



SPRING 2020

# BRIGADE



**Volunteer  
photo comp  
winners**

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**Useful resources**

**BRIGADE** [cfa.vic.gov.au/brigademag](http://cfa.vic.gov.au/brigademag)

[news.cfa.vic.gov.au](http://news.cfa.vic.gov.au)

[facebook.com/cfachiefofficer](https://facebook.com/cfachiefofficer)

[twitter.com/cfa\\_members](https://twitter.com/cfa_members)

CFA intranet:

[members.cfa.vic.gov.au](http://members.cfa.vic.gov.au)

Free CFA images for download:

[digitallibrary.cfa.vic.gov.au](http://digitallibrary.cfa.vic.gov.au)

Community engagement material:

[cfa.vic.gov.au/cecontentportal](http://cfa.vic.gov.au/cecontentportal)

CFA templates for download:

[cfa.vic.gov.au/templatetoolkit](http://cfa.vic.gov.au/templatetoolkit)

PHOTO: SCOTT MULHERAN



**SAFETY  
TEAMWORK  
ADAPTABLE  
INTEGRITY  
RESPECT**



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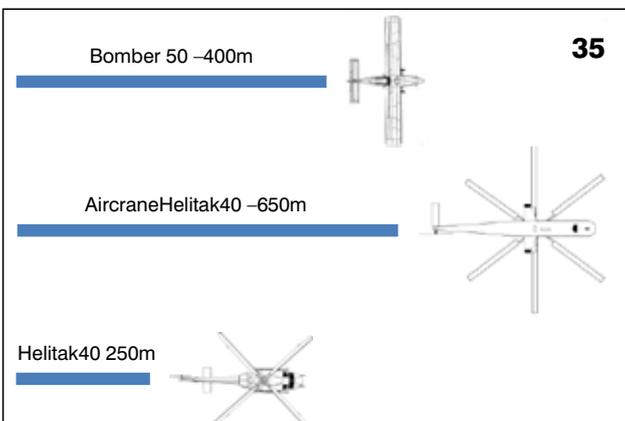
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# Lost boy rescued on Mt Disappointment

**About 200 CFA volunteers from 24 brigades joined hundreds of people over the Queen's Birthday long weekend to search for a missing 14-year-old boy who was on a camping trip with his family on Mount Disappointment.**

After William Callaghan ran into dense bushland while on a walk with his father and brother on Monday 8 June, a huge search was organised by Victoria Police. In addition to the CFA volunteers, members from SES, Ambulance Victoria, Bush Search and Rescue Victoria and search rescue dogs were also on scene, plus air support.

A search was carried out around the clock, with shifts changing between day and night. William, who is autistic and doesn't speak, endured two nights in freezing conditions wearing just a thin hoodie and tracksuit pants.

The thick bush hampered search efforts both from the ground and air, but thankfully William was found alive at about midday on 10 June.

Whittlesea brigade Third Lieutenant Scott Allen joined the search on Tuesday morning and continued until about 8pm after covering 4 kilometres near where William went missing. He was part of a team of 15 people from the Whittlesea Diamond Valley Group of brigades. Some of William's relatives also joined this team.

Most of the search area is Whittlesea brigade's normal turnout area, so Scott was familiar with the terrain.

"We had the Black Saturday fire up there and we sometimes look for lost four-wheel drivers and guide them back along the tracks," Scott said.

"What gave me hope was that the large tree canopy kept the temperature a few degrees warmer than outside the bush. It was quite wet and slippery, though the worst injuries were only bruised shins and knees.

"Some areas were so dense that it took an hour to walk 100 metres, and sometimes I couldn't see the yellows of the guy 10 metres ahead of me. Every so often we had to regroup to make sure everyone was still together.

"We used our thermal imaging camera to check areas that were difficult to access, like wombat holes and hollow fallen trees. A thermal imaging camera can be very beneficial."

Fifteen CFA volunteers from Panton Hill brigade searched on Wednesday morning

and only a couple of them had taken part in a search before.

"I was happy for our brigade to help, so I sent a text message to our 23 active members and 15 volunteered to help with the search," Captain Simon Wallace said.

