other community committees. “The meetings are about our town and I get to hear what’s going on and have a say in what’s going on around our town,” Chris said. “Being on the committee raised the profile of CFA.” He emphasised that CFA is part of the community: “Raise your profile and recruits will drop in.”

10. Tart up your station

To help raise your brigade’s profile you can increase the visibility, approachability and attractiveness of your station. Do you have noticeable signage outside or on a highway? Does the station stand out or blend into the background? What can you do to make your station more approachable? Chris started by painting the station’s rolling doors red. “People noticed and started expressing interest in coming to the station which resulted in some new recruits.”

Christine stressed, “We need to see our sheds have visible signage, become more modern and attractive; without space and modern comforts it’s almost impossible to get more recruits.”

Perhaps when brigade members aren’t too busy they can think about doing front yard blitzes to improve their station’s visibility and approachability because recruits don’t know what they can’t see.

STORY DISTRICT 11 RBASO MARGARET SUMMERTON



Black Summer 2019-2020

When the vapour on the horizon whipped the wind up into dust
The farmers became uncertain of what lay ahead
They were checking the Bureau for signs of relief on its way
And the townsfolk had a sense of impending dread

What followed the dust was lightning, the country all ablaze
Terror ensued in young and old amongst the smoke
As commanders and the captains scrambled strike teams onto trucks
The firefighters breathing hazards, in courage, but all a choke

There were fires in the hundreds with the community on its knees
"What's the cause?", a confusion beginning to unfold
Dark skies at midday, stay or leave, defend or flee
And for thousands a horror yet unuttered, their stories yet untold

Fire spread and crept up gullies it crowned and roared up hills
Flaming forests spotting and merging into one MEGA-blaze
A world in shock, as it paused in numb, mute sadness
Our south eastern Australia, blanketed in a thick acrid haze

The death of native fauna said to be one billion with many scarred and burned
This crisis was predicted, denied by leaders, now in shame
With a blackened earth ten million hectares spreading fast
And an angry suffering mob, garnered numbers, ready to blame

Some say unpredicted this national disaster, split opinions into two
Narrow reasoning, denying science, delivered this fateful grief
Many in trauma with their lives stopped dead, now in loss
We all hoped for a sensible leader to emerge, and give relief

Deeply troubled by collective heartbreak with emotions an ocean dark
Determined not to be adrift, disabled in a state of fright
We reconnect to those around us, in an attempt to reconcile
Family and friends remind us gladly of a future bright

As the crisis led to recovery with the grind of work ahead
How do we sustain life without the agony of repeat?
The fatigue of millions without rest and in silence quietly tasking
A glimmered goal of aching hardship without defeat

As we watch the bush recover quenched by relief of rain
Repair of us internally, we feel mirrored at nature's pace
New shoots of life and colour, growing slowly amongst the ash
The solution to this saddened grief needs science to lead the race

Gregory Dale
Indigo Valley Fire Brigade



Find a home for unwanted items



A few years ago a story circulated about a brigade in the south-west whose members had to sit on milk crates during meetings because they couldn't afford chairs. A group of brigades rallied to donate chairs and a barbecue.

This prompted the South East Region Volunteer Sustainability Team to set up the CFA Brigade Trader page on Facebook. The team recognised the need for an online forum for brigades

where they could swap, give away or sell items that are no longer needed.

Launched three years ago, the Brigade Trader Facebook page has been used to trade hose drying racks, fridges, chairs, washing machines, turnout gear racks, filing cabinets, microwaves and whiteboards.

It's a simple and effective way to connect with other brigades around the state and help others at the same time. There are currently more than 2,000

members and we'd like this to grow so that more brigades can show goodwill by offering items for trade or donation to under-resourced brigades.

If you think your brigade has items that could be of use to other brigades go to CFA Brigade Trader and request to join. When the administrator has approved your membership you can read the guidelines and start trading.

STORY LISA PETERS

CFA WELLBEING SUPPORT LINE

One number to manage your wellbeing

1800 959 232

24/7 support for CFA members and their family

- Psychologists
- Counsellors
- Peer Support
- Chaplains
- Other support services



cfa.vic.gov.au/wellbeing

Volunteers who are staff



PHOTO: JAN FRANKLIN

Shane Franklin

He's been a CFA volunteer for more than 16 years and has also worked for CFA in the State Logistics Centre (SLC) as a Procurement and Logistics Manager throughout this time.

Shane and his wife Jan moved into a new suburb in the Doreen area with their two daughters more than 16 years ago. They purchased lot number one in the first-ever estate, and were the eighth family to build and move in.

After a CFA leaflet was left in their post box, Jan and their two daughters decided to join Doreen Fire Brigade because the brigade was short on numbers and the family wanted to support the local community. Shane joined the brigade the following year and he's been part of the brigade ever since. Shane started working at CFA shortly after joining the brigade.

