



# Fire Ready Victoria

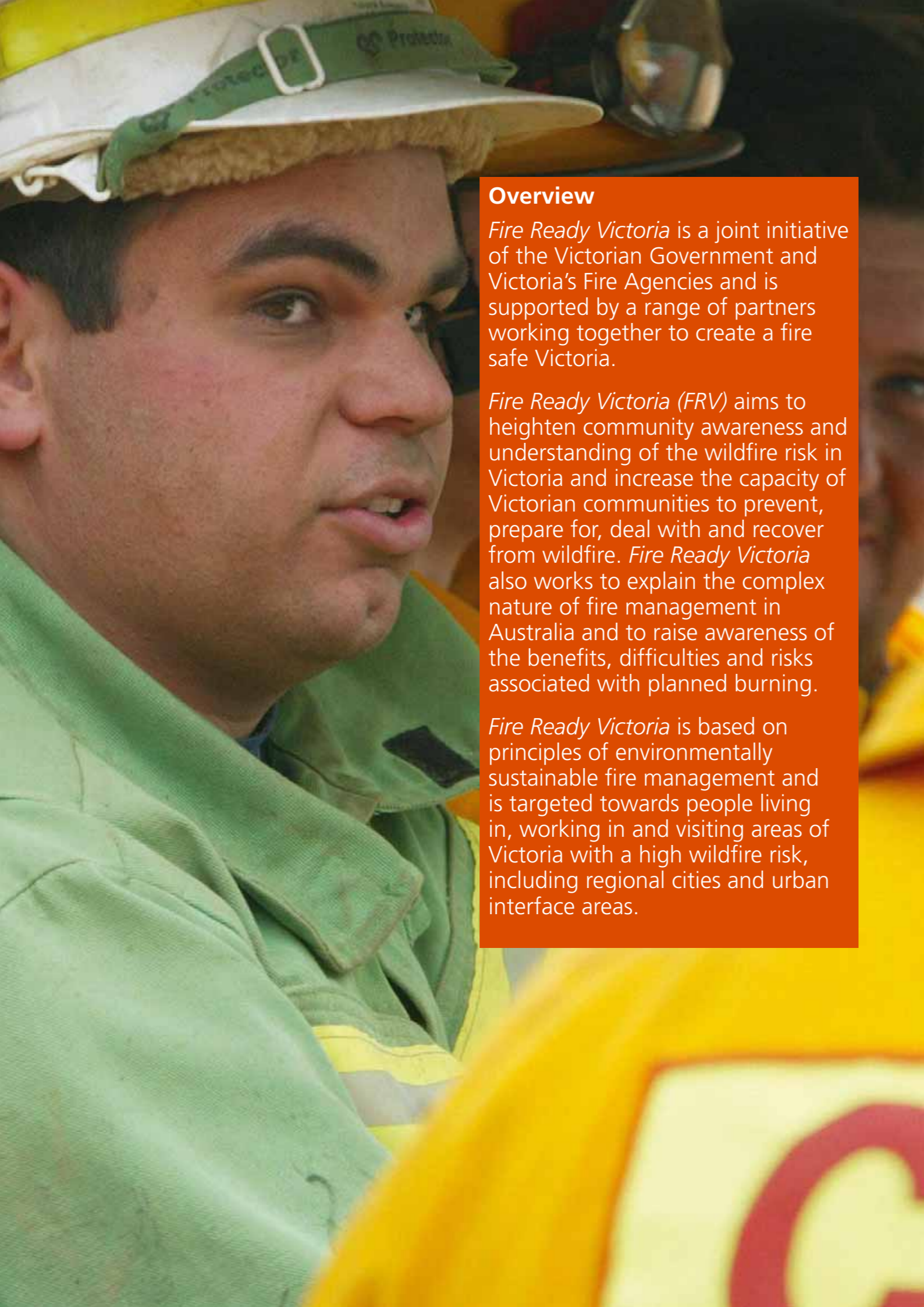
## Focus 07-08



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## Overview

*Fire Ready Victoria* is a joint initiative of the Victorian Government and Victoria's Fire Agencies and is supported by a range of partners working together to create a fire safe Victoria.

*Fire Ready Victoria (FRV)* aims to heighten community awareness and understanding of the wildfire risk in Victoria and increase the capacity of Victorian communities to prevent, prepare for, deal with and recover from wildfire. *Fire Ready Victoria* also works to explain the complex nature of fire management in Australia and to raise awareness of the benefits, difficulties and risks associated with planned burning.