Usually when he's in the bush Simon has to think about fighting a fire, but this time he had to focus on searching for a boy with special needs.

"We left the station at 6.30am and it was very cold. We had to organise more all-weather jackets as we only have six in our brigade. We rang other brigades and borrowed extra ones. We also had to organise other things such as back packs and private cars.

"When I saw the sheer thickness of the bush, I realised this was going to be a daunting task," Simon said. "It was like walking through a jungle. Fallen trees were covered in wet moss which was very slippery. But there was a real desire to find William.

"We were conscious of the fact we couldn't shout to each other because the noise may have made William run away."

Simon and his brigade team were allocated a seven-kilometre search area. "We walked in a straight line 10 to 15 metres apart, making sure we could see the person on our left and right.

"When we were told to cease searching and return to the staging area, it didn't sound good. But we then heard by phone that William had been found alive and we were really relieved."

Following this experience Simon put together a checklist of items to take on this type of search to help the brigade in the future.

"It was an awesome experience taking part in the rescue. Everyone was so driven to find him. And through participating, our brigade members gained new experiences. You always learn something."

CFA Commander Paul Elso was very pleased with CFA's response.

"We had an overwhelming amount of support from CFA members across Victoria," Paul said. "On request from Victoria Police, our forward planning was to provide crews for another four days around the clock.

"I'd like to thank everyone who helped and offered their support. The search and rescue involved nearly 500 people and there were many more members who wanted to help."

**STORY DUNCAN RUSSELL**







PHOTO: ADAM ROCHE

## Factory blaze at Campbellfield

CFA members from Epping, Bayswater and Eltham brigades supported Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) crews following multiple Triple Zero (000) callers reported seeing smoke and hearing explosions from a battery recycling factory on Sydney Road in Campbellfield at about 4.30am on 9 August.

The first firefighters arrived on scene within four minutes to find a 90-metre by 50-metre factory fully alight. Crews quickly called for support and escalated the response.

At the height of the fire there were more than 20 firefighting trucks on scene (plus several supporting units including Bayswater brigade's breathing apparatus (BA) van and Eltham Support) and about 60 firefighters.

Victoria Police, Ambulance Victoria and the Environment Protection Authority were also on scene.

A wind blowing to the south-west caused smoke to be blown towards housing estates and businesses.

Epping brigade was called out just before 4.30am. When they arrived the crew of four was tasked with setting up a ground monitor to help fight the fire.

"We had a twin feed into our pumper from an FRV pumper," Fifth Lieutenant Vince Zagari said, "and a twin feed out to the ground monitor. A panel collapsed from the tilt-slab and we angled the monitor into the fire through the hole.

"The wind was blowing straight through and two of our crew had to use BA because of the smoke."

The Epping truck was back in station at about 11am.

Ambulance Victoria supplied a rehab unit to check the firefighters' temperatures and blood pressure.

Eltham Support and Bayswater were responded just before 6.30am when it became clear it was going to be a big job. Eltham Support arrived first and began to switch empty BA cylinders belonging to CFA's Epping brigade and FRV's Craigieburn and Greenvale brigades for full ones. When the Bayswater BA van was set up, Eltham Support left the scene.

"We filled about 25 cylinders for Epping brigade and Craigieburn and Greenvale crews who used to be CFA members," Bayswater brigade Fourth Lieutenant Adam Roche said. "We filled Craigieburn and Greenvale brigades' cylinders because they haven't yet changed over to FRV's 'swap and go' method where an empty cylinder is swapped with a full one."

The fire was declared under control at about 9.20am, but FRV crews from eight trucks remained at the scene overnight to monitor the building and extinguish hot spots.

STORY DUNCAN RUSSELL



PHOTO: COURTESY OF EPPING



## Truck collision on Hume Freeway

Four CFA brigades were called to reports of a crash on the Hume Freeway in Wallan at 7am on 4 August. A tow truck travelling north bound with a single occupant ploughed into the back of a semi-trailer travelling in the same direction, resulting in the tow truck driver becoming trapped in the cab.

Wandong, Wallan, Epping and District 12 Headquarters brigades responded, along with an SES rescue crew from Craigieburn and Ambulance Victoria.