In the early years, Doreen brigade responded to around 10 call-outs a year with a two-wheel drive tanker and a brigade-owned Iveco ACCO truck. Now the brigade turns out to more than 200 incidents a year and has a fleet that includes a 2.4C medium tanker, a pumper tanker, an ultralight and a field command vehicle.

Over the years Shane has been keen to join strike teams and CFA has given him time off work, but Shane is also aware of his responsibilities at the SLC.

"In previous years I've been part of different strike teams including The Great Divide fires in 2006 and on the outskirts of Strathewen on Black Saturday. But it's important to consider the best use of CFA members and this year it was important for me to remain working at the SLC to respond to the demands of brigades across the state.

"We all play a role in CFA. I would have loved to have gone out on more strike teams this year, however the wheels still need to keep turning in supply of goods."

Shane has taken on several roles in the brigade, including crew leader, driver and fourth lieutenant. Recently Shane's focus has been to respond to local incidents because the younger members are stepping up for strike team deployments.

"The brigade still needs members around and available to respond to local call-outs."

So what about the implications of being both a volunteer and working for CFA?

"I know when I come to work I have my work hat on, and when I'm volunteering I have my brigade hat on. It's important to know the difference."

Shane believes that being a volunteer has allowed him to understand the needs of CFA people better, knowledge he has brought to his work. He was also instrumental in planning the SLC's move to a much larger building in 2019.

"I'm passionate about my role at CFA and endeavour to impress upon our staff the importance of improving what we do. It's all about using what we have and being smarter, more efficient, utilising technology to make it better for all our firefighters in the field. Our work to establish the new SLC will demonstrate this over time.

"Succession planning is key. I always try to mentor others whether it's at work or in the brigade. It's important to support the generations around us.

"The thing about CFA that impresses me most as a volunteer is someone always has your back. Whenever you are at a fire, CFA is working to get you help and it will arrive in bulk."



Belinda Gillespie

She has worked for CFA for 12 years and has been a volunteer with Bayswater Fire Brigade for more than four.



CFA Headquarters. This allowed her to complete a Certificate in Business with CFA as her host employer.

Belinda's current role in CFA is volunteer recognition and retention consultant, but she's had a range of roles over the years.

"I started volunteering for CFA because I wanted to get involved in my community. I had recently moved into the CFA area and knew I wanted to help. I was also working in the recruitment area and wanted to understand the process better."

Volunteering at Bayswater brigade has allowed Belinda to use her CFA knowledge to her advantage.

"Having knowledge of CFA processes is extremely helpful in my position as brigade secretary," Belinda said.

"Working for CFA has allowed me to gain experience with CFA people, departments and systems which I can use and share with my brigade."

"It's a privilege to be part of CFA. I enjoy both working and volunteering," Belinda Gillespie said. She joined CFA straight from high school as a trainee at

Having been secretary, Junior leader and a firefighter, Belinda has a wide range of experience. She has also supported the brigade through fundraising and social and community events.

Last year Belinda (pictured left at a Bayswater brigade event with member Stacey Sorrell) responded to around 50 call-outs and was also deployed to East Gippsland to support the bushfire crisis.

"CFA was really supportive with my recent deployment to East Gippsland. Having flexible work hours allowed me to be deployed," Belinda said. "It's important to keep your employer informed. I made sure I clearly communicated any deployment updates with my manager so they were aware of my situation."

"Having experiences like these has also benefited my team at work. I'm currently the only volunteer in our team and it's been great to share the volunteer knowledge I have with my colleagues."

CFA plays a huge role in Belinda's life.

"I spend a lot of time either working or volunteering for CFA. It has given me great opportunities in life. I'm also lucky to have made amazing friends through CFA."

Phil Craig

He has worked for CFA for more than 10 years, first as a project officer and then in his current role as community risk field adviser.

Phil has vast experience in incident management, working in Level 3 ICCs as an operations officer and deputy incident controller. He has also been deployed to numerous fires in Victoria and interstate as a strike team leader and sector commander. During the 2009 fires he was a division commander at the Bunyip Ridge fire.

Phil's knowledge of CFA procedures meant he was the perfect CFA representative to help implement the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission recommendations.

He's passionate about training and has had the opportunity to be involved in training and assessing throughout District 8.

"It's beneficial understanding volunteers and volunteerism when you work for CFA especially when you're dealing with volunteer brigades," Phil said. "It's critical to have that understanding and the best way to do that is be a volunteer."

Phil joined CFA as a volunteer 32 years ago and has been a member of Nar Nar Goon and Pakenham brigades. He's had a

range of roles over this time including captain, driving facilitator, VFBV delegate and group officer for Cardinia Group.

"I became a volunteer because I wanted to be involved with a community organisation to help the community," Phil said. "I was always aware of CFA and was just waiting until I had enough time to be able to walk down to the local station to join."

Both Phil and his wife are volunteers and employees with CFA. "CFA can easily consume you. You do it because you love it and sometimes there's a blurred line between volunteering and working. You need to manage your time really well and it's a lot easier when the family is involved.

