

AUTUMN 2011



BRIGADE



FIRE AND RAIN

Response and recovery through extreme weather



ALSO: STATE EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLAN, STRIKE TEAMS, WELFARE SERVICES

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Cover: : (Top) Crews turn out to the Tostaree - Princes Highway fire in early February (see story page 26). Photo by Geoff Stanton. (Bottom) Pumper in floodwater on Narre Warren-Cranbourne Road in Narre Warren. Photo by Alison Darvell.

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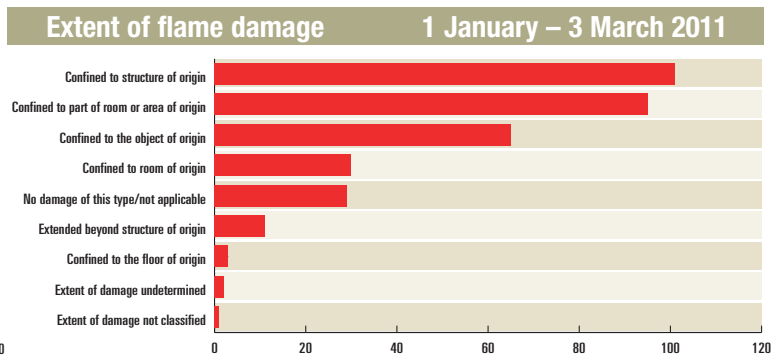
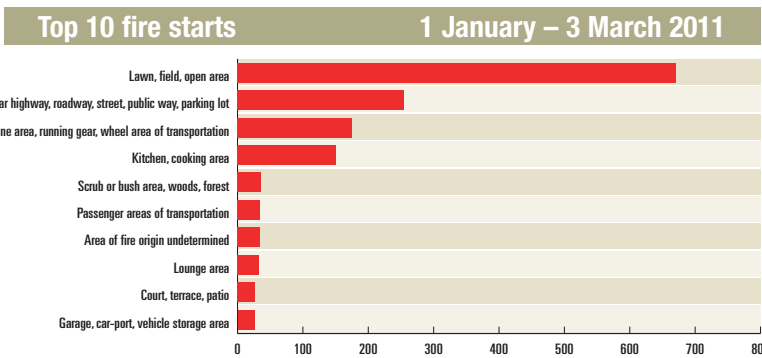
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In this section of *Brigade*, we summarise CFA incidents and examine the total number of incidents for each region. All statistical information has been extracted from CFA's Fire and Incident Reporting System (FIRS).

Summary	1 October – 31 December 2010			1 January – 3 March 2011		
	Est. loss	Est. ha burnt	Incident count	Est. loss	Est. ha burnt	Incident count
Bush and Forest		175	8*	11,453		7
Car Fires and MVA			1,293			771
False Alarms			1,875			1,928
Grass Fires		683	58#	465		24
Hazardous Materials			609			378
House Fires	\$13,420,850		286	\$6,505,200		181
Industrial Fires	\$5,575,150		53	\$930,030		39
	\$18,996,000	858	4,182	\$7,435,230	11,918	3,328

*These figures only represent Forest and Bush fires and Scrub or Bush and Grass mixture fires larger than one hectare
larger than one hectare





Kerry Murphy PSM AFSM



From the Chairman

New law shows commitment to CFA volunteers

New legislation to enshrine the Volunteer Charter in law is an important move that will further recognise the role of CFA volunteers.

When introducing the legislation into Parliament in March, Deputy Premier and Minister for Police and Emergency Services Peter Ryan captured the nature of our organisation: more than 97 per cent volunteers who come from all walks of life and make a significant contribution to the safety and wellbeing of the people of Victoria, supported by career staff.

The legislation shows the Government's commitment to CFA volunteers goes beyond words, committing both CFA and the Government to consulting with volunteers on matters that affect them.

I joined Premier Ted Baillieu, Minister Ryan and Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) President Hans van Hamond in a ceremony to sign the Volunteer Charter at Upper Ferntree Gully in late February. We came together at the tail end of a fire season that didn't fully stretch and test our firefighting resources but saw our members respond to a different kind of threat – the worst floods in our history – with dedication, professionalism and selfless courage.

The legislation to enshrine the Charter recognises that CFA is primarily a volunteer-based organisation where volunteers are supported by paid staff in a fully integrated manner. It requires both CFA and the Government to consult with VFBV on behalf of CFA volunteers before making decisions on matters that may reasonably be expected to affect volunteers, including recruitment, training and support programs.

The legislation creates a responsibility on CFA to develop policy and organisational arrangements that encourage and maintain the capacity



Premier Ted Baillieu signs the CFA Volunteer Charter, while Deputy Premier and Minister for Police and Emergency Services Peter Ryan, VFBV President Hans van Hamond and CFA Chairman Kerry Murphy look on. Photo by Peter Beaton

of volunteers to provide services. The Board, the majority of which are volunteer CFA members, support this strengthened commitment to the Volunteer Charter.

It came about, as Minister Ryan said, through the Government, CFA and VFBV working together in a spirit of mutual respect and goodwill. ■

Kerry Murphy PSM AFSM
Chairman

Motors running at Upper Ferntree Gully

BY KAYLA MASKELL

As part of the Volunteer Charter signing ceremony (*story above*), Victorian Premier Ted Baillieu and Minister for Police and Emergency Services Peter Ryan handed over the keys to both a new pumper/tanker and a 3.4C tanker to Upper Ferntree Gully Brigade. These vehicles replace the truck destroyed in the February 2009 Nixon Road fire.

With help from the community, the brigade has also purchased two new slip-on units. "The community donation has been greatly appreciated," said Captain Peter Smith. "We now have four brilliant new trucks to help the brigade do what it needs to do." ■



Captain Peter Smith takes possession of the new vehicles on the same day the Volunteer Charter was signed at his station. Photo by Peter Beaton

CFA specialists deployed outside Victoria

BY DARREN GREVIS-JAMES

BRISBANE FLOOD ZONE

Andy Waterson from Dandenong Fire Station, Rob Jones from Geelong City Fire Station and Fred de Leo from Eltham Fire Station were members of an interagency group deployed in response to the Queensland flood disaster in mid January.

The Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) experts worked in the Brisbane metropolitan area. "Our job was to look through buildings and search underground," said Fred. "We reported structural damage back to Incident Control Centres. Our six days there gave us some terrific experience."



Chief Officer Euan Ferguson with Leading Firefighters Rob Jones, Andy Waterson and Fred de Leo. Photo by Keith Pakenham

CHRISTCHURCH EARTHQUAKE ZONE

Two CFA USAR specialists were deployed to earthquake-hit Christchurch in early March.

Geelong City Fire Station's Anthony Heafield is not only a qualified Trench Rescue and Confined Space Rescue specialist but also a CFA instructor in USAR. Frankston Fire Station's Douglas Broom is one of Victoria's most experienced USAR specialists.

Both men were deployed in the aftermath of the February 2009 fires. That painstaking work prepared them for both the dangerous process of de-layering rubble in the quake zone and the grim task of searching for victims.



From left, Doug Broom and Anthony Heafield head to Christchurch. Photo by Gerard Scholten

PERTH BUSHFIRES

In early February, CFA led one of two interagency Incident Management Teams deployed to Perth in response to bushfires in southern and northern suburbs. ■

Euan Ferguson



From the Chief Officer

In recent weeks I have met many CFA people – volunteers, career staff, firefighters, community educators and supporters. One of the most common issues raised is concern at the diminished role of the Group and Group officers in operations. As reported by Chairman Kerry Murphy, the Board has supported my suggestion of a review of the role of the Group. The review will focus on strengthening the Group role in operations response and preparedness.

Whether we call it "local command and control" or "the Group", there is a critical role in planning readiness of brigades in a local area. Group personnel usually bring a wealth of local knowledge – highlighted by the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission as something to be encouraged. Local command and control is essential to manage the initial response and the escalation of resources and information as an incident grows.

Since the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires, there has been a very significant effort to develop standards for and upgrade Level 3 Incident Control Centres (ICC) and Divisional Command Points (Div Com). Whilst the role of the ICC is clear, the role and function of the Div Com in initial attack and incident escalation is less so. It could be argued that, by sidelining the role of the Group in the CFA chain of command, we have also sidelined key people who are strong leaders and have a unique grasp on the local situation.

Finally, with the philosophy of Mission Command receiving very strong support, CFA will be further developing the Mission Command philosophy. The essence of Mission Command is more emphasis on decision making and pushing operational decision making down in the organisation to the lowest appropriate level. It would seem consistent to redefine and strengthen the role of local command and control and the role of the Group.

A small working group with nominees from Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) will start work on this important task immediately. Effective local command and control will result in better early incident management and fewer large fires.

There are many matters drawn to my attention as I travel the state. However, I continue to be humbled by the commitment of CFA members. You do good work – great work. Thank you for what you do for CFA and the community. Keep positive and keep up the great effort! ■

Euan Ferguson AFSM
Chief Officer



Flash flooding in Kyneton

BY MICHELLE ANDREWS

Kyneton Group brigades were called to assist SES with flooding in a number of areas around Kyneton and Malmesbury.

Incidents included water running through the Malmesbury Hotel as well as a number of shops and houses in the township. Assistance was also provided to the Malmesbury Youth Justice Centre for flash flooding. Kyneton also bore the brunt of the heavy downpour, with flooding to the police station and a number of houses. Trees were also down across the region.

SES set up an Incident Control Centre in the Kyneton Fire Station with the support of the local CFA infrastructure. Control was then handed over to the Incident Control Centre in Epsom, with Kyneton Fire Station running as the Divisional Command Centre.

Brigade members responded to over 100 calls in the local area, working through the night cutting up fallen trees, filling sandbags and sandbagging homes. ■



Photo by Michelle Andrews

BEULAH'S BEST WORK

On January 21, the Yarriambiack Creek at Beulah rose 25 centimetres between 8.30am and midday. "A warning for evacuation was put out," said Captain Alan Smith, "but I was very confident of the levees. A strike team from District 16 worked overnight on an earthen levee around the school as well as sandbagging and were relieved by our Group, the Southern Mallee Group."