*Fire Ready Victoria* is based on principles of environmentally sustainable fire management and is targeted towards people living in, working in and visiting areas of Victoria with a high wildfire risk, including regional cities and urban interface areas.

## Background

Victoria has days of extreme fire danger every year. According to research commissioned by the Climate Institute the number of days of extreme fire danger is increasing, in fact it is anticipated that the number of days of high risk could increase by 60% over the next twelve years. Climate change and drought have placed both people and the environment under considerable stress, increasing Victoria's vulnerability to fire and reducing the resilience of people already grappling with social and economic challenges.

There is a need for people who live in wildfire risk areas to accept and manage the wildfire risk in order to reduce the impact of fire should it occur. CFA, DSE, MFB, and DHS will work together to increase public awareness and understanding of the wildfire risk and to improve the level of preparedness, safety and resilience of all Victorians living in or visiting those parts of Victoria where wildfires occur.

*Fire Ready Victoria* is a year round strategy as agencies work 365 days a year to reduce the fire risk across Victoria. In most cases the activities of *Fire Ready Victoria (FRV)* will be delivered as joint agency initiatives in order to provide seamless services to the community. In addition, individual agencies will supplement FRV activity with their own tailored programs.



## Objectives

The specific objectives of *Fire Ready Victoria* are:

- To increase understanding that fire is a natural and inevitable event that plays an essential role in the Australian environment
- To increase understanding about the nature of wildfires, including rapid onset and long duration fires, how fires behave in grassland and forest environments and the potential impacts of fire on rural, interface and semi-urban communities
- To raise awareness amongst residents of high wildfire risk areas, including those living in urban fringe areas, about the importance of planning and preparing for the event of wildfire
- To increase adoption of preparedness measures and appropriate response behaviours amongst residents of high wildfire risk areas
- To increase understanding of how to prepare for, respond to and recover from the psychological stresses that wildfire can bring to communities
- To raise awareness amongst residents in high wildfire risk areas that it is important to protect your health and emotional wellbeing before, during and after fire
- To promote awareness that support is available for people who are impacted physically, emotionally and financially from bushfire
- To promote public health by disseminating information relating to fire safety, water quality, the effects of smoke, personal stress and other important health messages before, during and after wildfires
- To promote environmentally sustainable fire management practices on both private and public land
- To increase understanding that planned burning is a vital tool in reducing the severity of wildfire and achieving positive environmental outcomes. Planned burning is carried out to reduce fuel loads and lower a wildfire's intensity and size, and to maintain the health of many ecosystems. Planned burning is undertaken within prescriptions but is not without risk
- To deliver timely and accurate community safety information to the community during incidents, through a variety of channels including ABC and other radio, the internet, the Victorian Bushfire Information Line and through local community meetings
- To promote awareness amongst residents and tourists visiting high wildfire risk areas, about the sources of information available prior to, during and after wildfire.

## Principles

*Fire Ready Victoria* is underpinned by well-established principles in relation to wildfire, including:

- Wildfire in Victoria is an inevitable and essential natural event; fire has helped shape the Australian environment for thousands of years and is essential to the survival of many plant and animal species.
- Fire restriction regulations play a key role in minimising the occurrence of unplanned fires.
- All people who live in, holiday at, or visit fire prone areas need to be aware of fire risk and accept a level of responsibility associated with being in that environment. People who prepare for wildfire and become self-reliant will be better able to deal effectively with the threat of fire.
- The two safest options for residents living in high wildfire risk areas are to: stay and actively defend a well prepared home, or to leave the area early, well before threatened and road travel becomes dangerous. The decision to leave the area early or stay with their property during a wildfire is the responsibility of the individuals concerned and must always be made by the residents themselves.
- Bushfire survival plans can help households deal with the complexity of preparing and responding to wildfires. Developing both physical and psychological preparedness is essential for the survival, recovery and future wellbeing of those threatened by fire.
- Fire agencies are committed to disseminating accurate and relevant information about fires to the community using ABC radio and other radio stations, the CFA / DSE / MFB websites and the Victorian Bushfire Information Line. When fires threaten communities, fire services will endeavour to provide warnings and urgent advice as quickly as possible to those threatened by the fires.
- Fire management includes the prevention and suppression of wildfires as well as the use of planned burning, which can assist in lessening the impact of wildfire, recognising that a lack of periodic fire will increase the risks to communities and the environment.
- Reducing the wildfire risk requires partnerships between State and local governments, land management agencies, fire services and the community.