"It would be really difficult to volunteer, let alone volunteer and work at CFA, if you didn't love the organisation and its people. Without that desire to be there it would be really hard to do."



Volunteers who are staff



Nicki Lund

Eildon Fire Brigade Captain Nicki Lund has been a volunteer with CFA for 14 years. CFA plays an enormous part in her life as she's also CFA's Acting Manager Learning and Development in North East Region.

PHOTO: BLAIR DELLEMIJN

Nicki first joined the brigade when she was a regular visitor to Eildon at weekends before she moved to the area.

"My husband and I had a holiday place up at Eildon and came up regularly to have a weekend away with friends and to go water skiing," Nicki said. "We had met a few members of Eildon brigade and wanted to be involved and assist in the community any way we could. We subsequently moved to Eildon a couple of years later."

Nicki has had numerous roles in the brigade and is also the deputy group officer training for the Alexandra Group.

Nicki's history in the IT and training space allows her to bring valuable experience to CFA and the training department.

"Prior to working at CFA, I was employed as an ICT manager and trainer. Before becoming captain my role in Eildon brigade was training officer, as well as helping CFA as a volunteer trainer and assessor. All these positions have proven invaluable working in the Learning and Development team. While attending meetings I'm able to assist both staff and volunteers to work through the best solutions for everyone."

Nicki attends many meetings as both a volunteer and a CFA staff member.

"I attend numerous meetings and am able to keep members well informed. Being both a staff member and a volunteer,

I see both sides which gives me a greater perspective and understanding. I'm able to explain processes and offer suggestions," Nicki said.

"As a volunteer it has given me a better understanding of how processes work at the district office. As a staff member my experience has been vital in allowing me to be more supportive of the volunteers."

Nicki also turns out to incidents when she can. "My role requires me to travel throughout North East Region, so I'm not always close to home when the pager goes off. But when I'm at home, and able to, I turn out with my brigade."

Nicki has also been deployed as both a volunteer and in her work capacity as a logistics officer.

"CFA does play a big part in my life. Anything that I do, regardless of what it is, I give 110 per cent," Nicki said.

"However, I always ensure that I make time for myself and have something outside of CFA too.

"I love the outdoors. I have two red heeler dogs and three big, beautiful Friesian horses – and no, they are not cows. So I spend a lot of time riding my horses and walking my dogs.

"I thoroughly enjoy working and volunteering for CFA and am incredibly proud of the work we do."

NEW VEHICLES FOR ALPINE BRIGADES

In mid-January three new Prinoth oversnow vehicles were unveiled in Dandenong. They will be used as alpine pumpers by CFA's alpine brigades.

This orientation session was hosted by Engineering Project Manager Joel Read who explained what the vehicles' bodies will look like after they have been built. A wide range of CFA members looked over the vehicles including people from the alpine brigades, CFA operational staff, engineering staff (including a district mechanical officer) and a representative from CFA's driving and training team.

There was also the opportunity to ask Prinoth representatives questions and test drive the machine.

The Victorian Government's Fire Services Statement identified that CFA needed to replace some of the specialist vehicle fleet that's currently at Mount Hotham, Mount Buller and Falls Creek for several reasons including outdated ergonomics and poor reliability.

A series of sessions was held with the alpine brigades to understand their capability needs, followed by a tender process to source new vehicles.

The Infrastructure Services Engineering Team decided that the Prinoth Panther T6 was the most appropriate for brigades.

"It's very car-like to drive," Joel said. "It has a steering wheel rather than a joystick which means more members of the brigades will be able to drive them."

It has a maximum speed of 15 kilometres an hour and several safety features including rollover protection for the cabin, it only operates when the seatbelt is worn, and the brake is automatically applied when the driver's foot comes off the throttle.

The machines were assessed for their mobility in alpine conditions, payload, ergonomics and ease of servicing by district mechanical officers. They will be able to access water points and have a hydraulically-driven pump to provide the required amount of water for incidents.

The bodies will now be built in time for the upcoming snow season, ensuring they are suitable for the alpine environment – for example, when the pumping operation finishes, all water can be drained from the plumbing manifold to ensure the water doesn't freeze and damage the piping.

"Firefighting and responding to emergency incidents in the alpine environment is extremely challenging," Joel said. "With approximately 8,000 beds at each of the resorts, the risk is high, and to respond on a snow-covered road to access a chalet requires specialist equipment."

"It's a testament to the specialist skills the alpine brigades have."

STORY HOLLY PENKETH



Ararat gets a new station



PHOTO: JEYDON NANCARROW

Ararat Fire Brigade members recently celebrated the completion of their new fire station. We are very proud of this project and what we've achieved. It has been an immense effort by CFA headquarters and brigade members.

A great deal of planning and consultation went into this project, starting with an idea and discussions 10 years ago. Funds were allocated two years ago and we moved into the planning and construction phase over the past 12 months.

I appreciate the patience and hard work of the brigade to relocate into temporary housing for a short time during the demolition and construction period. This old District 16 headquarters in Barkly Street was far from perfect, but full credit to the brigade for working through the difficulties and continuing their response capability over the busy fire season.

