

The year in review

Operations

This year was the most active for CFA in its history with the overall number of incidents increasing by 5% over last year. This reflects the busiest summer fire season in CFA's history. It also reflects increases in all types of incidents other than hazardous material incidents which declined by 5% compared with 2001/02 and the number of false alarms call outs which remained static.

While fire remains the major type of incident attended by CFA, the number and diversity of other incidents demonstrates that we are much more than a fire service with over 9% of our activities involving motor vehicle accident rescue and almost 8% involving hazardous materials.

Although the overall number of incidents increased, they do not reflect the extent of activity. For example, fires and explosions increased by 754 over 2001/02, and only seven of these were recorded as associated with the North East Victoria and Gippsland campaign fires which occupied a total of 8,595 CFA personnel over 71 days, including a period after containment on ready-reserve.

The number of primary and support turnouts by brigades increased by 5% over last year. This increase reflects increased brigade commitment to the major campaign fires which involved a total of 674 brigades throughout the State.

Total number of incidents (at 30 June)

Incident type	1998/99	1999/00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	change
Fires and explosions	12,066	11,554	14,510	13,784	14,538	+5.5%
MVA, rescue, EMS calls	2,879	2,877	3,045	3,306	3,332	+0.8%
Hazardous condition	2,426	2,001	2,772	2,863	2,715	-5.2%
Overpressure rupture	32	15	27	22	35	+59.0%
Service calls	1,630	1,545	1,864	1,583	1,867	+17.9%
Good intent calls	3,515	3,225	4,002	3,839	4,608	+20.0%
False alarms/false calls	6,375	5,694	7,797	7,658	7,654	nil
Undetermined and other	329	3,863	289	267	343	+28.5%
Total incidents	29,252	30,774	34,306	33,322	35,092	+5.3%

(Information provided from Fire Incident Reporting System (FIRS) and grouped by AIRS Divisions.)

Total number of turnouts by CFA brigades

	1998/99	1999/00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	change
Primary	29,252	30,774	34,306	33,322	35,092	+5.3%
Support	20,006	21,788	27,411	25,360	29,889	+17.9%
Total	49,258	52,562	61,717	58,682	64,981	+10.7%

Summer fire season

As mentioned above, the 2002/03 summer fire season was the busiest ever for CFA, following six years of drought conditions and particularly warm and dry weather in the northern parts of the State. The continuing effects of the drought resulted in tinder-dry fuel loads that produced extreme fire risks. During the summer fire season, a total of 24 Total Fire Bans (TFBs) were declared, the highest number for the past five years, and the second highest ever in CFA's history.

Total Fire Ban Days (1999-2003)

	Whole of State	Partial
1999	1	4
2000	3	13
2001	6	8
2002	0	9
2003	4	20

Declared Total Fire Bans 2002/03

18 October 2002	North West
2 November 2002	North West; North East
12 November 2002	North West; Central; North East
17 November 2002	North West
17 December 2002	North West; North East
18 December 2002	North West; North East
19 December 2002	North West; North East
20 December 2002	North West; North East
21 December 2002	North West; Central; North East
29 December 2002	North West; South West; Central; North East
30 December 2002	North West; North East
7 January 2003	Whole of State
13 January 2003	North West; South West; Central; North East
18 January 2003	North East
20 January 2003	Whole of State
21 January 2003	North East
22 January 2003	North East
24 January 2003	North West; South West; Central; North East
25 January 2003	Whole of State
26 January 2003	North West; Central; North East; Eastern
29 January 2003	Whole of State
30 January 2003	North East; Eastern
18 March 2003	North West; South West; Central; North East
19 March 2003	Central; North East; Eastern

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Victoria is divided into five Total Fire Ban (TFB) districts, based on geography and climate.

The fire season in NSW traditionally starts before Victoria and we assisted the NSW Rural Fire Service with firefighting personnel and equipment to battle severe fires in the Sydney region during October and November 2002.

During the declared fire danger period from 1 December 2002 to 30 April 2003, we attended a total of 15,493 incidents throughout the State, including 168 fires that originated on public land. Examples of major incidents originating on public land that involved a significant commitment of CFA resources.

Major incidents originating on public land: 2002/03 summer fire season

Date	Location	CFA brigades	CFA appliances	Fire size
18 December 2002	Big Desert	34	25	181,400 ha
19 March 2003	Wandong	28	35	8 ha
19 March 2003	Gembrook	18	24	650 ha
7 April 2003	Newham	80	102	600 ha

In addition to the major North East Victoria and Gippsland fires, and those described above, other significant fires occurred at Lysterfield, Morwell, Beechworth, Teesdale, Taggerty, Alvie, Smythesdale, Newton and Pakenham South.

North East Victoria and Gippsland fires

The largest of fires originating on public land occurred on the evening of 8 January 2003 when a series of violent thunderstorms stretching from South East NSW to North East Victoria ignited 87 fires on public land in Victoria's alpine area. While all but nine fires were successfully contained, the inaccessibility of mountainous terrain contributed to what was to become one of Victoria's most devastating fires.