JEPARIT SHOWS THE SPIRIT

Jeparit recorded the highest daily rainfall of any Victorian town during the January floods with 161.2 millimetres falling in just one day. Jeparit Fire Brigade was at the forefront of their community's effort to save their town from inundation. *Photo by Raylene Werner*



BARINGHUP FEELS THE FORCE

Baringhup was cut in half by flood waters. "We had to evacuate the shed," said Captain Brendan McKnight. "It had three or four inches through it. We had one tanker on one side of the Loddon and one on the other. We were hedging our bets." The Cairn Curran Reservoir above Baringhup let 80,000 megalitres through the gates as the Loddon River flooded. *Photo by Brendan McKnight*



QUAMBATOOK: A TOWN SAVED

Pauline Gardner was one of the many Quambatook community and brigade members working frantically for more than a week so the town could keep its head above water. "I think people can't believe that they've done what they've done. It's been sheer blood and guts," she said. *Photo by Mick Bourke*



HORSHAM STEMS THE TIDE

Horsham brigade members took on a range of duties through both the response and recovery phases of local flooding. Here members are shown directing traffic in the town centre. *Photo by Alison Aprhys*



RUPANYUP TAKES THE WATERS

Rupanyup pumper spent more than 48 hours pumping non-stop when the January water was at its height. The entire Dunmunkle Group assisted with manpower and pumping. *Photo by Campbell Hair*



ALLANSFORD HOLDS ITS BREATH

CFA worked shoulder-to-shoulder with locals, SES and DSE in Allansford as the January 17 peak approached. Crews from Allansford, Warrnamabool and Koroit were activated at 11am with two pumpers, one tanker and one quickfill pumping water back into the Hopkins River from the drains. The threat was water flowing into the back of Allansford and reaching houses. *Photo by Mathew Deans*



MEMBERS AFFECTED IN SKIPTON

The Mount Emu Creek at Skipton peaked on Saturday 15 January. "The station's on a hill so that's alright," said Skipton brigade member Ian Nash, "but quite a few of our members were upset about their houses being completely inundated. The water was eight sandbags high at one particular house. When the flood hit, we ended up with one truck on each side of the river which was good. We could work both sides. "Yalla-Y-Poorra and Carranballac from the district were supporting us and so was Mingay [from District 6]. Once water hit us, they started to think about what that was going to mean for them." *Photo by Ian Nash*



NATIMUK CUT IN HALF

The town of Natimuk was cut in half on January 12 with the local brigade and others in the Natimuk Group assisting with evacuations. *Photo courtesy of Paul Carracher, Wimmera Mail-Times*



Two sides of the flood

BY DARREN GREVIS-JAMES

CFA District 17 Community Education Coordinator, Jenny McGennicken saw the flood disaster from both sides – as an Information Officer in the Level 3 Incident Control Centre (ICC) and as a resident who was cut off as the flood surrounded her home in Horsham.

Jenny said the floods were a very different experience for those who have lived and worked through the dangers of major bushfire. “With fire you can see, hear and smell it coming,” Jenny said. “Floods are all about waiting to see what’s coming at you over a much longer period of time. It’s the great unknown, wondering what will happen when the water arrives. The hardest part is definitely the waiting.”

“People have said Horsham dodged a bullet – we didn’t. It was only the huge amount of community work done in sandbagging and preparation that prevented even more properties and businesses being inundated by water. “There’s been incredible community spirit here.”

Working in the Level 3 ICC was not new for Jenny. She’s been an information officer in ICCs many times. But she admits this time was somewhat different. Like other Level 3 ICCs during the flood crisis, it was a wider multiagency environment with SES as the lead agency.

“It took time to settle in initially but, after a few days, it never came down to where or what agency you came from. Everyone just pitched in and got on with their job. It was a great learning experience for us all,” Jenny added.

Jenny believes radio played an exceptional support role informing the community in the Wimmera. Local ACE radio stations dropped all usual programming and dedicated 24 hours a day broadcasting flood information.

“For the first time ever, certainly in this part of Victoria, radio broadcast the local community information meetings live to air. People who were trapped on properties or on far-flung farms in outlying districts could hear live information delivered in a series of public meetings coordinated by the Shire of Hindmarsh and the other agencies.” ■



Jenny McGennicken



Proud members of Pyramid Hill brigade



Heavy-duty pumping. Photo by Helen Bartels

Dirty Deeds Done Dirt Cheap

BY LEITH HILLARD

The ring tone on Pyramid Hill member Geoff Burke’s phone is the AC/DC classic Dirty Deeds Done Dirt Cheap. It’s appropriate for a member of a brigade that saved their town. Ask in the local pub and they’ll tell you, “CFA saved the town”.

“And the town was with us every step of the way,” says Geoff.

On January 17, the water reached Pyramid Hill. The town had already built earthen levees and used local grunt to sandbag the township perimeter.

“We were patrolling all night and reporting back on UHF and hand helds to Tony [Mullins, brigade captain] in the FCV [Forward Command Vehicle],” says Geoff.

The brigade rang the fire siren three times over the course of the emergency and locals came to the station to help out.

“It came down to local knowledge,” continues Geoff. “Offers came to us about equipment and who could get it and we’d put it into play. We had to build what we could manage quickest; not necessarily what everyone wanted.”

Geoff praises Tony’s practical leadership. “There were about eight people in charge of different areas. We’d call Tony and tell him what we were thinking of doing and he’d say, ‘If you think it’s the right thing to do, just do it’.

“It feels good. We fought a war and we won.”

The sandbags and levees at Pyramid Hill will remain in place until at least the end of the year. ■



Aerial view of traffic in floodwater



Photo by Robert Bury



Brigade members check sandbags around the Benjeroop Hall. Photo by Keith Clough



Getting equipment out after levee break at Benjeroop. Photo by Keith Clough

Sector Commander on the road BY LEITH HILLARD

Friday 14 January was the start of a road trip with a difference when Keith Clough, Lake Charm member and Kerang Group Officer, was appointed District 20 sector commander.

“The Sector Commander is really just a conduit: the middle man, the go-to man,” says Keith. “My job was to get information and pass it on; address any issues that arose.

“I started off working out of the Quambatook Fire Station. Nine inches of rain fell at Quambatook on Saturday 15th, so there was flash flooding compounded by the flood event at Charlton. The water rising by Monday was a combination of both. The power was out and landline and mobile phones were down.

“By Tuesday the levees were put up and we had CFA and RFS [New South Wales Rural Fire Service] strike teams sandbagging in town and some outlying areas.

“I worked with the flood wardens and Victoria Police and, given the details of what was coming down the river, we looked at the worst case scenario. We decided to plan for 600 millimetres higher than the September 2010 flood height and it actually got to that. The actual peak was 3.1 metres on Wednesday.

“We had pumps including a couple of larger quickfills working around the clock for a week and they were getting rid of the flash flooding. We

had water coming up out of drains and seepage.

“We got some very solid assistance from the Kerang Div Comm and Swan Hill Incident Control Centre. They responded in a timely manner.”

Keith briefly returned home to Lake Charm and assisted with local knowledge before moving on to Benjeroop, located in the Murrabit brigade area. Murrabit lies between the Murray and Little Murray rivers. The Loddon River reaches the Little Murray at Benjeroop.

“I worked on flooding in Lake Charm and Benjeroop in 1973 and 1974 but back then I was doing the grunt work,” says Keith. “This time I was working out of the Benjeroop Hall which was surrounded by knee-deep water. It became impractical and I moved to our Group FCV [Forward Command Vehicle] to work.

“It got down to trying to save as many individual houses as possible but the water came in so quick in the end. In some houses it was two metres deep and not a lot of people have been able to get back in yet. The roads are still closed and there’s still water flowing through. It’s brutal.”

“People pulled together and did some exceptional work. The community work done in advance was invaluable. There were some good results achieved. There was a great brigade and community response in all districts. An event like this brings the strength of community out.” ■



A hard rain for Kerang

BY ANDRE BROWN

Friday 14 January, Kerang brigade deployed a strike team to assist SES with sandbagging at Durham Ox. It was here we realised there wasn't a bit of water heading our way but rather a wall of water. Word soon spread around town...brace yourselves!

Sunday 16th we were called to Appin South to help evacuate three people and 80 dogs. The devastation that hit Appin was a well-heeded warning for Kerang.

Tuesday 18th and it was all on. The day started with a person trapped in a car and it was not long before we were helping to evacuate everyone down this same road. By afternoon the water was sneaking into town from the south and, although a levee had been built around the power station, it was becoming clear that more needed to be done.

The afternoon turned into a night many will always remember, as every able-bodied person in town made their way to help. The man who bought an old army duck had a grin from ear-to-ear as he ferried people across to Power Station Island. A human chain stretching about 300 metres shifted sandbags tirelessly. The night became long and dark but the determination and effort was relentless.

Moose (Mark Henderson) summed it up rather well: "If Kerang was a pug fighter, you wouldn't want to get in the ring with it."

For the next seven days the fight continued. Sandbags: we loaded them, lifted them and carted them. I couldn't give a toss if I never see one of those things again and my kid won't be getting a sandpit for Christmas

There are so many stories: creeks flowing backwards; running over carp on the highway with Greenie (Dennis Greenwood); me learning to cook two-minute noodles; Lyn (Steel) laughing at me for reading the noodle instructions first.

Thank you to so many people who stood side by side with us: our out-of-town brothers who hurried up and waited perfectly; to the wonderful women who fed us – a godsend as I was down to two cans of baked beans. To the people who opened their homes and gave without expecting return, you have sown good seeds and will reap accordingly.

It will probably be tougher as we help those who have suffered loss from the floods but I am confident that together we will kick it.

Andre Brown is Fourth Lieutenant, Kerang Fire Brigade. ■



Andre Brown (front right) and fellow brigade members put in the hard yards.
Photo by Dennis Greenwood



Photo by Robert Bury

Murrabit on the brink

BY LEITH HILLARD

Andrew Leahy is the captain of Murrabit brigade in a township of 290 people. He was one of five brigade members called to Serpentine to sandbag in mid January.

"It was a bit of an eye-opener," he says. "It gave us some idea of how much water there was. From there we were called out to Kerang when they were evacuating but I asked for us to be relieved. We needed to come home.

"We had earthen levees and the established irrigation channels but we were having breaches. One night it blew out and an evacuation notice went out. There was a severe threat to houses and potential for the town to go under. We had three fall-back lines as part of our plan and we ended up at our last line.

"Excavators were brought in from outside and we built levees along the road so people could get in and out. We were cut off from Benjeroop, Kerang and Lake Boga at different times.

"We were lucky to have a kitchen at our local hall and it was turning out 120 meals a night at the height of the floods. People had moved out of their homes and were camped around there.

"We had a lot of help from outside. The army came. SES came. Kerang brigade brought us tons of sandbags and Koondrook lent us their FCV. We used it to check levels every three hours for more than a week.

"Our brigade showed its true colours. You just do the job when it comes down to it and, in the end, the town was alright. About 20 houses had water over the floor but the town businesses were alright.

"I just wore myself down. It was really hard to take yourself out of the picture even for a few hours. My family picked up and ran the farm for about 10 days. Three weeks of our lives are just gone. I don't know where they went." ■



Warracknabeal Fire Brigade ready to serve. Photo by Alison Aprhys

Warracknabeal flood ready BY ALISON APRHYS

Fill over 20,000 sandbags, add a few hundred volunteers including local CFA members, a huge dose of community spirit and a whole lot of hard work and you have the township of Warracknabeal pulling together as it prepared to battle the flooding of nearby Yarriambiak Creek.

Tuesday 18 January it was all hands on deck as members of the Warracknabeal Urban Fire Brigade (WUFB) joined their colleagues from

SES, Red Cross and Victoria Police along with local service groups and Yarriambiak Shire staff, to prepare their small town for the predicted floods.

A community meeting held that night at the Warracknabeal Town Hall attracted approximately one quarter of the town's population.

WUFB captain Ron Zanker said that his members did an amazing job. "Everyone in town has pulled together. No one has stood back," he says. ■

Harrow-ing flood risk BY LEITH HILLARD

Show of strength from the Jilpanger Group in support of SES helped reassure residents of Harrow as the Glenelg River rose on Thursday 9 December.

"We called the local Group by pager and got 25 to 30 from across the District," says Group Officer Greg Hobbs, a member of Douglas brigade. "About 15 of them alone were from Telangatuk."