Brigade members made a considerable contribution in time and funds to ensure the new fire station met current and future needs. There's a four-bay drive through motor room, larger meeting room, office, local command facility, kitchen, rear storage shed, full concrete rear yard and pergola area. The brigade also successfully applied for a grant to help fit out the station with security, electrical and furnishing amenities.

Ararat brigade Captain Rob Starick said the new station had some important advantages compared with the old one.

"The additional space means we have room for all our trucks and we are able to safely get in an out when responding to call-outs," Rob said.

"The new station comfortably houses the local command facility and the increased office size will allow us to run two lots of training at the same time.

"I'd like to thank our brigade members who've worked very hard over a number of years to raise funds for the station."

Last October Ararat brigade celebrated its 160th birthday. Its first fire engine was a Shand & Mason fire pump, hand-pulled and hand operated, which was delivered to the brigade in January 1861. The brigade received its first motorised fire truck, a Maxwell, in 1919. This was replaced by a Dodge pumper in 1930.

The brigade moved into the new station in April 2020 and there will be an official handover in the middle of the year.

STORY: DISTRICT 16 COMMANDER IAN MORLEY





Stars turn out for fundraiser

CFA volunteers were recognised with a standing ovation and rousing applause at Rod Laver Arena in mid-January at a sold-out special event to raise money for the Victorian Bushfire Disaster Appeal.

Tennis stars including Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal, Serena Williams, Naomi Osaka, Nick Kyrgios, Caroline Wozniacki and Stefanos Tsitsipas took to the court for an exhibition match as part of the Australian Open Rally for Relief.

A group of 30 volunteers represented CFA at the event as guests of Tennis Australia in appreciation of the efforts of all volunteers battling the devastating fires in east and north-east Victoria.

Joined by world number three Grigor Dimitrov in their own VIP section of the stadium, volunteers were given the opportunity to watch an incredible night of tennis and entertainment as well as meet some of the stars of the sport.

Stuart Mill Fire Brigade volunteer Deb Borg (a regular player at her local tennis club) received an extra surprise. She was called out of the crowd to play a few points on centre court alongside her hero Rafael Nadal – see photo.

The pair swapped hugs and high fives as they rallied with superstars Alexander Zverev and Caroline Wozniacki in a game of Fast4 mixed doubles.

“I was given the chance to sit courtside,” Deb said, “and one of the organisers asked us if anyone played tennis. I put my hand up and agreed to go on court.”

Wheelchair champion and disability advocate Dylan Alcott, who was the MC for the event, asked Deb who her favourite player on court was. She replied Rafael Nadal. Asked if she’d like to partner him Deb said, “Yes please, of course.”

“Raffa was serving and I was at the net and our opponents put up juicy balls for me to hit.

“Raffa was lovely and gave me a lot of encouragement saying, ‘come on Deb we can do this’ and ‘good shot’. We mingled with all the players at the end. They were all lovely. It was a special evening, that’s for sure.”

Tyers Fire Brigade First Lieutenant Ross Wisewould, who attended the event, said the recognition shown to CFA people for



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF HERALD SUN

their services and the services of all firefighters Australia-wide was overwhelming.

“Our members, like all CFA members, do what they do because they want to make a difference and are proud to pull on their uniform and give everything to protect lives and property,” Ross said.

“We thank everybody at Tennis Australia and all those involved in the Australian Open Rally for Relief for the opportunity to attend and commend the efforts of the players and the public for the amazing donations that have been made.

“We cannot wait to see what a difference this will make to those communities who’ve been affected by fire.”

The event raised more than \$4.8 million for the appeal.

STORY SHAUNNAGH O’LOUGHLIN

Update to Warrnambool pumper story

In the story on page 64 of the spring 2019 issue of *Brigade* magazine, we incorrectly stated that Henry Barton had passed away. This should have said Henry's father Jack. We apologise for this mistake.

The 1942 K4 International midship mounted pumper was originally stationed in Doveton, south-east of Melbourne, before being bought in 1971 by Jack Barton, the father of former Warrnambool Officer-in-Charge Henry, and one of his mates.

After it was restored, it was used at events such as school fetes. But after a long illness Henry's father passed away, and the pumper sat rusting in his mate's back yard in Melbourne until 2003.

A small band of members from Warrnambool brigade along with Henry travelled to Wandin to inspect the old pumper left to Henry by his father – and so began a labour of love to restore it again.

In the photo Henry is fourth from left with some of the Warrnambool brigade members who restored the truck.



PHOTO: FIONA WOODHAMS

FEM is a great way to fundraise

Turning sausages and rattling tins are seen as the mainstay of fundraising for many of our brigades. But for 262 of the state's brigades the servicing and supply of fire extinguishers and other equipment is another positive option for their members.

Fire equipment maintenance (FEM) earns money for brigades to allow them to fund new vehicles, small and large equipment, brigade extensions and amenity improvements.