For 57 days, 15,725 personnel (of whom 8,595, or more than half, were from CFA) fought under extreme conditions to bring the fires under control. The extent and unpredictability of the fires, the number of personnel involved and the logistics of providing and supporting firefighting resources (including 1,192 interstate and overseas firefighters, and Defence personnel) was likened to a military campaign, and for this reason the fires are known as the 'campaign fires'.



Personnel deployed on the campaign fires

Victorian State Government agencies

- 8,595 CFA volunteers and staff
- 3,350 DSE, DPI, and PV firefighters and staff
- 1,016 SES staff and volunteers
- 75 MFESB staff
- 1,545 other non-firefighting agencies.

Interstate and overseas agencies and personnel

- 130 NSW Rural Fire Service personnel
- 584 South Australian Country Fire Service personnel
- 31 Tasmanian Fire Service and Tasmanian Parks and Wildlife Service personnel
- 68 Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and Queensland Rural Fire Service personnel
- 234 Department of Defence personnel
- 35 USA Department of Agriculture (National Forests Service) fire personnel
- 62 New Zealand Rural Fire Authority personnel

As the fires originated on public land, DSE acted most often as the agency in control, with CFA and other agencies providing support. As these fires also threatened private land and townships, it was decided very early in the campaign to adopt an inter-agency approach to fire management, including the establishment of joint Incident Control Centres (ICCs).

The fires were the biggest and most resource-intensive emergency event in CFA's history. Never before has CFA needed to deploy and continue to coordinate and manage such a large force of firefighters and support resources over such a prolonged period of time. The challenge we faced was to deploy sufficient resources to the campaign fires while maintaining operational capacity to protect the rest of the State. During the period of the campaign fires we attended 7,523 other incidents throughout the State, assisted by MFESB which stepped into CFA stations in outer-metropolitan Melbourne to allow the release of CFA personnel to fight the campaign fires.

When the fires were eventually contained on 19 March 2003, more than 1.1 million hectares (or 5% of Victoria) had been burnt, including more than 108,000 hectares of private land. During the fires, 41 dwellings, 213 other buildings, more than 3,000 km of fencing and more than 9,000 cattle and other commercial stock were lost. No lives were lost as a direct result of the fires. Like the fires in NSW and ACT during this summer fire period, the fire intensity and the extent of ember attack were at levels not generally experienced.

While the losses had a deep impact on the communities affected, they were relatively minor compared to other major Victorian fires such as 'Black Friday' on 13 January 1939 and 'Ash Wednesday' on 16 February 1983. This is testament to the relatively successful wildfire strategies used and, more importantly, the engagement of communities directly impacted by the fires prior to and during the fires, further demonstrating the synergies between community safety and fire suppression activities.

The campaign fires resulted in additional expenditure for CFA of \$14.8 million. This was reimbursed by the Government.

Post-fire recovery

As is common practice, we have used the experience of the campaign fires to review our business and service delivery, and to identify opportunities for improvement. This is being achieved through a recovery project which is reviewing all aspects of the operation, including physical response capacity, community preparedness and involvement, logistics and mobilization and the impact on CFA's budget and annual and corporate plans.

The project includes extensive debriefing of brigades and individuals, as well as input from many external organisations that supported CFA during the fires. It will identify processes and procedures that performed well and areas that need improvement, and establish a process from which future recovery activities can be developed.

Information gathered as part of the recovery project was also used to provide a comprehensive submission to the Victorian Government Bushfire Inquiry, in which we have identified areas for improvement and recommended potential solutions that would ensure Victoria is better prepared for large-scale fire emergencies in the future.

Concurrent with our commitment to continuous improvement, the recovery project also includes a number of investigations into specific incidents that occurred during the summer fire season. These relate to a number of 'near miss' incidents and more general operational issues such as fatigue, red flag warnings, dehydration and resource mobilization. Most of these relate to the campaign fires.

Service Delivery Standards

During 2002/03, compliance with Service Delivery Standards (SDS) was 89.75% on a rolling 12-month basis. While slightly below the 90% benchmark requirements, continual monitoring of performance is being factored into future resourcing and capital works programs.

Safer Firefighting program

The Linton coronial inquiry into the tragic deaths of five CFA volunteer firefighters on 2 December 1998 resulted in 55 recommendations that highlighted a number of risks and problems needing urgent attention by CFA and DNRE (now DSE).

To ensure that the Coroner's recommendations are carefully considered, a high-level group, the CFA Safer Firefighting Steering Committee, was formed, comprising representatives from CFA's major stakeholders. The Steering Committee is overseeing the progressive resolution of all recommendations.

Of the 55 recommendations associated with the Linton coronial inquiry, 24 (or 44%) are nearing completion, and 27 (or 69%) of 39 recommendations associated with the Linton/Midlands Joint CFA/DSE Review are considered complete. Internal auditors will validate the completion of recommendations progressively.