Also in attendance were members of Clear Lake, Connewirricoo, Miga

Lake and Toolondo alongside Douglas and Harrow volunteers. They worked shoulder to shoulder with police, SES and the local shire and townspeople.

"Emergency management went really well across the board," says District 17 Operations Officer David Chugg. "The pagers worked well. Our members pitched in even though it wasn't directly affecting a lot of them. It emphasises the close working relationships we have with communities and the other emergency services." ■

Records broken in Rochester

BY KEITH PAKENHAM AND LEITH HILLARD

Rochester Captain Mick Hassell considered himself lucky to have had four hours sleep on Sunday night 16 January. Since being activated through an SES request on Friday 14 January, members sandbagged and evacuated residents using the trucks. "They were initially the only vehicles in town capable of reaching isolated people," said Mick, "but by Saturday afternoon, evacuations had to be done by boats."

After one member was nearly swept away while rescuing people, brigade members tied themselves to the tanker so they could safely rescue others who were also in danger of being swept away. Groups of up to 12 residents were rescued and transported to safety using the two

brigade tankers; an action that was undertaken many times.

"On 17 January the water was receding and we were on the truck delivering bread, milk and water to isolated homes. We also helped about nine of our members whose houses were inundated.

"We had about 150-odd millimetres of water through the station. We were going to give our DivCom [Divisional Command Centre] its first run but we had to abandon it by about noon on Saturday.

"We had wonderful assistance from Elmore brigade and brigades from the Northern Campaspe, Deakin and Waranga Groups through it all."

Most of the members of Rochester brigade had flood water through their properties and homes. ■



Ian Sheldrick (centre) and the strike team are thanked for cleaning the Durham Ox Memorial Hall



Domestic chores for Strike Team 2305



Mop-and-bucket team

BY IAN SHELDRIK

Strike team 2305 was deployed to Bridgewater for a very meaningful and worthwhile four-day flood recovery assignment. Our first destination was near Dingee to assist in clean up at the bus depot.

In line with Fireline Leadership principles, we established our team values: contact with people, patience, teamwork and local communities. These values guided us in choosing the tasks we might successfully accomplish and supported the strengths of our personnel. These values were on show in the Durham Ox area where the community hall, public toilet block and nearby residents' properties became our challenges.

Australia Day provided me with one of those unforgettable moments you get in CFA. By radio, we were asked to attend a property that water had penetrated. Much work had already been performed by the family and the strain was evident.

Unprompted, our crew members offered their sandwiches, drinks and ration pack goodies, which were gratefully accepted by the family

members. We then got to work, shifting pot plants, furniture and sundry items so that silt and grime could be shovelled/hosed/mopped out. It was a top effort to get that part of the house almost liveable again.

My fellow strike team leader Alan Edwards described this deployment very well. "We worked under a different structure from a fire situation. Crew members were empowered to do as they saw fit and performed their tasks admirably. It was definitely one of the most rewarding strike teams I've been on."

Ian Sheldrick was District 23 strike team leader and is a member of Killawarra brigade. ■



Sandbagging at Lake Boga. Photos by Eric Collier



The spirit of Australia

BY ERIC COLLIER

Loddon Mallee people have been badly affected by years of drought. This flood event was a real kick in the guts for them. Participating in this strike team was a positive way District 8 personnel could help our fellow Victorians and show them our support.

Our strike team was deployed on Australia Day, and I couldn't think of a better way for us to demonstrate what the Australian spirit is all about.

Eric Collier was a member of Strike Team 0861. ■



Photo Courtesy of the Colac Herald



Doreen tanker crew from Strike Team 1422 take a break. Photo by Robert Bury

The clean team

District 22 strike team was formed by members from the Shepparton, Mooroopna, Strathmerton, Violet Town, Mooroopna, Yarrawonga, Nagambie, Longwood and Tallygaroopna brigades. They spent most of their five-day duty in flood-ravaged Bridgewater.

Strike team leader Ian Martin told *The Shepparton News* that cleaning out flooded homes “was clearly an emotional task for the residents. It was one which the strike team undertook with great commitment and in a compassionate manner”. ■



Picking a ration pack. Photo by Robert Bury



Firies to the fore

BY JENNY POLLARD

They became a welcome presence around Charlton – those distinctive red fire trucks bearing names from places all around the state.

Strike teams from Regions 2, 5, 6, 7, 9 and a variety of other localities were just some of the 120-plus CFA volunteers who worked solid shifts cleaning homes, pumping water and generally helping Charlton residents get back on their feet.

Australia Day saw crews helping residents bring new furniture into homes, checking on others who might need an extra pair of hands, and offering a boost to those moving into the recovery phase.

Cleaning mud out of the Charlton swimming pool was a massive job done by crews from Coimadai, Bacchus Marsh and Point Cook. The school clean ups were supported by a tanker from Romsey while house

clean ups were facilitated by the Bolinda/ Monegeeta tanker.

Strike Team 0280 Eppalock Group and Strike Team 1421 Bacchus Marsh pumped water, cleaned houses and helped those in need around the township of Charlton.

Gippsland-based Strike Team 909 had been in town since the previous Sunday night, but were sleeping at the camp at Huntly and travelling up and down to Charlton each day. Undeterred by this imposition, they said travelling wasn't a problem - they were just pleased to be helping out.

Other crews were accommodated at St. Arnaud.

“These guys are wonderful,” said local Greg King as his empty house was being refurbished. “We just want to thank each and every one of them.” ■



The Chief at the Divisional Command Centre set up at Kerang Fire Station



District 20 Operations Officer Mark Owens shows the Chief the remarkable community effort that went in to sandbagging the Kerang power distribution substation



The Chief praised the work of Rochester members, some of whom told how they have lost everything. He was told of operational concerns during the floods and exchanged ideas about improvements



The Chief met the proud members of Quambatook brigade who, along with members of their community, maintained 24 hour patrols of the township levees



Murrabit brigade members put Euan in the picture about their mighty effort to save their community and the vital assistance they received



The Chief attended Mildura Fire Station and was briefed on the extent of damage from the February 4 flood event which saw 173 homes and 249 other structures inundated or damaged

Chief Officer visits the frontline

BY CRAIG ROWSTON, PHOTOS BY CRAIG ROWSTON, HUGO ZOLLER AND JODI BUTLER

Chief Officer Euan Ferguson spent Saturday 22 January visiting flood-affected Victorian towns to speak to CFA members and inspect the clean-up efforts.

“This visit was to see how our people – especially those personally impacted by flooding – were coping, and thank them for the hard work they have put in so far. The overwhelming thing I took away was that CFA plays an incredibly important role in local communities and our

people do great work even when faced with personal hardships.

“A number of CFA members told me they were frustrated that they were not being utilised enough and wanted to help more. That said, many locals told us that CFA was lifting morale simply by being there.”

One month later the Chief was back in the Loddon Mallee Region to check on recovery efforts. ■



The Chief visited the Huntly operational base camp that housed over 100 emergency service people (mostly CFA) assisting with the flood effort



The Chief visits the Carisbrook station to meet members who had worked tirelessly to help people clean their homes



The Chief meets members of Charlton group outside flood-affected Charlton Fire Station where three members' cars were also damaged by raging flood waters



Captain Ian Boucher shows the Chief how high the water got in the Carisbrook Fire Station



The Chief discussed the dramatic local flood event with Pyramid Hill members and praised their leadership role in their community



The Chief met staff and volunteers from the South Gippsland, Leongatha / Korumburra and Mirboo groups in District 9 in February and enjoyed some friendly banter. He said, "If you take no other message from today, it is thank you for what you do in CFA. It's valuable work".



Photo by Glenn Mumford



Photo courtesy of the Herald Sun

DMOs drowning in repairs

BY LEITH HILLARD

One of the flow-on effects of flooding around the state has been water-damaged trucks pouring into District Mechanical Officers (DMOs).

The January flooding left 206 vehicles in the firefighting fleet water damaged, which amounted to 930 labour hours by DMOs. The material cost for inspection and repairs for that month alone was \$33,000. The February flooding left 93 vehicles water damaged, which has amounted to 385 labour hours so far.

“Our trucks are commercial trucks built for firefighting,” says Kangaroo Flat Officer in Charge Danny O’Neill. “We can’t go through big water without consequences.

“There’s general awareness of transmissions, diffs and gearboxes getting water in them but the brakes are our biggest problem. The park brake operates through the rear wheel cylinders with mechanical parts. Once the height of the water is roughly reaching the centre of

the axle, that component fills with water.

“The air master cylinder is mounted on the chassis. Once you apply the brakes when the vehicle is in water, that component also fills up with water.

“On top of that we’ve had headlights full of water and wet floor mats which means water got in the cabins. In those cases we were also trying to get rid of the stink.”

CRANBOURNE DMO FLAT OUT

Cranbourne Officer in Charge Glenn Mumford saw the same damage. “For some trucks it’s been a minor service in the field,” he says, “but we’ve also had urban appliances like pumpers with water in the engine oil. We were getting a lot of corrosion by the second week in.”

A speedy response was vital and workshops were at capacity with DMOs travelling from Geelong, Ballarat and Moe to assist. ■

Haystack fires ignite in the wet

BY DARREN GREVIS-JAMES

A consequence of the recent floods was a spate of haystack fires that flared up in many parts of the state, particularly in the major cropping areas of Victoria.

In District 17 of the Grampians Region, there were eight haystack fires in the first week of February alone.

Fire Investigator Chris Rosewall said many of the fires were caused by the extreme damp created following the 200-plus millimetres of rain that fell over a two-day period in the Wimmera.

“We had one fire that occurred in a stack of 500 bales, each bale weighing about three quarters of a tonne,” said Chris. “That’s a lot of fuel. The fires are caused by a combination of heat, oxygen and chemical reaction plus the movement of bales that let in air and suddenly you’ve got spontaneous combustion.”

Chris said the bales that catch fire include barley, wheat, oats, canola and lucerne. “Bales should be left in the paddock for several days to dry out properly before stacking them,” he says. ■



Urgent Charlton evacuation

BY JENNY POLLARD

The call went out to evacuate the south side of Charlton at 7:00pm on 14 January.

With the Avoca River rising rapidly, tankers were mobilised to move residents to higher ground. In many cases residents had to wade through waist high water to reach the safety of the tanker.

Providing support to Charlton brigade were Yeungroon, Teddywaddy, Wooroonook, Jeffcott, Donald, Corack, Wycheproof and Wycheproof South brigades. Charlton pumper had water in the motor by 8:00pm and mechanics from Swan Hill responded, bringing the Region spare with them.

By mid evening the flood zone was precarious with each roadway in town becoming a mini river. The water flow was so strong that the Charlton tanker was pushed forward by the current when the hand break was released. After the power was cut at 11.45pm, tankers operated only by the light of their red and blue beacons as the headlights were under water.

Evacuations continued until around 3am. The water was ferocious and the situation deteriorated but there was no panic. People were focussed on reaching the tankers which had to remain in the centre of the roads. As well as ferrying many pets, one of the more unusual requests involved the evacuation of a sheep.