But it has other important benefits too, such as the opportunity to interact regularly with the community and be available to answer questions – an enormous advantage when preparing and planning locally for fires and other emergencies. Also, when brigades interact with industry they can provide key fire safety information and training, and gain knowledge of sites and facilities.

FEM stretches to every corner of the state and no matter how big or small your town is, you might be surprised at the number of businesses in your area that have a legislative requirement to maintain fire equipment. Fire extinguishers are found everywhere including home offices, workshops, farms, some vehicles, local council and infrastructure installations.

The FEM team gives brigades comprehensive training to perform the role to Australian Standards, and handles contracts, data entry and retention. It also offers 24/7 technical support to brigades and their clients.

"FEM income has helped us fund our FCV and rescue support units, as well as the other equipment that goes with those vehicles. We try to do these every five years," Andrew Dalla Via, FEM officer at Epping Fire Brigade said.

Any brigade interested in becoming an FEM brigade can contact the Bendigo Client Services Team on **1300 36 36 61** or email fem@cfa.vic.gov.au to find out more about how they can join the growing number of FEM brigades.

STORY FEM TEAM



PHOTO: BLAIR DELLEMLIN

Working as one with FIBs



HVP Plantations plays an important role in protecting the 245,000 hectares of private, public and plantation-owned land across Victoria. The company's crews are registered as forest industry brigades (FIBs) in CFA. HVP Plantations has more than 230 trained firefighters and support staff across its seven brigades.

FIBs work alongside other CFA volunteers on the frontline carrying out fire prevention and suppression activities as well as delivering key safety messages and training. Prevention measures include fuel reduction burning and firebreaks. HVP also works closely with Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), farmers and landowners throughout the fire season.

The FIBs' specialist skills, equipment and experience help them fight forest fires 24 hours a day. Many of the people who work for HVP are also volunteer firefighters at their local CFA brigade.

The HVP FIBs were the first FIBs registered in Victoria in 1998-9 following the launch of new legislation. CFA currently has 20 FIBs.

Although FIBs are run by forest plantation companies they abide by CFA regulations. This allows CFA to access specialised skilled firefighters and equipment including two helicopters that are dispatched by HVP but are fully-integrated with the Aviation Services Unit. HVP also has a fleet of forest firefighting vehicles, lookout towers and access to many items of heavy plant needed for forestry operations.

Before each fire season employees undergo regular training sessions to complete a range of activities and test equipment, and their health is assessed.

"Most fires start outside of HVP's boundaries but we work closely with neighbouring landowners to support one another," Ruth Ryan, HVP's Corporate Fire Manager said. "It's critical to have a strong relationship with the multiple agencies involved as we are all here to protect the Victorian community.

"We have a vast number of skilled firefighters, some of whom have over 30 years' experience in the industry," Ruth added. "The



2020 fire season has been a big one. From 20 December 2019 we had people out fighting fires for a period of 54 days out of 55.

"We even called on the resources of our sister companies in Queensland and New Zealand to assist with the provision of skilled plantation firefighters to help us manage fatigue in the local crews.

Ruth said that in terms of damage to the plantations, this year still ranks behind the 2009 fire season, but is still the second most significant in Victoria with about 8,000 hectares impacted.

"Salvage harvest operations have already commenced in the plantations to maximise the recovery of timber before it starts to decay," Ruth said.

"The trees take around 30 years to grow and so a gap in the resource supply may not be truly felt until many years down the track."

STORY HOLLY PENKETH

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9



THROUGH THE AGES ROSEBUD

- 1 Current Rosebud Fire Station
- 2 Fourth Avenue station and Austin pumper
- 3 Rosebud brigade's pumpers 1 and 2
- 4 Scrub fire and C1300 International tanker
- 5 Freeway fire at Dromana, 2009
- 6 Heronswood Garden Cafe fire 2014
- 7 Historic procession on Point Nepean Road
- 8 Foreshore community fire safety demonstration, 2014
- 9 District 7 tankers arriving by ferry to fight Arthurs Seat fire
- 10 Rope rescue training in old fire station
- 11 Brigade members at official handover of pumper 2

COMPILED BY KEITH PAKENHAM AFSM

10



11





INTER-BRIGADE TRAINING TAKEN TO NEW LEVEL

Just over three years ago Connewarre Fire Brigade Training Officer Phil Stewart set up inter-brigade training in District 7 to help train new members, build skills, share knowledge, and strengthen relationships between neighbouring brigades. Now into its fourth year the brigades meet for training once a month.

In December 2019 brigade members from Grovedale, Connewarre, Freshwater Creek, Torquay, Bellbrae, Highton and Barwon Heads met to reinforce summer skills training by participating in a major strike team training exercise.

Before the training began Assistant Chief Officer Rohan Luke addressed the group. He was keen to emphasise that firefighter safety was paramount in our operations for the forthcoming fire season. Rohan added that CFA greatly appreciated the support of local CFA volunteers and those from further afield who've helped interstate firefighters.