While resolution of the Linton recommendations is a priority, there are a number of other reviews and inquiries that have occurred in the past that are also being addressed. To assist in the management of resolving these recommendations, we have introduced the Performance Improvement Monitoring System.

As a demonstration of our commitment to continuous improvement, we currently have 130 reviews, and 1,733 recommendations from the debriefings recently conducted as part of the post-campaign fires operational recovery project that will also be included.

Key actions resulting from addressing the recommendations are described below.

Programs to improve operational effectiveness and service levels

The impact of providing support to NSW in October and November 2002, and the North East Victoria and Gippsland campaign fires and subsequent recovery activities have significantly impacted on our ability to complete many major programs with an operational impact. These include a number of projects emanating from the findings of the Coronial Inquiry into the Linton fires and the Safer Firefighting program. Nevertheless, significant progress has been made with many important projects that are continuing to improve the effectiveness of CFA as we evolve as an integrated emergency management agency. These are summarised below:

Operational audits:

During the year we completed Regional and Regional Emergency Coordination Centre preparedness audits. Procedures and checklists for the Real Time Performance Monitoring project were agreed with DSE, and were implemented at seven incidents including the Big Desert and North East Victoria and Gippsland campaign fires.

In addition, an operational analysis was conducted on the Arthur's Seat Chairlift collapse and, in conjunction with DSE, 'near miss' investigations into seven incidents during the campaign fires.

The final project report on assessment of brigade operational efficiency was completed and development of technology systems to support the process has commenced.

Review of Groups:

The future role of Groups is being progressively implemented. Extensive briefings with brigades and Groups have been held and mapping and planning tools are currently being developed.

Review of use of private appliances:

We have engaged a project officer for this review and a legal position and interim guidelines are now being developed.

State Operational Plans and Standards:

Functional roles of appliances and operational specifications are being developed, and incident management standards are being defined and reviewed as part of the State Operations Management Plan (StOMP). We have completed and implemented the Escalation and Readiness Plan format and are currently establishing an information technology system to link brigades, Groups and Regions to the State Emergency Control Centre (SECC) database.

Introduction of fireground Safety Adviser:

This project involves an ongoing review of managing safety in the workplace and consultation with DSE. Commitments by both agencies during the campaign fires and in post-fire activities has delayed further progress which will be resumed during 2003/04.

Resource Management and Information System:

The resource tracking system was developed and is being implemented progressively. Operational requirements have been defined and standards and specifications have been completed.

Skills maintenance for command and control personnel:

This project is now complete. We developed an RPL process for role evaluation for personnel involved in the 2002/03 fire danger period activities, and Levels 2 and 3 Incident Management Team (IMT) personnel training has been completed at Regional level.

Vehicle spray protection system:

Phase 3 of this project is now complete. Findings on an earlier spray system has been validated and design modified for final tests. Fit-out of a test vehicle has been completed and tested. A validation site has been selected in NSW and its preparation has been completed in readiness for large-scale field experiments which are scheduled for January 2004.

State Aircraft Unit (SAU):

The SAU was extensively used during the 2002/03 summer fire season. An operational review and refinements to its operations are being implemented. An audit of aviation specialist personnel is currently being conducted to identify training requirements.

Class A Foam program:

We have completed consultation on a draft policy for Class A foam and agricultural land. Information cards have been developed for use by brigades and property owners.

Service delivery planning

The Service Delivery (Brigade) Planning Tool has been developed to assist brigades in identifying and delivering enhanced service levels to their communities. It was originally developed for the Brigade Community Support Program and was intended primarily to support planning at brigade and Area level.

The introduction of this planning and reporting tool involves significant work at Area level to assist brigades to introduce a risk-based planning process and it is anticipated that full introduction of this process will take a number of years.

The data captured at brigade level will form a critical basis for determining and evaluating service delivery and the efficiency of this delivery. The data will also provide important information on demand management, risk treatment at brigade level and benchmarking across CFA.

The service delivery planning model is a critical component of our corporate planning process, and it will be a key activity in our annual planning for the next three years. It also supports the Auditor General's report which recommended that CFA proceed with this business tool as soon as possible.

The process is being piloted in the Barwon/Corangamite Area and, following completion of this trial, a standard process will be developed for use across the State. Critical to and concurrent with this pilot program is the identification of CFA activities in accordance with the PPRR output model in the new corporate planning process.

Involvement of staff in the summer fire season and particularly the campaign fires, has delayed commencement of the planning process for 2003/04. However, we are intending that by June 2004 all Areas and Directorates will have a generic, integrated business tool (database) and an associated brigade planning process, and that a minimum of three Areas will be using the business tool. We also intend that all Areas and Directorates will be trained and engaged in the brigade planning process during 2004/05 and that by 2005/06 all Areas will have produced plans for their brigades using the new planning process and tool.