Phil Aiello, from Epping Fire Brigade, arrived on scene at about 7.40am and was the rescue officer in charge.

“A tow truck driver collided with a semi carrying a load of steel reinforcement on a section of road that has an incline that appears to catch drivers off guard,” Phil said. “The mini boom lifts on the tow truck moved forward in the impact and crushed part of the roof of the cab. The deck of the semi’s trailer pinned the driver at knee level.”

The driver suffered broken legs and pelvis and there was significant bleeding. He went in and out of consciousness, and because he was an SES volunteer he gave advice to the rescue teams about how to free him.

“It was awkward accessing the cab because of the damage and height off the ground,” Phil said. “We worked off ladders and the deck of the trailer he hit. We also used the tilt tray of his truck as a stabilisation point for some of our equipment.”

“Every rescue is a game of peel and reveal, and no two rescues are the same. I could see that nothing had impaled the driver, so that was one less thing to worry about. If the accident had happened slightly differently he could have been impaled.”

The rescue took about three hours and the man was in the helicopter by 10.40am.

“Having two rescue teams on scene was really useful because we used the Craigieburn equipment too. We couldn’t have done the rescue without the SES. Everything went really smoothly and everyone played their part.”

“But it was a challenge, especially having to wear masks due to COVID-19 while working on ladders and using hydraulic tools above our heads.”



PHOTOS WANDONG FIRE BRIGADE

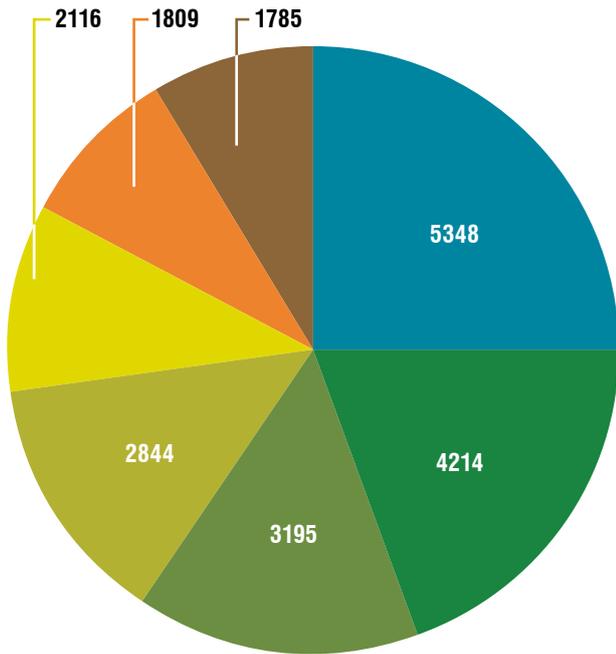
Before COVID-19, Epping Rescue trained twice a week. “We’re lucky,” Phil said, “because we have good connections and a company drops off cars for us to cut up and then picks them up afterwards. More often than not, we have a car that we can cut up safely around the back of the station.”

Wandong Fire Brigade Captain Yorin Miller agreed that CFA and SES rescue crews worked efficiently to free the driver.

“Rescue crews had little space to operate so they did a great job of effectively working together to overcome these challenges and safely extricate the driver,” Yorin said.