Commander Wayne Aylmer also attended to provide valuable support to the activities. Wayne was very keen to see this inter-brigade training continue as a valuable resource for smaller brigades.

About 20 CFA members from District 7 Headquarters Brigade and Coastal Group coordinated the staging area and the local command facility at Torquay Fire Station, and about 60 firefighters from seven brigades took part in the fireground exercise.

During the fireground scenario one strike team carried out grassfire tactics while another strike team protected assets around a local shearing complex on an adjacent farm using the hose laying trailer and collar tank. A water relay was established from the nearby dam.

During the exercise wind and ember attack predictions were changed so that members had to deal with changing conditions. Communication was also an important part of the training.

Many members said this training was valuable for building skills. They also thought it had helped develop better relationships with surrounding brigades, which would be a great benefit at future incidents.

One member said she had revelled in working with crew members that she had only just met. "It was a complete learning curve for me," she said, "and I hope we can do this again soon".

New and inexperienced strike team leaders and crew leaders gained valuable insight into fireground operations. Experienced members who had regularly operated in these roles mentored less experienced members as the incident progressed. This succession planning was enthusiastically embraced by Connewarre brigade firefighter Mark Neil who had the opportunity to take on a strike team leader role.

"It gave me a real feel for what a larger incident is like," Mark said. "Having really experienced people next to me was brilliant. It took away some of the fear of how demanding a strike team leader role is and was a great way to get exposure to decision-making.

"The exercise was a good opportunity for people at all levels to get a taste of what it's like stepping up to the next level.

"When the time comes to do it for real, I'll be confident with the right attitude and understanding."

Rohan Luke's debrief recognised the effort taken to plan the event and complimented all involved on a successful exercise.

Special thanks to Connewarre and Freshwater Creek brigade members who prepared the obligatory sausage sizzle after the exercise back at the fire station.

STORY GEOFF MAYS AND JULIE PEEL

New elearning builds capability

The number of members accessing online learning more than doubled in 2019 as our people embraced more modern approaches to training.

First Aid, Thermal Imaging Camera Awareness and Brown Coalmine Firefighting are just some of the elearning packages rolled out on CFA's Learning Hub (learninghub.cfa.vic.gov.au) in the past 12 months.

Most of the new packages are adaptive to our people's skill sets, which means that prior learning and experience are recognised and learners don't have to sit through information they already know.

Fire Weather, Asbestos Awareness, Intermediate Bushfire Behaviour, AllIMS Awareness, and Driving Policy and Legislation are the next packages to roll out.

DCO Training Gregg Paterson said more than 9,150 members completed online learning across 35 courses in 2019 – double that of 2018.

"Digital learning isn't designed to replace face-to-face training; CFA people receive more than 500,000 hours of formal and informal training each year across the state," Gregg said. "What it does do is help us meet the demand for training."

"Relying on in-person training often means waiting to complete qualifications and competencies if sessions are full or if they have to travel long distances to join a course."

Gregg said face-to-face training would still be available to members who prefer to learn in a classroom setting.

"The digitisation of some of our programs helps us to deliver more flexible, consistent and targeted training to brigades, particularly for individual, role-specific training and response activities.



Left and below: Two of the available online training modules are Thermal Imaging Camera Awareness and Brown Coalmine Firefighting

"In some cases, members will soon be able to complete the majority of their training online before completing a smaller, practical component in person.

"If you prefer to participate in face-to-face training, this will continue to be available to you through your district office."

To find out more about digital learning at CFA visit The Learning Hub or speak to your district office.

The new digital learning packages are funded under the State Government's \$60 million investment in the Victorian fire services as part of the 2017 Fire Services Statement.

STORY SHAUNNAGH O'LOUGHLIN



Developing comms skills during water bombing

CFA firefighters switched to airplane mode for an all-day aerial firefighting training exercise at Lilydale Airport at the beginning of December 2019.

Firefighters from Districts 8, 13 and 14 got involved in communication activities during water bombing procedures, aircraft loading operations and aircraft assessments.

As part of the Aviation Communication Evaluation (ACE) training, crews observed a number of water drops from helicopters and airplanes in the Dixons Creek area and discussed their communication strategy with other members.

District 13 Acting Operations Manager Tim Holland said the training aimed to enhance the communication between crews operating on the ground and pilots giving aerial support.

“The training was focused on our members learning and developing their skills to communicate directly with pilots and provide feedback to the aircraft on the effectiveness of their water bombing operations,” Tim said.

“There will always be a need for firefighting aircraft. They’re a key component to help reduce the spread of fires in support of our ground crews.

“There are 50 aircraft across the state on contract this season plus more available through the ‘call when needed’ arrangements, which can be deployed from 21 primary airbases.”

Tim said the training was also an opportunity for firefighters to practise safety procedures when operating near drop zones.

“There is a significant number of aerial firefighting resources available to assist our ground crews, so it’s vital we introduce our members to this type of aviation communication training,” he said.