The main street of Charlton. Photo by Elisa Grobe

Loddon Mallee Regional Manager Pat O'Brien assisted with the evacuations and Operations Manager Bill Johnstone worked out of the Incident Control Centre at Charlton Shire Hall.

Commendation needs to be given to all CFA members involved with the successful rescue of many people which, towards the end, was carried out in trying and dangerous circumstances. ■



Photo by Louise McGillivray

The crisis peaks

BY LOUISE MCGILLIVRAY

This is the view (see left) from the Wooroonook tanker in the main street of Charlton at 10:30pm after a rescue. Evacuated residents loaded on the back of the tanker were being taken to the drop-off point, but not before the rescue of an elderly gentleman. Allan McGillivray had left the vehicle pictured and waded through chest deep water to coax him from his home. The current was very strong as we were close to the creek. Water was four inches deep in the floor of this vehicle as the gentleman climbed in. Once all evacuees on board were taken to the drop-off point, the four wheel drives were stood down from evacuations. We continued in tankers until 3:00am. ■

Malmsbury reaches out

BY ANTHONY STEPHENS

Members of Malmsbury Fire Brigade returned to Charlton in late February to deliver quality donated goods they had organised within their community and Kyneton. Members first travelled there in a District 2 strike team in January but returned in a prime mover laden with everything from toys to furniture. ■

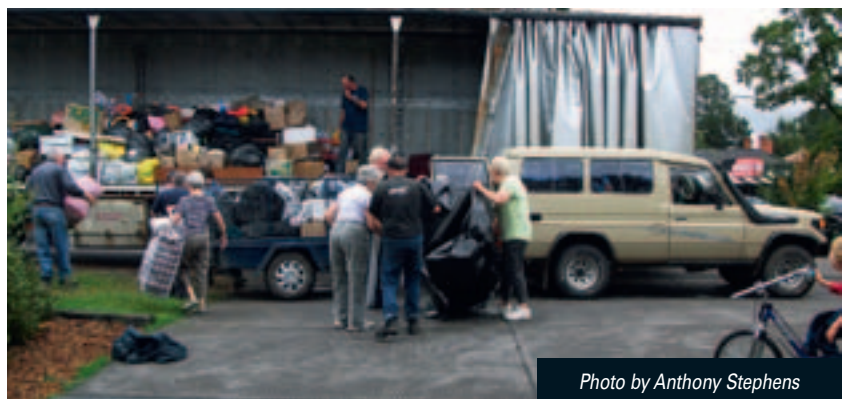


Photo by Anthony Stephens

FEATURE

State Emergency Resp



Sandbagging Patchell Bridge over the Loddon River, Kerang.
Photo supplied by Andre Brown

FIRE OR FLOODS -IT'S STILL AN EMERGENCY

THE STATE EMERGENCY RESPONSE PLAN

BY DARREN GREVIS-JAMES

For CFA, the State Emergency Response Plan is not just about big bushfires. It covers all emergency incidents, all enshrined in the Victorian Emergency Management Manual. But how did the State Emergency Response Plan function with an unprecedented flood event that stretched the operational response of emergency management agencies?

The January floods drew together all the state's fire and emergency services, Victoria Police and a wide range of government agencies and essential service entities.

CFA's Regional Commander for the Loddon Mallee Region, Mike Wassing, said the State Emergency Response Plan came together quickly and efficiently. "We had a trial-run back in September last year, so the concept of interagency operations for a flood event was certainly not foreign," Mike said.

"Initially our response began with a 'Warning Order' that talked about preparedness; a heads-up, if you like. It mentioned our mission, and our predicted direct response to flash flooding that evolved into riverine flooding. It identified things such as tasking for brigades, groups and District Mechanical Officers."

In Bendigo, a Regional Emergency Management Team was set up that included all the key agencies with Victoria's State Emergency Service

(SES) as the lead agency. This team expanded to include other agencies such as the Departments of Human Services and Primary Industries, catchment authorities and the utility companies such as Powercor, Coliban Water and SP Ausnet.

As the flood situation worsened, a Level 3 Incident Control Centre (ICC) was established at Epsom just north of Bendigo. At various times, CFA members were Deputy Incident Controllers and appointed to other key positions in the Incident Management Teams (IMTs).

"One of the first towns to be hit hard was Carisbrook where the water came up particularly fast," Mike said. "We had to move the entire town population to a relief centre. Within hours we then had to move them on to a relief centre away from Carisbrook."

"In some places, CFA played a critical role in the flood event. This was due to the isolation of some towns where there is no permanent SES presence. CFA brigades were doing house checks for safety and found a smouldering electric blanket in a house at Carisbrook."

We recognise that we are not the flood experts, but what we do offer in this type of emergency event is access to facilities and resources that SES doesn't necessarily have."

Towards the end of January, the Level 3 ICC moved from Bendigo to Swan Hill as the floods began to move along the Murray. "At one point

we had a 90 by 50 kilometre-wide mass of water shifting through central districts to north western Victoria,” said Mike. “It was an enormous floodplain moving at the rate of one to two kilometres per day.”

In February, the ICC in Swan Hill coordinated the monitoring of the levees and movement of water. Significant amounts of water remained in the lakes around Swan Hill and Kerang for many weeks. More than 4000 people were displaced; 23 relief centres were set up and 11 recovery centres established. In early February, CFA also coordinated the distribution of \$3 million in emergency grants as part of our recovery operation.

LESSONS LEARNT

Mike Wassing believes there have been some important lessons for CFA in the multiagency incident management of a major flood event. Partnerships and personal relations between the emergency management agencies and Victoria Police are essential in the fast start-up of a cohesive joint operational team.

“If you already know people really well, you can provide honest advice that can help sort things out very quickly,” said Mike. “CFA and DSE [Department of Sustainability and Environment] are highly accustomed to managing joint IMTs, and that’s evolved because we have deliberately built on our partnership in recent years.”

As a Regional Commander, Mike has enormous praise for CFA and all the agencies that came from other parts of the state to support the efforts in the Loddon Mallee Region. “It was outstanding the response we got and that continued over several weeks”, he said.

“The strength of support from CFA personnel everywhere has been sincerely appreciated. It continues to be a huge effort from staff and volunteers across multiple agencies within Loddon Mallee, and we all remain focussed on the support of our communities in need.

“The force of that support has a unifying effect. It reinforces the feeling of the broader CFA – and what a great organisation it is.”

HORSHAM AND THE WEST

In the western half of Victoria, the floods also drew CFA into a multiagency response and recovery operation mainly centred on Horsham and Warrnambool.

At Horsham, Acting District 17 Operations Manager John Maguire was involved in the Level 3 ICC under the command of SES.

“Local knowledge was very valuable,” said John. “Reports coming into the ICC from CFA members who have an intimate knowledge of local infrastructure and the landscape were of real value and support to SES.”

GRAMPIANS

“CFA brigades did a great job at Beaufort and other flood-affected places,” said Phil Beasley, Regional Commander for Grampians Region. “I was very impressed with the tremendous leadership our brigades were able to provide their local communities in dealing with an emergency that is not as familiar as bushfire. One of the things that CFA does well is that it’s adaptive to a range of emergency events.”

Like Mike Wassing, Phil believes there is an opportunity to learn from this emergency and improve for future events. “This was the first time that CFA had dipped into this level of incident management involving such a broad range of agencies in a major flood crisis,” said Phil. “At the

start things were a bit clunky, but soon the system began to work well. We need to look at the potential to learn and understand the SES way of doing things. Perhaps there may be more opportunities to conduct interagency training.

“We’ve come a long way in this area of emergency management with DSE and we operate very well with DSE in ICCs in the Grampians region.

GEELONG AND THE SOUTH WEST

In Geelong, a Level 3 ICC was also set up to deal with floods in the Barwon area. It was later moved to Warrnambool to be closer to the flood areas.

District 7 Group Officer Alistair Drayton was appointed Deputy Incident Controller at Geelong. “SES operational terminology is sometimes different from the fire services,” he said, “but it did not interfere with the ability to run a cohesive Level 3 IMT.”

“Many CFA trucks, particularly in the Allansford area, were used for pumping out rising water where there were major overflows from drains. CFA also supported the operation with sandbagging, monitoring local flood water levels and mapping of water movement.”

Alistair is an enthusiastic supporter of the Australasian Inter-Service Incident Management System (AIIMS). The system can be applied over all emergency management and it proved that it works well in a flood event.

“I think the best illustration of that sort of flexibility was when DSE removed the tanks and pumps from the back of their four wheel drive slip-on units and allowed these vehicles to be used to transport sandbags,” said Alistair. “It’s a good example of how well the fire services work together during major events. It’s seamless.” ■

JEPARIT LOCAL KNOWLEDGE GOES A LONG WAY

As the flood disaster in far western Victoria began to unfold in late January, a DivCom was set up at Jeparit about 75 kilometres northwest of Horsham. It was one of many established in the flood areas throughout Victoria.

Chris Rosewall, Group Officer for the Ebenezer Group, was the Deputy to the Division Commander at Jeparit.

“It was the first time I had worked in a DivCom with SES as the controlling agency,” Chris said. “The whole thing worked extremely well. Even though the incident was very different from the familiar fire situation, CFA and SES applied the same planning and response approach.

“Local knowledge is an essential component of DivComs: knowing who’s where and what’s available from where. It’s amazing what farmers have in their backyards that comes in handy someday.

“We provided ground observers and fed that information back to the ICC in Horsham along with other information about local resources, catering for volunteers and our plans in the immediate area around Jeparit.

The volunteers filled and laid 12,000 sandbags in two days. It was a great team effort as everyone pulled their weight and pitched in to do what they could.” ■

YOU'VE EARNED IT



Emergency Memberlink is a key recognition program that thanks members for their significant contribution and dedication to CFA and creating safer communities.



Through Emergency Memberlink, members can receive discounts and benefits on a wide range of products and services. In excess of 250 offers are now available, with new benefits being added regularly.

Details of the offers can be found in the Emergency Memberlink Guide which is sent out with all new Memberlink Cards and on the Memberlink website www.emergencymemberlink.com.au. Be sure to visit the website regularly to keep up to date.

There are a number of ways you can access your Memberlink Benefits. These include:

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- **Online Shopping** – goods below RRP delivered state-wide.
- **Purchase Cards** – Safeway/Caltex and Coles Gift Cards available through your Memberlink team at 5% discount.
- **Discount Vouchers** – time limited, special offers updated regularly. Members can download these vouchers from the Memberlink website or call the Memberlink Team.

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FEATURE Welfare Services

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN WELFARE SERVICES

BY PAUL GARVEY

The effectiveness of peers, chaplains and psychologists was apparent in the aftermath of the February 2009 fires. In March 2009 alone, welfare services delivered approximately 6800 hours of support.

The 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission (VBRC) recognised the importance of welfare services and encouraged all agencies to continue providing support for members.

Although constant improvement is part of our basic philosophy, a formal review of welfare service processes is underway to identify ways to bolster existing programs. The review will include consultation with Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV), industrial bodies, Operations staff, peers and peer coordinators.

We are already making the support we provide to brigades more flexible and responsive. While defusions and debriefings are effective in the right circumstances, they are not always what a brigade needs. Peers and chaplains have also been providing support in new ways such as calming and stabilising after an incident, connecting people with their own social supports and setting up longer term services if required.