## Scope

*Fire Ready Victoria* is heavily focused on awareness, education, engagement and empowerment in relation to fire and involves the full spectrum of emergency management from prevention and preparedness to response and recovery. While all participating agencies such as CFA, DSE, MFB and DHS contribute to FRV at all aspects of the Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Recovery (PPRR) cycle, their services in relation to fire are not limited to FRV.

A range of information and support will be provided to the community in a variety of ways, from broad scale media campaigns to interactive meetings targeting residents living in high wildfire risk areas. FRV distributes information and provides support to communities through:

- A range of resources and publications
- A multi-media campaign focusing on fire awareness and relevant information for people living, working and travelling in wildfire risk areas
- Internet sites of participating agencies (CFA, DSE, DHS, MFB)
- Information dissemination from the Incident Controller to community during incidents
- Community meetings during and immediately after incidents
- Interactive community meetings and street meetings focused on household preparedness
- Ongoing supportive programs such as Community Fireguard that work to build self-reliant community groups



## Stages of FRV

FRV aims to cover community needs for information, education and support throughout the Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Recovery cycle.

### Prevention

A series of community engagement forums about fire prevention and protection, including the planned burning program will be held throughout the state in both spring and autumn. These are supported by a range of brochures and other publications relating to fire prevention regulations and strategies during the Fire Danger Period and particularly on days of Total Fire Ban.

A multi-media campfire safety campaign will be undertaken to raise awareness and understanding of campfire safety, including messages about the causes and consequence of campfire escape. This campaign will particularly target visitors to State Forests and National Parks.

Fire prevention messages in relation to the Fire Danger Period and Total Fire Bans will be promoted to culturally and linguistically diverse communities (CALD) who as new residents or as visitors to Australia may be unaware of fire regulations in relation to the summer period.

### Preparing the community

A broad ranging media and promotional campaign will be implemented using print media, radio and television, in order to highlight the wildfire risk in Victoria and promote the need for community preparedness. The campaign will highlight the wildfire risk that occurs across the state each year and will encourage people living, working and travelling in high risk areas to recognise the risk and to accept some responsibility by planning for the event of wildfire.

The media campaign will act as a "call to action" to encourage people to seek further information and support through the Victorian Bushfire Information line, the relevant internet sites and by accessing the wide variety of programs, services and resources offered through FRV.

The key messages for the 2007-2008 awareness campaign will be:

- *Bushfire is an inevitable part of life in Victoria*
- *All people should take care to prevent bushfire occurring*
- *All people should be aware of the risks and accept some responsibility*
- *Road travel during bushfire is dangerous*
- *It is important for people at risk of wildfire to develop their own bushfire survival plan*
- *In the preparation of bushfire you need to consider your emotional and psychological wellbeing and look after yourself through the bushfire season.*

A range of interactive programs and meetings targeted to residents will be delivered in high wildfire risk areas. The meetings have a strong focus on the local wildfire risk, personal safety, house survival and developing bushfire survival plans. These programs aim to develop self-reliant communities who are prepared to take safe and effective action in the event of wildfire and who are resilient and able to deal with and recover from the trauma caused by fires.



### Responding to fires

Providing up to date information to residents likely to be impacted by a wildfire is a high priority for the fire services, and forms an integral part of *Fire Ready Victoria*.

Fire services have set up Information Units as part of the incident management arrangements to deliver accurate and timely messages to affected communities that support and encourage appropriate response and proactive measures by people threatened by wildfires.

Information about wildfires will be disseminated through:

- ABC Radio 774 (Victoria's official emergency services broadcaster) and other radio stations
- Victorian Bushfire Information Line (VBIL) – 1800 240 667. The VBIL provides both recorded information and contact with call takers to answer questions relating to the current fire situation
- CFA and DSE websites
- Media releases across the state

During campaign fires and whenever possible during rapid onset fires the Information Unit will also establish community liaison services and organise community meetings in order to provide affected communities with up to date information about the fire, important safety messages and information and support to help deal with the emotional stresses associated with disaster.

