

Guidelines for Operating Private Equipment at Fires Project Summary March 2005

Background

Private individuals using their own equipment at fires provide invaluable assistance to CFA to reduce the loss of life and property. 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. However, CFA identified that the responsibility, ability and safety of members of the community fighting fires on or near their land raises a number of complex issues. To address these issues, CFA initiated a project in 2003 with a view to developing Guidelines for Private Equipment at Fires.



Development of Guidelines

CFA considered a number of options for the management of private equipment (Control, Mutual Co-operation, Recognition, No Control). After an extensive regional consultation CFA concluded that whilst, in theory at least, it could attempt to control the activities of private equipment operators at fires, this approach would be very costly both for CFA and the community, and could make private equipment harder to manage as operators may deliberately avoid cooperating with CFA. After considering these issues, the CFA Board determined that the Guidelines be underpinned by an approach of “Mutual Co-operation”.

The Guidelines are based on the philosophy that:

- The equipment needs to be suitable for the task
- The person should have a means to communicate with CFA
- The person operating the equipment should be competent for the task
- The person should have appropriate personal protective clothing for the task and environment
- CFA should be aware of the presence of the private equipment
- Private equipment operators should follow any directions issued by a CFA person at the fire
- Private equipment operators should not undertake independent actions that compromise strategies being implemented to control the incident, or endanger or injure CFA or other personnel

The Guidelines also contain fire awareness material covering such topics as wildfire behaviour, wildfire suppression, strategies, hazards related to wildfires, health hazards, and taking refuge.



Promotional activities

The Guidelines for Operating Private Equipment at Fires were approved by the CFA Board and launched at the Elmore Field Days in October. The launch was supported by a comprehensive promotional campaign of media releases and advertisements in rural newspapers. A brochure and display panels were also produced. Copies of the Guidelines and promotional materials were distributed to all Regions. Guidelines are also available on the CFA website. The Guidelines were incorporated into the revised Living in the Bush book, and into the Community Safety summer campaign information.



The Guidelines have been a key component of CFA displays at Seymour Alternative Field days, Acme Field Days (Warrnambool) and Wimmera Field Days to date, and will be part of displays at Farmworld (Warragul), East Gippsland Field Days (Bairnsdale), Mildura Horticultural Field Days, and Sheepvention (Hamilton) in the near future. In addition, the Guidelines form part of CFA displays at both the Urban and Rural Championships.

Briefings were conducted for the Emergency Services Commissioner, State Coroner, Department of Primary Industries, and Victorian Workcover Authority. Both DPI and VWA have indicated that they will include promotion of the Private Equipment Guidelines in any relevant field days or other events they are organising. Discussions are occurring with Victorian Farmers Federation to promote the Guidelines through various regional VFF forums. A number of extensive briefings have been provided to DSE Chief Fire Officer and senior DSE fire management executives. However, to date DSE have not advised of their position on implementing the Guidelines.

Internal CFA advice

Interim guidelines for CFA personnel about working with private equipment was issued in Operations Updates 2003. A Standard Operating Procedure and Checklist that provide advice to CFA personnel have been approved by the Chief Officer and are currently being distributed.

CFA	Standard Operating Procedure	
Private Equipment on the Fire/Incident Ground		
Scope	This Standard Operating Procedure applies to all CFA members attending fires and incidents where private	