CFA will identify the lessons learnt from the review to provide a more effective service to members, especially during critical events.

There are many ways you can utilise CFA's confidential welfare services:

- CFA Peers via District Office or Headquarters
- local Chaplains via the District Office or Headquarters
- PPC Worldwide (psychologists and counsellors) by phoning 1300 361 008
- Converge International (chaplains and psychologists) by phoning 1800 337 068
- CFA After Hours Welfare Support 1800 628 616
- CISM Consultant by phoning 9262 8560

THREE ANONYMOUS CFA MEMBERS PROVIDE INSIGHT INTO WELFARE SUPPORT:

CFA PEER SUPPORT COORDINATOR

My brigade captain recommended I see a peer support coordinator. I cannot sing that man's praises highly enough. The peer support coordinator helped me get through some very difficult times.

I think that at CFA we expect everyday people to go out and do extraordinary things and, maybe in the past, we took the attitude of, 'She'll be right'. In this day and age you can't go along like that.

Like most people, I needed strategies to cope. The scope of what the peer support people do is amazing. They are the unsung heroes; the behind-the-scenes people who really matter. I think it's that Aussie spirit and that desire to help people.

I'm now thinking about doing my mental first aid certificate and becoming a peer myself.

I'm a CFA member and my sons are members and we want to give something back.

CHAPLAINS, PSYCHOLOGISTS AND COUNSELLORS

I saw the service advertised on a noticeboard at the fire station and was referred to a psychologist.

That person was brilliant. I saw them once and, after that, talked with them over the phone.

It's totally confidential. The service is very professional but also really genuine. They follow up with you and make the time to be available. You can say anything and know that no one is going to judge you. They were able to give me objective advice and good practical strategies.

It's different to speaking with friends or family. I didn't want to burden people and I also didn't want to be seen as a whinger.

I totally recommend that anyone feeling stressed or having recurring thoughts access the service. It's free, confidential and helped me move forward.

PEER PROGRAM

Every time I called the peer they were there quickly. I didn't realise they can also help with things that are not CFA related.

I accessed the service a number of times over a few years and would recommend it to anybody. It is still very helpful. ■



The Teddywaddy shed flooded again in January. Photo by Jenny Pollard



Warracknabeal members during the January flood. Photo by Alison Aprhys



From left, Nicki Lund, Pip Johnson, Sandra O'Connor. Photo by Gerard Scholten

Female volunteers firmly in place BY HUGO ZOLLER

Three senior female CFA volunteers marked International Women's Day by calling for more women to join their ranks.

Wandong Captain Sandra O'Connor, Tallarook Captain Pip Johnson and Eildon Lieutenant Nicki Lund are just three of the record number of 11,829 female volunteers – over 20 per cent of total volunteers.

In 1997, Sandra was part of a mothers group, which often heard the local CFA siren go unanswered because most of the male members were away at work. So, en masse, all 16 of them signed up, half taking operational roles, while the rest provided support.

"The ones that didn't want to get on the back of the truck decided they could help by babysitting and picking kids up from school while the rest of us responded to the call," says Sandra.

Pip Johnson says she has experienced nothing but acceptance and

support since joining her brigade. "What women bring to CFA is the ability to multi-task, especially if you're a mum," she says. "You're always wrangling a thousand things at once. It's no different responding to an incident. We can be listening to a dozen different radios at once and people shouting instructions and we still get the job done."

Over her six years in CFA, Nicki Lund has seen the number of women in her brigade grow to around 25 per cent. "I'm hoping I can be a role model for other female members," says Nicki, "and they can realise that the roles traditionally done by men can be done by women."

Contrary to some media reports, overall CFA membership has remained steady, as has been the trend for the past few years, with 1,176 new volunteers recruited in the past six months. ■

Breaking down the barriers BY HUGO ZOLLER

Geelong City Fire Brigade showed 25 young refugees around their new station in January. The morning's activities were part of the three day Breaking Barriers program, which introduces new arrivals to life in Australia through camps and community activities.

An important part of the program is to meet emergency services personnel and learn about their role in the community.

"Many of these young people have come from countries where uniformed officials are feared and they bring that fear with them to Australia," says Geelong City Leading Firefighter Adam Shearer. "We want to show them that firefighters and other emergency services are approachable."

The youngsters, aged between 14 and 21, have recently arrived from Burma and Sudan. ■



Mick Bourke



From the CEO Volunteer Leadership

With memories of the January and February floods still raw for many, I want to pay tribute to the communities who defended themselves, and especially those who suffered the impacts.

With family in the town of Quambatook, I spent almost a week there in January and witnessed first hand the strength of our volunteer capacity and the resilience of the community. Their vital role in community leadership was tested as the town faced the biggest flood ever seen.

That leadership is based on sound CFA training and the harnessing of local volunteer and community knowledge gained, in some cases, over generations. The invaluable expertise of river wardens was harnessed. The local community responded with all the resourcing needed. All locals, including women and many children, rolled up their sleeves and worked with all their might when their town needed them. Local businesses and contractors provided food, front-end loaders and hours and days of their labour free of charge. The earthen levees to protect the town were patrolled all day and night and an eye kept on the pumps.

Much of the work was done by CFA volunteers and that's no accident. Pat O'Brien and his team at Loddon Mallee Region have ensured that the volunteers have the capability and enough capacity to respond to any emergency, fire or flood.

That strong capacity was supplemented by other experienced CFA people brought in from outside the community. Neighbouring brigades were invaluable. Local government provided significant support through their key committed and practical people, while the strong arms of Victoria Police offered leadership, support and presence.

The town hub was the Quambatook Fire Station: a tin shed with a meeting room and small communications room. People were working out of the shed 24 hours a day in roles that may have intimidated them at first, but it was a highly supportive environment. That's what communities are all about.

Our volunteers had the capacity to organise, coordinate and make, or support, some hard but well-informed decisions, relying on local resources to enact those decisions.

A community was tested and proven to be unified, resourceful and determined. The result was every house in town remaining high and dry. Community resilience is something we read a lot about, but it was truly alive there.

Over the past six months, CFA has shown again that we are a community-based fire and emergency service and we can turn our hand to any urgent threat to our communities. We will act in either a lead or a support capacity to protect lives and property; in both response and recovery. ■

Mick Bourke
CEO



Photo by Jamie Mackenzie

Fireline Leadership's leading edge

BY LEITH HILLARD

There are at least 5000 volunteers in leadership positions across CFA from captains and lieutenants to incident controllers and strike team leaders.

Since 2005, CFA has run 68 Fireline Leadership courses offering structured leadership development. More than 1000 satisfied members have taken practical skills, greater self knowledge and confidence back to their brigades, their groups and their families.

"And they have a hell of a lot of fun in the process," says Fireline Leadership program coordinator Jamie Mackenzie. "It's not about SOPs [Standard Operating Procedure]. We lead people to think outside the principles and guidelines through two full weekends of workshops, discussions and exercises that are operational in flavour. Everyone gets the chance to step forward in a safe environment. It's for them to discover their own strengths.

"The lead instructor for each course is ex-US Special Forces. They have a high level operational background, but they've also done focused leadership training which means their experience has relevance. It's applied. They connect really quickly with our members and bring a different world view. They have credibility but, in return, they're just amazed by CFA culture and the commitment of our volunteers."

Four CFA instructors run the courses alongside their US colleague, with the logistical support of 15 volunteers statewide.

"Communication is the tool of leaders so that's the focus," continues Jamie. "You can see the flow-on benefits. Good leadership at brigade level means better retention and more opportunities.

"Brigades are about trucks and sheds, sure, but they're mostly about people working together, dealing with issues, dealing with stress, wanting to make a difference."

All members who complete the course link into an active network of past participants. Jamie and the other instructors also offer follow-up support to integrate the lessons learnt into the participants' brigades.

"It's quite amazing the effect the course has," says Jamie. "It's really hit a nerve with our people."

Fourteen courses will run between April and September this year in different parts of the state. Interested members should contact their brigade or district training office, sign up for some challenging fun and pack their Hawaiian shirt. ■

Chairman reflects on Challenge program

BY KERRY MURPHY

In January, I had the pleasure of attending the Challenge 2011 Fellowship Dinner at Fiskville. Together with fellow Board members, senior managers and VFBV executives, I heard each participant speak about what Challenge had meant to them. They told of the bonds that had formed and their pride in achievement during this once-in-a-lifetime experience.

Challenge is a program designed to take people out of their comfort zone. It encourages participants to test their physical and emotional limits and to set personal goals for the future.

The program aims to encourage both personal growth and the development of leadership skills. It achieves this through a combination of workshops at Fiskville followed by seven days in the Snowy River National Park with Outward Bound.

Last year I was wearing the Challenge jacket at the supermarket checkout. A woman tapped me on the shoulder and told me about the



remarkable influence the program had had on her daughter. From everything I have seen and heard about this program, I understand why.

I encourage all young CFA members to consider applying for this program as part of their ongoing development.

Information about Challenge 2012 can be found on Brigades Online and CFA Connect. ■



Fire Services Commissioner Craig Lapsley congratulates some of the winners



Photos by Sasha Reid

Speed and skill of Urban Juniors

BY PETER BEATON

It is four years since Tatura hosted the VFBV Junior Urban Championships, and the local committee found the juniors have been busy building their skills and numbers in the meantime.

Committee Secretary Geoff Wright declared the 2011 event a great weekend with 82 teams from all over Victoria lining up for the events. "Competitors and spectators added up to more than two thousand people present at the Tatura Centenary Track," said Geoff, "which made it a big weekend for the town.

And while the hard work of the committee paid off with a successful event, the hard work of the local juniors was rewarded with a win in the under 14s and a second place overall.

The Under 17 and Grand Aggregate winners were Pyramid Hill.

The Championships were officially opened by Parliamentary Secretary for Police and Emergency Services, Bill Tilley MP. Senior CFA personnel including Chief Officer Euan Ferguson and CEO Mick Bourke were also in attendance.

Sponsors for the weekend included Powercor Australia and Unilever Australia. ■

More detailed results are available on www.cfaconnect.net.au

DRY AGGREGATE:

1st	Maffra A	26 points
2nd	Pyramid Hill A	21 points
3rd	Wendouree A	20 points

WET AGGREGATE

1st	Pyramid Hill A	27 points
2nd	Tatura	24 points
3rd	Wendouree A	18 points

UNDER 14 YEARS AGGREGATE

1st	Tatura	42 points
2nd	Pyramid Hill A	37 points
3rd	Maffra A	16 points

UNDER 17 YEARS AGGREGATE

1st	Wendouree A	31 points
2nd	Maffra A	21 points
3rd	Kangaroo Flat A	16 points

GRAND AGGREGATE

1st	Pyramid Hill A	48 points
2nd	Tatura	43 points
3rd	Wendouree A	38 points



Members gather to repair damaged fences. Photos by Robert Melville and Geoff Stanton



Debriefing after the fire



Tostaree faces the flames

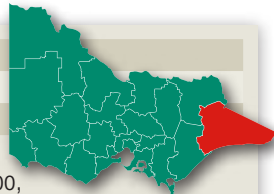
BY JASON LEIGH

Incident: Tostaree-Princes Highway fire

District: 11

Date: 1 February 2011

Brigades: Wairewa, Newmerella, Orbost, Marlo, Bemm, Buchan, Lakes Entrance, Toorloo, Johnsonville, Bruthen, Kalimna West, Metung, Bairnsdale, Bengworden, Fernbank, Flaggy Creek, Paynesville, Sarsfield, Hillside, Mount Taylor, Westbury, Darnum & Ellinbank, Drouin West, Moe South, Nilma North, Rosedale, Stratford, Briagolong, Sale, Munro



At the height of the Tostaree – Princes Highway fire, there was one strike team from District 9, one from District 10 and three from District 11 involved.