During significant events fire services will work with other partners such as DHS, Vic Roads and Victoria Police to disseminate related information such as public health information, notice of road closures and power outages.

### Recovering from fires

Fire Services and DHS will work together with local governments and other agencies to ensure there is a smooth transition from response to recovery in the event of fire. Through *Fire Ready Victoria*, DHS, municipalities and other partners will work with fire affected communities in order to provide health advice and relevant information about recovery initiatives, including financial assistance and counselling support services, and to ensure appropriate assistance is provided to people in need.

Information about fire recovery issues will be disseminated through

- DHS website,
- The VBIL
- Local government websites
- Media releases across the state and local government areas
- Community updates
- Community meetings
- Fact sheets

Image courtesy Chris Maxwell, Fire Museum Photographic & Research Group



## Community Engagement Model

*Fire Ready Victoria* is underpinned by principles of effective community engagement, recognising that improved community safety outcomes will ultimately be achieved through a two-way flow of information between fire agencies and the community. Therefore FRV offers a variety of treatments, ranging from media and printed resources through to interactive programs such as Community Fireguard, which establish ongoing supportive networks to help community groups prepare for and recover from fires (see diagram below).

### Partnerships

*Fire Ready Victoria* is a joint initiative of the Country Fire Authority (CFA), the Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB), the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) and the Department of Human Services (DHS). These agencies will work in partnership with a range of other key stakeholders such as the Department of Justice, Vic Tourism and Parks Victoria.

The Fire Ready Victoria partnership is based on principles of cooperation and collaboration, to ensure that resources are directed towards integrated service delivery to maximise community safety outcomes. *Fire Ready Victoria* is underpinned by evidence-based research as all partners contribute the specialist knowledge and skills of their organisation to the broader goals of a strong, resilient and fire safe Victoria.

### Community Engagement Model for Communication and Behaviour Change

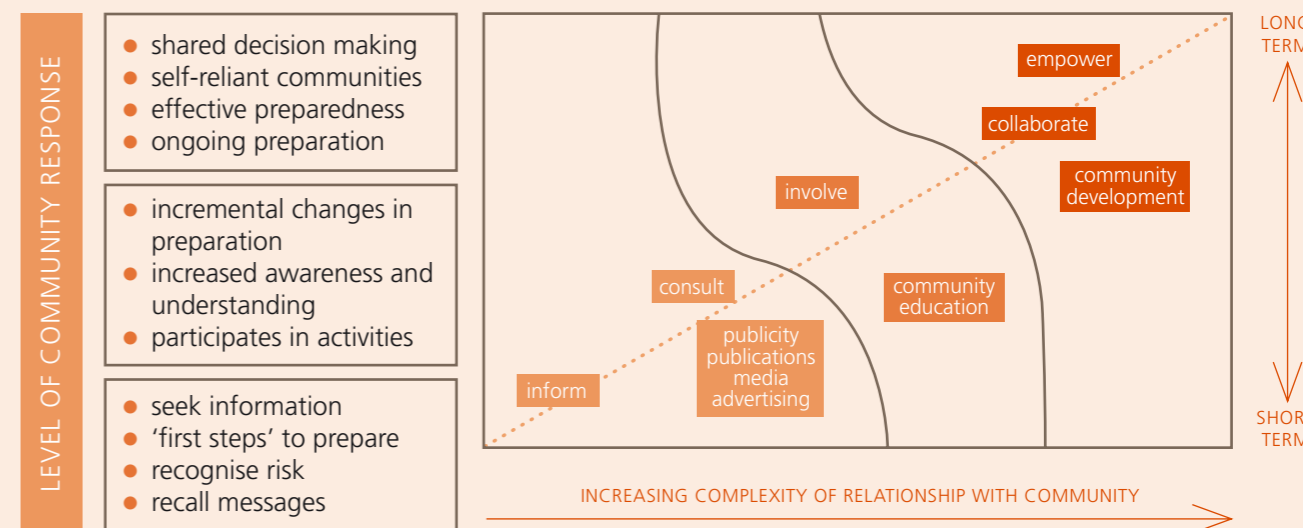


Diagram conceptualised by David Beckingsale - Evolving Ways © 2007. Acknowledgements to Sirrims, J and Baumann, E Environment and Behaviour 15(2), DSE Community Engagement Framework and Alan Rhodes (CFA)