

WHAT IS CFA? WHAT DOES CFA DO?

Factsheet

What is CFA and what does it do?

CFA is one of the world's largest volunteer emergency service and community safety organisations. CFA is based on community involvement and gains its strength from the commitment of its volunteers and staff. The organisation is responsible for the putting out and controlling of fires in country Victoria and outer Melbourne. CFA is also involved in attending emergencies like road accidents, chemical spills, search and rescue, and fire preparedness and community education.

CFA has more than 59,000 volunteers, supported by over 550 career firefighters and officers, and more than 1000 career support and administrative staff.

CFA covers an area of more than 150,182 square kilometres of land covering 2.5 million people. This area includes more than 980,000 homes, and covers all of rural and regional Victoria, including provincial cities and towns (except State forests and National Parks). The area also includes more than one million residents in outer Melbourne suburbs such as Frankston and Dandenong, and key growth suburbs such as Cranbourne, Melton and Werribee.

CFA History

In 1891 the Fire Brigade Act created two boards: the Metropolitan Fire Brigades Board (MFBB) and the Country Fire Brigades Board (CFBB). The CFBB was responsible for coordinating fire brigades more than 16 kilometres from Melbourne.

Another fire management organisation called the Bush Fire Brigades was created in 1926 following serious bushfires. It consisted of volunteer members and had little power to carry out fire prevention, and received very little financial assistance from the government at that time.

After the serious fires of 1939 a Royal Commission was established and it recommended a single firefighting organisation for country Victoria. After more devastating fires in 1944 CFA was established to better coordinate country fire services. It commenced operation on 2 April 1945.

What is the role of CFA in today's emergencies?

CFA performs a number of fire service activities. This includes fire preparedness, which involves land management and community education. The aim is to reduce the triggers for an uncontrollable fire and ensure that residents are undertaking all appropriate safety measures to prepare for such events.

Fire safety building inspections are carried out to identify any safety issues within a particular building. The inspecting officer will recommend changes to reduce or eliminate the fire risk.

When a fire occurs within CFA's service area, CFA plays the major role in coordinating the response. This includes fire suppression, rescue and community announcements. After a fire has finished and the area is secure, CFA will conduct a post-incident analysis to determine the cause of the fire and ways of preventing a similar occurrence in the future.

Aside from bushfires, CFA responds to other emergencies, including house fires, road accidents, hazard breakouts and non-fire related disasters.

Community education is an integral part of CFA's responsibilities, and it aims to offer people from all walks of life an understanding of fire, the different types of fire, and what to do to prepare for and respond to a dangerous fire. This includes participation in school education programs and wider community initiatives.

What equipment does CFA have to deal with fires?

- **Stations:** More than 1200 fire stations ranging from small and simple sheds to large facilities which include meeting rooms, sleeping quarters and kitchens.

- **Vehicles:** More than 1200 *tankers* designed to carry up to 3000 litres of water are generally used during bushfires. Tankers can be used while the vehicle is moving and are often 4WD increasing access in difficult environments.

Pumpers are mainly used to respond to urban fires and can pump up to 4000 litres of water per minute. They have a large inventory of equipment including hoses, nozzles, ladders, breathing apparatus, and chemical protection suits. CFA currently has over 200 pumpers in supply.

Some fire trucks have long extension ladders or hydraulic platforms called *aerial appliances*. They allow firefighters to reach locations several stories in the air, which helps them rescue people and pump water down on to fires from great heights. CFA currently has seven of these, which are placed in the areas of Victoria where they are needed most.

CFA has three *all terrain* vehicles which are stationed at ski resorts. These vehicles are capable of navigating through snow and work similarly to pumpers.

Rescue vehicles are equipped with the 'jaws of life' – a powerful machine that can free people from their cars following a road accident. CFA has 28 of these vehicles.

CFA has additional vehicles to assist communications and to provide extra safety equipment.

- **Aircraft:** CFA has access to a variety of aircraft. This includes:

- Light helicopters
- Medium helicopters: used for firebombing and capable of holding 1200-1400 litres of water
- Fixed wing aircraft: also used for firebombing and capable of holding 1900-3200 litres of water
- Mapping aircraft: used for infrared scanning of fire
- Heavy volume aircraft: this includes the renowned 'Elvis' Erickson Air-Crane helicopter which has a capacity of 9000 litres of water

- **Communications:** CFA has a massive set of communication devices at its disposal. This includes portable, mobile and base radios as well as portable repeaters, pagers, satellite terminals, and emergency reporting system interceptors which allow staff to access important information in responding to a fire.