The fire claimed two houses in the Wombat Creek area with two horses killed. It resulted in a power outage for the towns east of Nowa Nowa (including Orbost, Mallacoota, Cann River) as around eight powerpoles were burnt out.

The response was coordinated from the Bairnsdale Incident Control Centre (ICC) as a joint operation with Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) who brought tankers, bulldozers and nearly a dozen firefighting aircraft – including two Canadian Convair water bombing planes.

“The fire started on private land and ran straight away to the edge of the coast,” said District 11 Operations Manager Bryan Russell. “It was quite different to what we’re used to. Fires around here are usually started by a lightning strike in the hills and then build up slowly from there, whereas this was quite a fast running scrub fire.

“It was unfortunate to lose two houses but luckily one was unoccupied. DSE and CFA crews were actively involved in protecting other properties nearby, and there were some good saves. Around 20

Wombat Creek residents were at risk but everyone got out early enough. Most headed to the community relief centre set up in Orbost.”

The fire was slowed down significantly when the south eastern edge ran into an area where DSE had already carried out a fuel reduction burn in 2010.

“Without that burn having taken place, I’m not sure what the consequences would have been,” said District 11 Brigade Administration Support Officer (BASO) Rob Melville. “There had also been a fuel reduction burn in 2009 which slowed down the north east edge of the fire. These both show just how essential these planned burns are.

“There was terrific cooperation between CFA and DSE on the fireground as well as in the Orbost office where I was. We had a terrific rapport. They’re a fantastic bunch of people.”

“Improved liaison between agencies allowed crews from VicRoads, East Gippsland Shire and SP Ausnet to get in quickly and assess the damage. It meant that the Princes Highway between Nowa Nowa and Newmerella was reopened within 24 hours. This previously could have taken a number of days.

“SP Ausnet was fantastic in getting the power fixed so quickly. There was a lot of work done to get those poles put up again.”

A public meeting in Wairewa the Monday after the fire ended in two separate rounds of applause for the CFA and DSE crews.

Newmerella Captain Des Ryan lost significant fencing while he was out fighting the fire, as well as a shed containing his old Datsun 120Y. CFA members from the district came out just days later to remove the damaged fencing and conduct clean up work on other properties in the area. Significant damage was also done to the property of Eddie and Paul Lavell from the Wairewa brigade, and Mount Taylor brigade was on hand to repair fencing.

The Tostaree – Princes Highway fire was declared contained on the afternoon of Friday, 4 February 2011. ■

Firefight gets bogged down

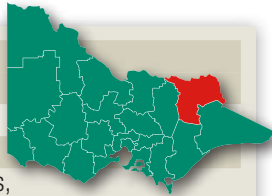
BY LEITH HILLARD

Incident: Murray Valley Highway grass and scrub fire

District: 24

Date: 5 December 2010

Brigades: Yarrowonga, Bowser, Browns Plains, Carlyle, Cornishtown, Norong, Killawarra, Wang North, Boorhaman, Bundalong, Peechelba, Springhurst, Rutherglen, Wahgunyah, Yarrowonga, Chiltern



More than half the trucks deployed got bogged during a dirty firefight in Norong near the Murray Valley Highway. "The biggest difficulty was the wetness of the paddocks with the fire running across the top," said Operations Manager Paul King.

"It got to 100 hectares because our trucks couldn't get to the fire edge."

The Incident Controller was Norong captain Tony Jones, working with Rutherglen Group Officer Milton Thompson who takes up the story.

"A landowner was welding on the roof which sent sparks onto the grass," says Milton. "It jumped a road in the first half hour and was heading to the Murray River, spreading on the flanks. It burnt the ground as clean as a whistle – burnt it to the waterline. The paddocks were very soft and muddy but they burnt black.

"We put a couple of trucks on each farmhouse in the vicinity for asset protection. We stationed vehicles on the road and knocked it on the head when it finally came out which is time consuming. There was one area we couldn't put trucks that didn't have a nearby road so we burnt that area out."

There was concern about the river red gum forests along the Murray. Police alerted waterskiers at Lake Moodemere Reserve and many of them got in their boats and went out onto the lake.

"Here was the reality we've been planning for at brigade and Group level," continues Milton. "Be careful putting trucks into wet paddocks." ■



Rescue services turn out in force. Photo by Keith Pakenham

Cliff rescue at Mount Martha

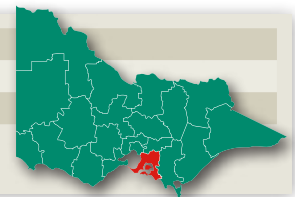
BY KEITH PAKENHAM

Incident: Esplanade control

District: 8

Date: 12 February 2011

Brigades: Dromana, Langwarrin, Mt Martha, Dandenong, Hallam



A search for a secluded beach spot landed a man in an awkward dilemma on Saturday 12 February.

At around 12:45pm, Mt Martha and rope rescue brigades responded to The Esplanade near Bradford Road in Mt Martha to help rescue a male who had been stranded for a short while on a ledge down a cliff face.

Crews from CFA, SES, Ambulance Victoria and police attended the scene. Specialist CFA rope rescue crews were setting up when the police helicopter arrived and was able to winch a rescuer down to bring the man back up.

The police helicopter landed at Martha Cove with the man assessed by paramedics and having a talk with the local police. ■

Brigade members save boy's life

BY KAYLA MASKELL

Members of Ballan Fire Brigade saved the life of a boy who became stuck in a culvert of rising water at Gordon. The 14-year-old boy and a friend were riding their motorbikes around floodwaters on a track at about 8pm. As he was crossing a flooding creek, the powerful current pulled the boy off his feet and he ended up in rapidly-rising water with his feet trapped in a culvert. The boy's friend called for help at a nearby farm and CFA was notified.

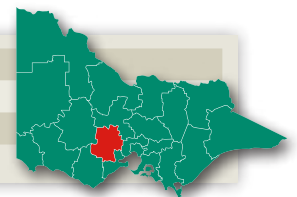
The water was travelling with such force that the boy had to be held above the water which was up to his chin and rising. A makeshift snorkel

Incident: Callaghans Lane control

District: 15

Date: 13 January 2011

Brigades: Ballan, Gordon



was found to keep the boy breathing if he became completely submerged.

A four-wheel-drive tractor was brought in to dig out a channel to release some of the water pressure, while the rescuers desperately tried to free the boy's legs.

Ballan member Ian Ireland said that the water pressure was so great that, when he managed to dislodge one of the boy's trapped legs, he found his own leg being sucked in.

It took an hour to release the boy who was cold and in shock but otherwise uninjured. ■



Photo by Joel Davey

Smoke on the water

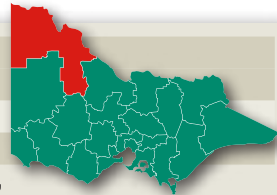
BY JOEL DAVEY

Incident: Sea Lake-Lascalles Road grass and scrub fire

District: 18

Date: 17 December 2010

Brigades: Wycheproof, Sea Lake, Waitchie, Lascalles, Speed, Turriff, Watchupga, Berrivillock, Ultima, Beulah, Nandaly, Woomelang



A crop fire on the Sea Lake Lascalles Rd in Lascalles was believed to have started from a spark on a tractor. It burnt mostly standing cereal crop but Lascalles Fire Brigade Captain and Incident Controller Graeme Symes believes it could have been worse.

“It was a fantastic save,” says Graeme. “All units on scene did a fantastic job of protecting structures and machinery. The quality of

crops this year meant a continuity of fuel with fire running across flooded paddocks.”

Many crops are so dense that it’s only by walking through them or attempting to harvest them that farmers can see how wet it is underneath.

This fire was a true representation of the positive attitude in the Mallee. The fire took off at the busiest time of year, with farmers keen to harvest what crop they could before the next rain. Finding so many people willing to volunteer their time and put their own needs aside was nothing short of amazing.

Graeme Symes made an interesting comment when referring to the volunteers and private units: “How could you ever put a value on this”. The answer is that we can’t. The job CFA volunteers do in the Mallee cannot be quantified – they are invaluable. They typify what it is to be a CFA volunteer, a community member and an Australian. ■



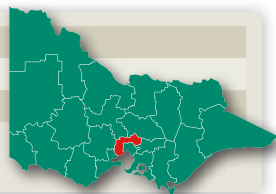
Photo by Adam Townsend

Incident: Kurunjang structure fire

District: 14

Date: 15 March 2011

Brigades: Melton, Caroline Springs, Sunbury



Safety lessons pay off

BY BLAIR DELLEMIJN

Vicfire gave information of a call made by a distressed child about a house fire. Melton Fire Brigade arrived on scene and found the only occupant of the house outside.

The crew was faced with a single storey brick building with a clip lock, flat style roof. Heavy black smoke was issuing with flames punching out through the back bedrooms.

“Once the boys got to the front door, all I could see was their feet. The black smoke was just so thick,” explained Station Officer Cory Woodyatt. “It would have been extremely hot in there with no real way for the fire or smoke to vent upwards.

“We were extremely fortunate that the only occupant at the time remembered his fire safety training at school and met us at the front letterbox. It’s a great testament to fire safety being taught at schools for this young lad to remember what to do in case of fire.” ■



CFA and SES joined forces to rescue a young man who found himself out of his depth.
Photo by Kimberly Peterson



Narre Warren brigade members rescue horses trapped in rising waters

Wet and wild in District 8

BY SOPHIE JACKSON

When Mother Nature struck on Friday 4 February, brigades in the Southern Metropolitan Region found themselves responding to an unprecedented number of flood and swift water rescue calls that continued well into Saturday.

The Casey and Cardinia Groups were some of the hardest hit, and Nar Nar Goon and Narre Warren Stations were flooded while members were helping others caught in the deluge.

Nar Nar Goon Captain and Cardinia Group Officer Phillip Craig said the Cardinia Group responded to more than 25 rescues on Friday evening and the following Saturday.

"We rescued people out of houses, cars and off the roof of cars that had been driven into floodwaters," said Phillip.

The brigade was also called to a swift water rescue, where a young man was caught clinging to a pole in a swollen creek.

"We set up a rope system and crew members from Pakenham SES and our brigade donned harnesses and life jackets to rescue the victim," said Phillip. "It took 45 minutes. The skill and teamwork of all, including Beaconsfield brigade, made for a successful rescue."

Narre Warren Firefighter and Casey Group Officer Shane Keen said that the Casey Group responded to more than 200 calls on Friday evening and the following Saturday, but none quite as unusual as rescuing six horses and a foal from flood waters.

"We also evacuated a couple of nursing homes," said Shane. "It was really constant work and the Casey Group worked well together."

