



The CFA Firefighter

Who are our firefighters?

Most CFA firefighters are volunteers. Being a volunteer means working to help others in some way without expecting or receiving any payment for what you do. Volunteer firefighters are not paid. Many Victorians have become firefighters because they want to protect the community in the suburb or town or area in which they live. Every volunteer belongs to a local fire brigade.

Anyone over the age of 16 can become a volunteer firefighter. Children under the age of 16 can join the Junior Fire Brigade.

Career firefighters at the larger suburban and country stations do get paid for their work. They are on duty at their station on a rostered shift system. Volunteer firefighters work alongside career firefighters.

What are some of the jobs carried out by a CFA firefighter?

Firefighters:

- Learn special skills to operate fire equipment
- Control bushfires, grass fires, chemical fires, house and building fires
- Help cleanup chemical spills resulting from transport accidents
- Rescue people trapped in vehicles in road accidents
- Rescue people trapped in mines or trenches
- Work with the community to advise residents on fire safety procedures to carry out around their homes
- Visit schools to teach children about fire safety; and
- Are ready for duty 24 hours a day.



What special skills do firefighters learn?

Firefighters need to learn many special skills, such as:

- First aid training
- How to operate fire fighting equipment
- How to use two-way radios
- How to prevent and control different types of fires
- Understanding fire behaviour
- How to drive a fire vehicle
- How to read maps



And many other things.

Where do CFA firefighters do their training?

All CFA members are trained in skills required for using the equipment and safe firefighting techniques. Most training takes place at the local fire station, at Regional Training Grounds or at Fiskville, the Firefighting Training College near Ballarat.

Training can consist of some of the following: maintaining vehicles and equipment; being aware of personal safety issues; learning about potential local hazards; practising laying hoses and operating a pumper or tanker; safe handling of ladders in firefighting and rescue work; putting out structural, bush and chemical fires; and using breathing apparatus in heat, darkness, heavy smoke and stairwells. Competitions held between brigades each year help to improve speed and skill in handling equipment and play an important part in brigade training.

How is a firefighter notified of a fire?

Firefighters are notified of an emergency through their battery-operated pagers. Details of the emergency are given to firefighters via this pagers, which are worn or kept with them at all times.

When they arrive at the emergency, the officer-in-charge of the fire crew must decide what equipment is needed. For example, if it is a chemical spill, they will need to put on splash suits, or maybe fully encapsulated suits to protect their skin from harmful chemicals or gas vapours.



What special clothing does a CFA firefighter wear?

Protective clothing worn by CFA firefighters to a bushfire consists of: lightweight yellow overalls or a yellow wildfire coat and overtrousers, a protective helmet, goggles, protective leather gloves, cotton or woollen socks and sturdy leather or rubber boots.



Protective clothing worn by CFA firefighters to a structural fire consists of: yellow overpants, a blue cotton t-shirt, a fire retardant black pure wool jacket, yellow shoulder protectors and yellow reflective fluoro strips on the jacket, a protective helmet with a protective eye visor, leather protective gloves, a safety belt worn around the waist inside the jacket to which a rope can be attached, and sturdy black leather or rubber boots.

Breathing apparatus consists of a face-mask connected to an air cylinder carried on the firefighter's back. The cylinder contains a supply of air which allows the firefighters to breathe safely inside houses or factories full of smoke. A special dial on the cylinder tells the firefighter how much air is left. An alarm sounds on the cylinder to alert the firefighter to low air supply.

Protective clothing worn to a chemical or hazardous material incident consists of either a splash suit or a fully encapsulated gas suit. The **splash suit** is made from reinforced yellow plastic and comprises overpants and a hooded jacket, which protects the firefighter from splashes of dangerous chemicals.



Breathing apparatus is worn over the splash suit to guard against breathing in poisonous fumes. Once a splash suit has been worn it must be hosed down and cleaned with special detergents or dry cleaned at the CFA special depot for cleaning before being safe for the next firefighter to use, otherwise harmful chemicals may be spread.



The fully encapsulated gas suit is worn to industrial or chemical fires to protect firefighters from chemical gases, which if breathed in can kill people or cause injury if they make contact with the skin or eyes.

These encapsulated gas suits are made of special yellow protective rubber and cover the firefighter completely, protecting them from air or gas entering the suit from the outside.



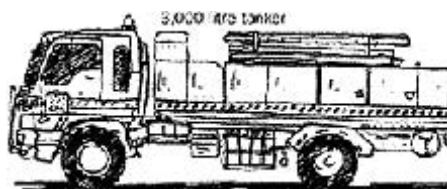
Breathing apparatus is worn inside the suit to allow the firefighter to breathe fresh air. Once wearing this special suit, the firefighter can then safely move poisonous or dangerous chemicals, disposing the dangerous chemicals into a large screw-top disposal bin.

This suit can only be worn for a short period of time before the firefighter becomes too hot inside the suit and will dehydrate if the suit is not taken off.

What special equipment is used by the firefighter?

CFA has over 2,200 vehicles. These include rescue vehicles, firefighting appliances and personnel protection appliances. Each vehicle has a different use. Firefighters learn to operate different types of fire trucks - pumps and tankers.

In mostly rural areas, firefighters learn to operate tanker fire trucks, which carry their own water to the fire.



Tankers collect their water from the nearest water supply, such as nearby creeks and dams and pump water out through motor driven pumps on the trucks. Tanker trucks carry between 580 and 3,000 litres of water.

Tankers normally carry five firefighters and are designed to be used mainly in country areas and to put out grass and bushfires.

In mainly suburban areas, firefighters learn to operate pumpers which can carry around 1,800 litres of water. Once connected to a fire hydrant they can pump out between 2,000 and 4,000 litres of water per minute.



Both the pumpers and tankers carry firefighting equipment in the lockers on the sides and at the back of the trucks.

This equipment includes: fire hoses, tools, jacks, axes, a chain saw, rake hoe, spanners, shovels, torches, breathing apparatus and rescue equipment. A fire ladder is carried on top of the truck

There are a number of different sized tankers and pumpers with different water capacities suited to suburban, country and industrial areas.

As well as tankers and pumpers, CFA firefighters use various rescue vehicles involved in road accident and trench rescue tasks, containing special equipment such as "the jaws of life", first aid materials, and ropes.