STORY MITCHELL GASTIN



PHOTOS: MITCHELL GASTIN

Josh helps the homeless

When Josh Berry was 9 years old, he saw homeless people in Melbourne city centre and told his mum he wanted to do something to help them. When he got home, he jumped onto a computer to read about homeless people. One fact he discovered was that they always needed socks, so he decided to start collecting them.

"I thought collecting 100 pairs would be fantastic, but Josh found out there were about 24,000 homeless people in Victoria, so he wanted to collect 50,000 pairs," his mum Jane said.

Josh is now 14 years old and has so far collected 28,500 pairs of new socks from overseas and all parts of Australia.

"He's always had a compassionate heart and wanted to help people.

"Socks are an easy thing to collect and being so young he was successful in getting people to buy socks and send them to him.

"He won't give up until he reaches 50,000 pairs."

Initially Josh put notes in letterboxes of the three nearest streets asking for donations. When a local person heard about this they offered to distribute 4,000 leaflets free of charge if he made the leaflets – which he did.

He also set up a Facebook page (2 Pairs Each), a website (2pairseach.com.au) and visited some schools and charity groups to tell them about his quest.

When he was 11 years old, Josh joined the Juniors at Mount Eliza Fire Brigade, and when a Junior leader saw a story about him in a peninsula magazine wanting to donate 50,000 socks to homeless people, the brigade stepped in to help.

"The brigade really believes in helping the community so they have supported me," Josh said.

The brigade collected socks from the local brigades and Josh was invited to a brigade group meeting which led to further donated socks.

So what does Josh do with the thousands of socks he collects?

"Initially he went to St Kilda, Dandenong and Frankston to give them to homeless people," Jane said, "but now he supplies organisations who distribute them. Two thousand pairs were given out on Christmas Day."

Josh's desire to support his community extends to those with disabilities. In 2018 Josh joined Sailability Victoria, a not-for-profit volunteer organisation, where he learned to sail and then for the next 12 months took people with disabilities out in a sailing boat.

When asked why he's collecting all these socks, his simple answer will resonate with many CFA volunteers.

"Our family likes helping people. I want to help people in the community."

STORY DUNCAN RUSSELL



PHOTO: JANE BERRY

Supporting our younger members

Recognising that our younger members are an important part of our brigades now and into the future, the CFA Youth Programs Team was set up to provide strategic direction and information about youth issues in CFA, and help Junior leaders and brigades deliver locally-relevant programs to young people.

The Youth Programs Team extends to regions and districts through the Youth Engagement Working Group (YEWG) which works to ensure the best outcomes for young people in CFA. The group consists of the CFA Youth Programs Team staff and an RBASO from each region. Its focus is to provide an opportunity for strategic thinking and planning around youth issues, with the best interest of future CFA generations in mind. This is an exciting opportunity which the group is enthusiastic to develop.

Outlined below are the team's current projects.

Developing a youth engagement framework

Underpinned by CFA's values, strategic goals and child safe standards, the Youth Engagement Framework will identify three elements: values, principles and practices. These will lead to a set of indicators for young people, Junior leaders/brigades and CFA more broadly to help make the most of opportunities and strengths and enhance good practice in youth engagement.

When finished the framework will also be used to consider and develop any new program or activity for young people in CFA.

Toolkit development

The YEWG is developing three toolkits: Junior Leaders Network Toolkit, Disability Toolkit for Junior Brigades and Behaviour Agreement Toolkit for Junior Brigades.

These toolkits will be practical resources targeted at Junior brigades and leaders to help deliver a strong, inclusive and safe Junior Volunteer Development Program (JVDP) and support Junior leaders. It's anticipated that the toolkits will be ready to launch at the Junior Leaders' Forum in May 2020.

Junior Leaders' Forum

The Junior Leaders' Forum (last year's attendees pictured below) is an opportunity for CFA Junior leaders from across Victoria to gather together to be encouraged and inspired through speakers, training and networking. The leaders return to their brigades refreshed, equipped and enthused to impact the next generation.

The program for the 2020 gathering in May is shaping up and will include a focus on further developing the JVDP and program planning, plus the launch of new resources and a look at how we can make our work with young people the best it can be.

Junior Leaders Development Program

A suite of online training resources is being developed to help build the capacity of Junior leaders across a range of areas relevant to delivering the JVDP and broader youth engagement. These resources will also be launched at this year's Junior Leaders' Forum.

Cadets Pilot Project

Consultation is underway to develop the program model for a Cadets Program for 16 and 17-year-old members that will produce content that's current, relevant and exciting. The aim is to start a pilot of this program later this year in two regions. The pilot will be called CFA Cadets and will run for 12 months. It will include face-to-face, online and practical training.

The young people taking part will gather twice for overnight training weekends with additional online training. Regular brigade training will continue as normal. At the end of the pilot CFA will collect feedback to discover how well the pilot worked and how it can be improved.

The team is keen to hear from you about any youth-related topics. Email juniors@cfa.vic.gov.au.

