



GUIDELINES FOR

Operating Private Equipment at Fires

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Section 1 – Background

1.1 Background

The responsibility for individuals to fight fire on their own land has always been a part of Victoria's fire fighting suppression regime. It was recognized in the Royal Commission into the disastrous 1939 Black Friday fires where Commissioner Stretton recommended that when a fire breaks out on private land "it should be made the duty of the landholder... to take immediate steps to check and suppress such fire". This recommendation is reflected today in Section 34 of the *CFA Act*, 1958.

It has always been the custom and practice in Victoria that members of the community attend fires with their own equipment to protect their property and that of others. For that matter, CFA developed from such beginnings.

The guidelines have been developed to help you understand your responsibilities when fighting fires on or near your land. CFA has developed some basic principles to help you fight fires safely and effectively whether CFA is present at the fire or not.

1.2 Purpose of the Guidelines

CFA recognises that, in many parts of Victoria, private equipment is an essential part of the community's response to fire. A key principle of this community response is that it be done with safety as number one priority.

Your safety at fires is your responsibility. However, CFA is committed to working with private equipment operators to ensure that safety is at the front of everyone's mind at fires.

The guidelines:

- promote the safe, efficient, effective and cooperative involvement of private equipment to control a fire in the shortest possible time; and
- give private equipment operators information so that they can make informed decisions about their actions.

The guidelines identify the broad expectation held by CFA of private equipment operators in terms of their capabilities and that of their equipment to ensure that the tasks undertaken are appropriate and safely performed. It also identifies the expectation that private equipment operators will accept responsibility and accountability for their actions at fires.

You are encouraged to speak to your local fire brigade about the guidelines. This discussion will help in the development of a cooperative working relationship when you are at a fire.

1.3 Application of the Guidelines

For the purpose of the guidelines, “fire” means all emergencies including wildfires, structure and non-structure fires, hazardous material incidents, motor vehicle and industrial accidents.

“Private equipment” means equipment or machinery (including tankers) owned or operated by a private individual or body that may be used to help contain, suppress or reduce the effects of a fire. It does not include:

- equipment or machinery used for the private defence of domestic dwellings in a wildfire; or

- equipment or machinery contracted by the fire control agency.

The guidelines will apply to the operation of private equipment at fires on private land, including burn-off activities managed by CFA. CFA expects that compliance with the guidelines is a requirement for those operating private equipment at fires.

CFA personnel will, where possible, try to work cooperatively with private equipment operators to ensure safer and more effective operations. However, where private equipment operators are impeding operations or working unsafely, CFA personnel may require that the equipment be deployed to another task or to leave the area.

The guidelines do not apply to individuals defending their homes using fixed or portable firefighting equipment.

1.4 Content of This Publication

The content of this publication is presented in four sections:

- Section 1 provides the context and background;
- Section 2 focuses on the guidelines themselves in terms of what is expected of private equipment operators engaged in firefighting;
- Section 3 is aimed at heightening the awareness of the private equipment operator in fire behaviour, suppression activities and fire hazards; and
- Section 4 contains useful checklists.

1.5 Why Guidelines?

The guidelines provide a basis for establishing and maintaining a consistent approach in the use of private equipment at fires across Victoria. They provide equipment operators with information to improve their knowledge in fire behaviour, fire hazards and suppression activities, as well as providing guidance on fire equipment, communications and protective clothing.

1.6 Monitoring and Review of the Guidelines

CFA will monitor the effectiveness of the guidelines. The guidelines will be reviewed within five years of their approval, or sooner if necessary, to consider any relevant field experience, technological change, legislative change, management policy or community expectation.

Private equipment operators and other stakeholders are encouraged to provide feedback at any time, via email to operations-feedback@cfa.vic.gov.au or write to Chief Officer, Country Fire Authority, PO Box 701 Mount Waverley, Victoria 3149.