Narre Warren Captain Paul Hardy said the brigade was called to more than twenty rescues that Friday night and the following Saturday. "We were very rapt with the surrounding brigades. They were constantly ringing and offering assistance. They were fantastic." ■

Dandenong deluge

BY KEITH PAKENHAM

As Victoria was hit by a sudden downpour on Friday night 4 February, many fire trucks didn't make it back to their stations until the early hours of Saturday. Dandenong Rescue was busy along with Dandenong Support and FCV saving people from cars. As the calls increased, Dromana Rescue stepped up to Dandenong to help with the call-outs. ■





Cooperation in action as a CFA vehicle pulls an SES trailer to assist with the flood response



Koo Wee Rup brigade members discuss the flood situation

Joint effort in Cardinia Shire

BY KEITH PAKENHAM

The onflow of water from the Cardinia and Bunyip areas meant the lowland township of Koo Wee Rup was to suffer. The CFA station became a community hub as locals dropped by to ask questions about the rising water. Police and CFA vehicles patrolled low spots to keep the public informed. At first many locals (and a few sightseers) were quite happy just watching until they realised they might be trapped there for the night. ■



The Pakenham Incident Control Centre coordinated the response to multiple calls from residents in Cardinia Shire

Sunraysia's big wet

BY LEITH HILLARD

The skies over the Sunraysia district opened on 4 February and dumped half the average yearly rainfall. More than 200 houses across the district were inundated and pumping was carried out in Mildura, Irymple and Cardross for more than a fortnight.

District 22 Operations Officer Rob van Dorsser was on duty in Mildura and stayed in regular contact with captains of all local brigades. He also helped direct the operations of a spare pumper crew brought in from other parts of Loddon Mallee and District 8.

“We have some spare pumpers and a big fill,” said Rob, “and the crew we have brought in is assisting with pumping so we can rest local crews. Of course, the local crews are still available for emergency response.

“We also have PFIT [Portable Field Information Technology] operators working in an assessment crew to map the requests we receive: is the water lying there or is it being fed from somewhere; can we move the water; where can we move it to; can we make an impact...that sort of thing.



Working in the Hood Sector, several pumps, a tanker and a quickfill were able to shift 15,000 litres per minute from inundated houses. Photo by Steve Russell

“The crew is assessing whether doing the job is going to help people in their homes. We’re doing a guesstimation of the amount of water on a property to see whether we can make an impact or not.” ■



FireReady Roadshow

BY JASON LEIGH

The FireReady Roadshow visited 40 locations across the state throughout summer to reach residents and holidaymakers in high-risk bushfire areas. The whole-of-government campaign promoted the importance of having a written and practised Bushfire Survival Plan.

CFA brigades were an integral part of the FireReady Roadshow, with over 200 volunteers making themselves available for a total audience of over 7000.

Highlights included Ballarat City Fire Brigade showcasing its Heavy Rescue Truck and Inverloch brigade receiving over \$700 in gold coin donations.

The Roadshow responded directly to the findings of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission that recommended localised advice be given to the community about both the risks from bushfire in their area, and what is required to adequately prepare for and survive a bushfire. ■

Leave Early Destination name change

BY SONIA MACLEAN

The Members Quick Reference Guide included in the Summer 2010 edition of *Brigade* used the term Bushfire Safer Precincts. This has now been replaced by Leave Early Destinations.

The term was correct at the time the guide went to print, but research found that Leave Early Destinations was easier to understand.

While the name has changed, the principle remains the same: establishing places of relative safety for use during forecast high fire risk weather or bushfire. ■

Community engaged in fire safety

BY SONIA MACLEAN

While unseasonal wet weather has had an impact on CFA's summer fire season, a significant amount of community engagement work has been undertaken.

CFA delivered over 1,000 FireReady Victoria (FRV) meetings to more than 19,000 people. Over 60% of these FRV meetings have been in locations assessed under the Victorian Fire Risk Register (VFRR) as being at extreme, very high or high bushfire risk.

In addition to this, 362 Community Fireguard (CFG) maintenance meetings have been held by established CFG groups. These 362 groups represent 1,475 separate households that are active CFG group members. ■

Demand grows for Home Bushfire Advice Service

BY DARREN GREVIS-JAMES

CFA's Home Bushfire Advice Service has been declared a resounding success in the Grampians Region over summer with more than 1,900 properties visited in the City of Ballarat and Hepburn Shire.

The proactive program began operating this fire season. It involves a team of CFA Fire Safety Officers who advise householders about a range of matters including preparing and defending their property in the bushfire environment. The objective is to help lower bushfire risk and focus on a range of considerations including defensible space, vegetation management, water supply and the personal capacity to defend a property.

Bushfire Preparedness Project Manager for Grampian's Region, David Tilson, said the first phase of assessments was carried out in Ballarat's Mount Helen and nearby Mount Clear areas. More than 900 properties were visited and over 200 assessments undertaken.

City of Ballarat Chief Executive Officer Anthony Schinck said the property assessment program is a partnership arrangement between CFA, City of Ballarat and residents to educate the community on how to be fire ready and was conducted in two of the state's 52 most at-risk fire areas, Mount Clear and Mount Helen, as well as Buninyong and Invermay.

"One of the biggest advantages of the program is that residents are able to get answers to their questions in a one-on-one situation on their property," Mr Schinck said. "A flow-on effect of this was a reduction in the number of fire prevention notices issued in the areas covered, which is a fantastic outcome for both Council and the community."

Mr Schinck said that, from the City of Ballarat's point of view, the program is an effective use of resources to help reduce fire hazards.

In nearby Hepburn Shire, the CFA team from Melbourne and Ballarat door-knocked the Hepburn Springs and Daylesford areas. David Tilson said more than 700 letters were sent to property owners and over 1,000 properties visited.

"As a result we have had more than 100 appointments made to assess properties," said David. "So far we've completed more than 130 individual property assessment reports with more expected to be undertaken in the coming weeks."

"I think the job we did in both Ballarat and at Hepburn Springs has laid the foundation for some very valuable advice to the community in these areas." ■



The Chief is shown around the Casey Safety Village

Casey Safety Village brings fire safety messages home

BY SONIA MACLEAN

A visit to the Casey Safety Village was a must for Chief Officer Euan Ferguson as he travelled around the regions. Since 2008, the number of visitors to Casey Safety Village has more than doubled.

The Chief congratulated both the council and the Southern Metropolitan team on their efforts in delivering a memorable and hands on fire safety experience to thousands of children.

“Teachers, schools and families all have a vital role to play in creating safer communities,” he said. “I would thoroughly recommend a visit to this facility and I’m looking forward to seeing it grow.”

The Casey Safety Village remains the only purpose-built centre in Victoria to deliver fire and road safety education to kindergarten and primary age children. Its facilities include replicas of a kitchen, lounge room and laundry where children can identify home hazards and practice fire escape plans. ■

Fire Safe Kids revs up

BY SONIA MACLEAN

The primary education program Fire Safe Kids is replacing Brigades in Schools, but the transformation is about more than just a change of name.

CFA has updated the content and materials and taken on board feedback from teachers and presenters on everything from the size of posters – too big and the little kids can’t hold them – to extra lesson plans for teachers and new ways of integrating technology.

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) Executive Director Adam Barnett says that the association is very supportive of the push to refresh the program.

“VFBV strongly endorses Fire Safe Kids,” he says. “We look forward to increasing our involvement with community safety and empowering brigades keen to contribute to these initiatives.”

Kinglake District Fire Brigade member Travis Griffith gets a kick out of being able to share his knowledge in a fun way.

“As a firefighter you can talk about what you do and why you do it and the kids really look up to you,”

he says. “It’s great to see the smiles on their faces while taking in some vital safety information. This program gives us the opportunity to directly influence lives, change behaviour, help prevent injury and instill lifelong values.”

To become accredited as a Fire Safe Kids presenter, brigade members must be nominated by a brigade training officer or captain and undertake two days of training. Current Brigades in Schools presenters can undertake a short bridging course to gain accreditation. ■



The Captain Koala graphic has been updated and the character now has a host of new friends. Photo courtesy of Middle Kinglake Primary School

East Gippsland doorknock service BY ERIN SEMMENS

Over 370 East Gippsland residents received individual expert advice on their bushfire risk as part of CFA’s effort to reach people living in isolated communities.

Four CFA Fire Ready presenters visited houses in high-risk isolated locations such as Mallacoota, Cann River, Orbost, Swan Reach, Mt Taylor and Cassillis from 14-18 February.

“We were able to discuss bushfire preparation with people who hadn’t had the chance to attend a CFA program before,” said FireReady presenter Robbie de Zwart. “It was surprising that a number of people didn’t have written Bushfire Survival Plans, and it was good to spend time going through the FireReady

Kit and discussing their fire risk.

“There was a lot of interest in the Community Fireguard program, and it looks like around 12 new groups will be created as a result of the visits.”

CFA Gippsland Manager of Community Safety Mark Potter was pleased with the result.

“This initiative was invaluable in fostering relationships with these communities, and highlighted the importance of having a physical presence,” said Mark. “Captain Ken Pickering of Bruthen brigade joined one of the teams on Tuesday afternoon and it worked really well having that line of communication for residents with their local brigade.” ■



Photo courtesy of The Geelong Advertiser

Queenscliff celebrates 100 years BY BILL DALLADAY

This year marks 100 years since the establishment of the Queenscliff volunteer fire brigade. To mark the event, the brigade organised a family open day and bushfire information session at its Stokes St headquarters in January. Further events are planned throughout the year to celebrate the centenary including a torch procession in early July.

Big fires have been few and far between within the municipality, but the brigade has been involved in almost every major firefighting operation in Victoria and interstate from Ash Wednesday through to the fires of February 2009. The brigade is proud that no member has sustained a serious injury or lost their life in the course of their volunteer activities. ■



EASTER BUNNYKINS GIVEAWAY!

To celebrate Easter and commemorate the limited edition CFA Bush Firefighter Bunnykins, we are giving away the last available collectable to one lucky CFA member.

Every year Waterford Crystal Wedgewood Royal Doulton (WWRD) Australia develops a limited edition Australian themed Bunnykins figurine. Following the devastation of Black Saturday, WWRD Australia developed a limited edition Bush Firefighter Bunnykins with \$5 from each sale donated back to CFA.

The figurines went on sale in 2010 and soon sold out.

If you want to be the proud owner of the last available CFA Bunnykins, simply enter our competition by sending your full name, CFA member number, mailing address, phone number and email address to cfapromotions@cfa.vic.gov.au or on the back of an envelope to:

CFA Bunnykins Competition

PO Box 701

Mount Waverley VIC 3149

GOOD LUCK!

Competition closes 11.59pm on Friday 29 April 2011.

Winners will be notified by phone.

For further terms and conditions, visit www.cfaconnect.net.au

Callignee Fire Station opened

BY JASON LEIGH

The new Callignee Fire Station replaces the building lost in the February 2009 fires. It is part of a larger community centre which includes a state-of-the-art meeting room, kitchen facilities and a play area for children.

"It's getting a lot of use already for our Community Fireguard meetings and brigade training," says Captain Ian Ewart. "The local playgroup, stitch-and-chat club and cricket club all love their new home."