STORY JENNIFER CLEMENT



Commissioner visits Emerald Juniors



When we were told that Emergency Management Commissioner Andrew Crisp was planning to visit our Junior Brigade we thought 'wow, that'd be really awesome, but let's wait and see if it actually happens'.

In the weeks leading up to the visit, our Juniors practised using the phonetic alphabet, the turnout race and wet practical fireground skills to demonstrate their teamwork, knowledge and skills just in case the proposed visit eventuated.

And it did. On 12 November 2019 Andrew

visited Emerald Fire Station and Emerald Junior Fire Brigade. He was keen to talk with our Juniors. He discussed his role at EMV and we spoke about Junior brigades and the opportunities young people have in CFA and in their local communities through the Junior Volunteer Development Program.

Following the group discussion our Juniors enthusiastically showed off their practical skills, then Andrew had a go at bowling a hose and squirting some water.

It rained, it hailed and it was very cold

but we still had an absolutely fantastic night with Andrew. We are very thankful to him for being such a good sport, for his encouragement and for making time in his busy schedule to visit us.

As Junior leaders we are very proud of our Juniors. The camaraderie between them is outstanding and it's a privilege to be able to introduce them to the emergency services.

STORY JUNIOR LEADERS TANYA JOGAN AND TREVOR IRELAND

SWAN HILL JUNIORS IMPRESS THEIR COMMUNITY

Swan Hill Fire Brigade in Victoria's north-west runs one of the largest Junior programs in the state. As part of the program, Junior members learn firefighting, teamwork and leadership skills and compete in both rural and urban competitions.

When the Juniors were asked to help at the local Bunnings community Christmas night and engage with the local community, they jumped at the opportunity. Thirteen Juniors attended to lend a hand with a range of activities that introduced the community to firefighting techniques.

"There was a huge amount of interest from the community about our Junior program," said Swan Hill Junior Leader Denise Jordan. "The biggest hit on the night was squirting the hose to make a toy fire truck move."

The Juniors worked with senior brigade members to introduce the community to fire safety and firefighting techniques. Some of the key activities were using fire extinguishers to knock a tennis ball off a traffic cone, setting hydrants and bowling and rolling hoses.

A huge thank you to the members of Echuca Fire Brigade for lending their toy trucks, and to Swan Hill's committed Junior leaders who helped on the night. The event was a huge success.

STORY NATHAN LINTON AND DENISE JORDAN



PHOTO: DENISE JORDAN

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 new 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.



POPULAR OFFERS

- **Latrobe Health** offers members a 6.5% discount on direct debit premiums.
- Up to 20% discount on standard rates at the **Radisson on Flagstaff Gardens Melbourne**.
- 20% off Bath House bathing during off-peak periods (Tues-Thurs outside of public and school holidays) at **Peninsula Hot Springs** on the Mornington Peninsula.
- 15% off the best available rate at **Best Western Hotels and Resorts**.
- Save money on pre-purchased **movie tickets, theme park and attraction tickets**.
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- 5% discount when you book a trip with **Contiki Holidays**.
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- Commercial pricing through **The Good Guys Commercial Division**.
- Between 10% and 40% off the best available rates at **Wyndham Resort Hotels** throughout Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific.
- 15% off the best rates of the day with **Thrifty** car rental.
- Plants and garden products at wholesale prices at **Plantmark**.
- Exclusive discounts and unique offers through the **JB Hi-Fi Family & Friends Program**.
- Discounts on a range of pre-purchased **Gift Cards** including Woolworths, Coles, Myer, Kmart, Target, Rebel Sport, JB Hi-Fi, Ray's and BCF.
- One complimentary admission when a second of equal or greater value is purchased at **Ashcombe Maze and Lavender Gardens** on the Mornington Peninsula.
- Preferential government rates across Australia with **Choice Hotels Asia Pac**.
- **Searoad Ferries** has a 10% discount on ferry travel between Sorrento and Queenscliff.
- Corporate pricing on all vehicles at **Rex Gorell Geelong**.
- **Experience OZ** has at least a 10% discount on popular tourist attractions, activities and tours.
- 15% of all casual sessions at **Melbourne Float House, Kilsyth**.
- **Departure Lounge** has up to 50% off accommodation at Peppers, Mantra and BreakFree properties.
- 10% discount on accommodation at **Holiday Lifestyle Henty Bay Portland**.
- 15% off full-priced items in store and online at **RSEA Safety**.
- \$50 off when you spend over \$1,500 at **Flight Centre**.
- Commercial pricing through **Harvey Norman Groups & Associations Division**.
- Save 40% on **AIG Travel Insurance**.
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- 25% or \$25 off your entire meal (lowest applies) at **Taco Bill Mexican Restaurants**.
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- Discounted rates and reduced insurance excess on car hire with **Avis**.
- **Goodyear Airport Parking** has a 20% discount for online bookings.
- 10% off standard tours at **Asylum Ghost Tours** in Beechworth.
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- Subscribe to **Magshop** and save up to 53% on popular magazines.
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