The rebuilding project was a partnership between the local community, Callignee Fire Brigade, La Trobe City Council, local and state government. ■



Captain Ian Ewart holds the remains of a car engine, found after Black Saturday. Behind him is a collage of artwork from local students, expressing their experiences of the fires



Captain Ian Ewart outside the new Callignee station

Ash Wednesday remembered

BY KAYLA MASKELL

The tragedy of Ash Wednesday will forever be in the minds of Panton Hill Fire Brigade members.

The 16 February 1983 fires, which claimed some 47 lives, also killed five Panton Hill firefighters. Maurice Atkinson, Stuart Duff, Neville Jeffrey, Bill Marsden and Peter Singleton died when their tanker was overcome by flames.

Following Ash Wednesday, the community pulled together to build a Memorial Park in their memory. On the 28th anniversary this year, Panton Hill brigade, fellow CFA members and the wider community gathered at the park

"The brigade decided to broaden the invitation to a much wider audience and combine the service with a community concert," says brigade member Nan Oates. "The idea was to raise awareness about Ash Wednesday and the impact it had on the Panton Hill community."

Up to 70 people attended the service including members from Narre Warren who also lost a crew on Ash Wednesday. "There were a lot of tears, a lot of hugs and a lot of reunions," said Nan. ■



Photo by Mike Jansz



Photo by Alison Aprhys

Crews ace it at Avalon

More than 240 career staff and volunteers from Districts 7 and 15 mixed work and pleasure on firefighting duty at Avalon 2011, the Australian International Airshow. ■



Photo by Blair Dellemijn

Chief commends Melton firies **BY KRIS PERKOVIC**

Chief Officer Euan Ferguson visited Melton Fire Brigade in early March to present a Chief Officer's commendation. Seven members of the brigade were acknowledged for their actions in saving the life of an occupant at a house fire in Melton West last year.

Members receiving the commendation were Station Officer Jayson Hirt, Leading Firefighter Dan Barker, Lieutenant Peter Staindl and firefighters Alexia Cooney, Belinda Phillips, Paul Strachan and Trevor Rickards.

The members were praised for their quick thinking and brave actions. "There can be no greater satisfaction for a firefighter than to save the life of another human being during a firefight," said the Chief.

"Your professional leadership and courage contributed to the rescue of the occupant of the house in a safe and timely manner. You are a credit to yourself and to CFA."

Brigade members were presented in full uniform to the Chief Officer for inspection and he mingled and spoke to members at length. ■



Photo by Keith Pakenham

Chief Officer on scene

BY KEITH PAKENHAM

The Chief Officer was having a meeting with career staff at Dandenong Fire Station in early February when the Ladder Platform was required to assist at a house fire in Springvale.

Springvale Pumper and MFB units arrived to find a double storey brick veneer house well alight. Incident Controller Bernie Frawley quickly coordinated a search for all the occupants as crews went to work on stopping the fire spread. "Make pumpers three" was called and the Bronto LP from Dandenong was summoned.

The building suffered major damage as the roof trusses and tiles collapsed into the structure. Firefighters worked cohesively laying hose and knocking the fire down as the aerial appliance set up close to the house. The local power company isolated power along the street and maintained a watchful eye as the ladder platform worked along the roofline close to powerlines.

The Chief Officer spoke with firefighters on the fireground and also to Incident Controller Bernie Frawley regarding the fire call. He also helped crews re-stow hoses back in Dandenong Pumper 2. ■



Photo supplied by Ken Foletta

Whanregarwen opens its doors

BY SONIA MACLEAN

The galvanised iron shed that was Whanregarwen Fire Station has been replaced with a modern facility, officially opened on Sunday 27 February.

The station, which consists of a two bay station with a kitchenette, was a joint initiative of CFA and local landholders.

Captain Steve Prothero says that the new station will improve the brigade's safety and level of service to the community. "In the event of local fires, the facility will provide strike teams with a comfortable and functional base to operate from.

"I see this development as recognition by CFA of its members and their ongoing commitment and service to the community, not least the Black Saturday event of 2009 and the following weeks throughout the Black Range and immediate surrounds.

"It is at times like these that communities show their true spirit and rise to the challenge." ■

Check-in time for Thornton

BY SONIA MACLEAN

Both Thornton appliances are now under the one roof for the first time with the opening of a new station.

The new facility is a vast improvement over the old single bay station – a small galvanised iron shed which dated from the 1960s.

Unfortunately construction on the site was delayed by planning issues, and when the station opened on 9 January this year, it had been 49 weeks since the brigade vacated their former premises.

Despite the lengthy setback, Thornton brigade maintained 'business as usual' activities throughout the year, assisted in no small part by some handy connections.

A large CFA appliance and quickfill tanker was garaged at a farm property on the edge of the town, and the brigade-owned ultralight tanker was housed at the captain's house.

It was fortunate that a brigade member is the proprietor of the Rubicon Hotel Motel, and he kindly set aside one of the motel's family rooms for storage and weekly brigade meetings. ■



Photo by A. Layton

New and improved Wandin station

BY ANDREW WEBBER

The extension of the Wandin Fire Station in District 13 was officially opened on 5 March in front of a crowd of 180 people.

The extension includes a larger training facility, upgraded change rooms and storage facilities, an extended car park and realigned engine bay, all of which will be of benefit not only to the brigade but also the wider community. The Wandin Fire Brigade has an active membership of 35 members ranging in age from 16 to 68 and provides not only fire protection but also road rescue response within the Yarra Valley group. ■



Photo by Andrew Webber



Portland crew contains an LP gas leak and fire at a gas loading dock in a training exercise at the Western District Training Ground. Photo by Mathew Deans

Portland tests its muscle BY GRANT McCANN

A new aged care home in Portland provided emergency crews with the ideal location for a real-time exercise in January before the residents moved in.

We planned a mock fire and evacuation at the home with Australian Volunteer Coast Guard members, facility staff and SES acting as residents.

The scenario was fire spreading rapidly in the dementia wing at the back of the building. We used strobe lights to set the scene and communicated through fireground and VicFire channels for trial purposes. Some of the actors on the night tried to return to the burning building which made it realistic for the crews and the Incident Controller.

All four Portland trucks were in attendance and we also called on Heywood who set up a staging area. It was all hands on deck.

Firefighters would bring patients out of the facility and hand them on to SES who moved them to the assembly areas. This freed up firefighters for the firefight and evacuation.

Crew members were in their BA [breathing apparatus] so we had a large BA control point. The training session was conducted in the new PPC ensemble with a rotation of crews allowing 20 minutes for a break and hydration.

We chose this timeframe to cover all adverse circumstances from extreme heat to lack of crews. It put all working parties under pressure and tested our logistics and planning. Learning our limitations in training is the key to good training.

I think the exercise really put staff and emergency services in the picture about what is expected in such a relatively remote location.

Grant McCann is a Leading Firefighter at Portland Fire Brigade. ■

Desal plant tour

BY WILLIAM BARBOUR

Dalyston and Wonthaggi Fire Brigade members had a tour of the Victorian desalination project site in early January and learnt about the desalination process.

Since construction work began 18 months ago, CFA has been involved in discussions with the project's construction contractor about emergency management, traffic management, site access and the progress of both the pipeline and plant projects. ■



Photo by William Barbour



If the boot fits

BY LEONA LATCHAM

Following evaluations conducted by both volunteers and employees, an optional new style of structural firefighting boot has been rolling out to brigades since 31 January 2011. The distribution will be conducted using the Structural Personal Protective Clothing (PPC) model and may take up to two years to complete.

The new boot will be offered to all volunteers and employees who have been issued with the new Structural PPC. The leather bunker style boot is designed and produced by Ballarat's Oliver Bootmakers. It has a dual density rubber sole that offers superior cushioning and shock absorption

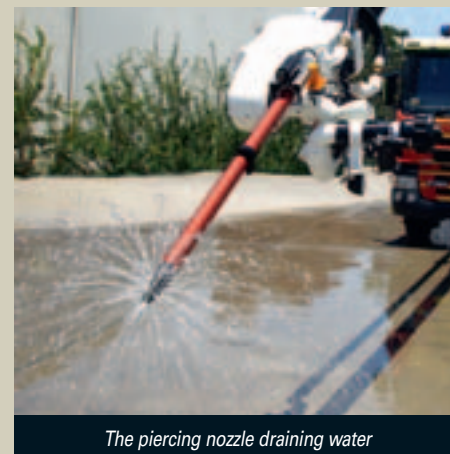
while helping to reduce foot, leg and lower back fatigue. A breathable moisture barrier is designed to protect feet from water.

Unfortunately this boot may not suit the foot and lower leg shape of all firefighters and is not suitable for grass and bushfire operations. Consequently, all eligible members will be given the option to receive the new boot or a second pair of the Type 2 GP style boot.

The distribution agent Amare Safety will conduct measuring and, in most cases, issue the new bunker style boot to the member at the measuring session. Type 2 GP style boots will be sent to members at a later date. ■



Photos by Keith Pakenham



The piercing nozzle draining water



Cranbourne District Mechanical Officer Scott operating the wireless controls for the boom

Aerial pumper

BY KEITH PAKENHAM

CFA has just taken delivery of four aerial pumpers based on a Scania P380 crew cab chassis. Installed on the chassis is a Crash Rescue Snozzle® 20 metre Hydra-Sword HS-1 semi-articulated/telescopic aerial assembly complete with

mid-mounted turntable and end-of-boom tip water monitor with a wireless walk-around remote control. The head of the boom also contains two different types of cameras. The aerial pumpers are currently having Standard Operating Procedures drawn up. ■

CFA's got a brand new bag radio

BY BILL THOMPSON

CFA has designed a bag radio as part of the rollout of the new Tait radios. It will replace the seatbelt and the suitcase radio configurations.

The radio will provide flexibility as it can be easily moved from one vehicle to another, for example,

without occupying the front passenger seat. The radios can be powered by 240V mains or from the vehicle's cigarette lighter power supply.

It is planned that these radios will be deployed from July 2011. ■

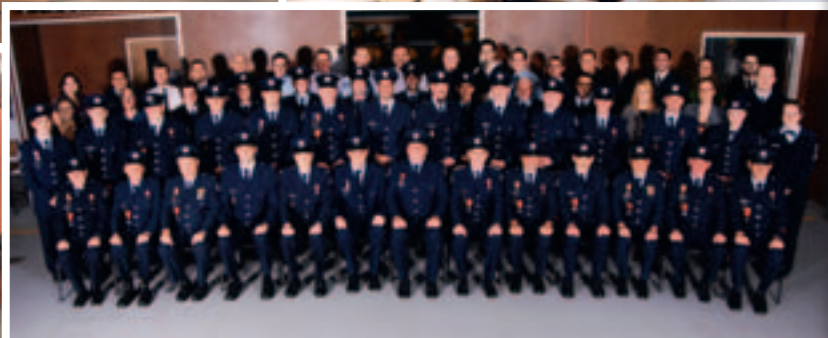




A PHOTOGRAPHIC DIARY OF A CFA BRIGADE



THROUGH THE AGES MELTON



COMPILED BY KEITH PAKENHAM

Odd Shots

BY KEITH PAKENHAM



"Captain, there's a hissing sound coming from the air tank."



Brand new International ACCO 610A trucks waiting to be made into tankers, 1981



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