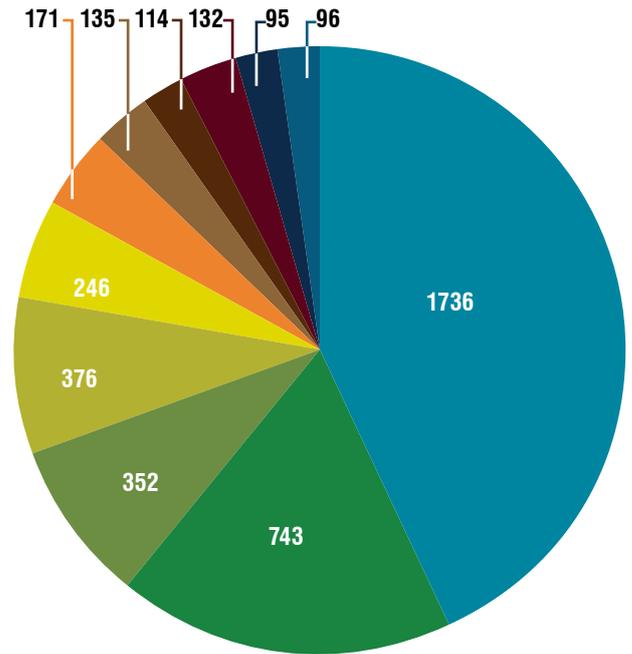
STORY DUNCAN RUSSELL

**INCIDENTS BY TYPE**



Fire and explosions	
False alarms/false calls	
Motor vehicle accidents/rescue	
Good intent calls	
Emergency medical response	
Hazardous condition	
Service calls	

**ORIGIN OF FIRE**



Paddock, open area, lawn	
Road, car park	
Engine area, running gear, wheel area of vehicle	
Kitchen, cooking area	
Scrub or bush area	
Undetermined	
Garage, carport, vehicle storage area	
Passenger areas of vehicle	
Court, terrace, patio	
Bedroom	
Lounge	

**INCIDENTS BY DISTRICT**



**SOUTH WEST**

District	Incidents
4	152
5	510
6	308
7	1943

**WEST**

District	Incidents
15	1299
16	336
17	264

**NORTH WEST**

District	Incidents
2	1159
14	3726
18	605
20	415

**NORTH EAST**

District	Incidents
12	433
13	1785
22	862
23	435
24	562

**SOUTH EAST**

District	Incidents
8	5695
9	469
10	253
11	596
27	691

Brigades are reminded to submit their incident report as soon as possible after attending an incident. Brigades on strike teams also need to submit a report to the Service Delivery Reporting Centre (SDRC). Call **1800 628 844** between 8am and 10pm.

## A/CEO



## Catherine Greaves

**I was honoured to be appointed by the Board to the position of Acting CEO at the end of June. Having just completed my first quarter, I'm proud to update you on some of the priorities that CFA's Executive team has been driving to maintain CFA as a great place to volunteer and work, as well as a trusted and respected community organisation.**

To assist with this, I've drawn on my experience in corporate governance, organisational development and corporate planning at organisations such as EMV and the Department of Justice and Community Safety.

Over the past three months, we've made some significant progress despite the ongoing difficulties we all face because of COVID-19. We've evaluated the organisational structure and realigned it to reflect the dual roles of CEO and Chief Officer and to ensure our districts have the resources and support they need for the fire season.

Now that CFA is a volunteer firefighter emergency service, the organisation is focusing on how we bring this to life in tangible and meaningful ways including:

- our Volunteer Statement of Intent
- developing our future volunteer engagement plan
- developing a program to deliver the \$126 million in Government funding to support CFA
- continuing the rollout of equipment and transformative initiatives as a result of the funds donated last fire season
- finalising the procurement of volunteer workwear and the distribution of structural helmets
- providing additional resources, tools and training for volunteer trainers and assessors
- improving our online training resources.

We've resolved a number of issues with Fire Rescue Victoria related to fire services reform and will be reporting to Government as part of the Fire Services Reform Implementation Plan due to be published in the near future.

As a result of the pandemic, we have put in place pandemic management plans for both the corporate environment and operations, and our fire season preparedness takes into account COVID-19 scenario planning.

We also want to celebrate individual member behaviours and outcomes by developing new ways to reward and recognise them.

I've attended brigade reviews, DPCs and other regional forums to listen to and learn from our members about what really matters to them. This ongoing dialogue and engagement is the key to our future success.

I look forward to continuing to work with you to build on our strong foundations as a trusted and respected emergency service, where all our members can actively participate in shaping our future.

## CHAIR



## Greg Wilson

**When bushfire threatens in Victoria, representatives from multiple emergency services work together to address the threat and protect communities. During my time with the Department of Sustainability and Environment, as the department was known then, I witnessed firsthand the collaborative efforts to suppress fire, protect assets and support individuals.**

Everyone had a role to play to achieve the identified goals. It is having experienced this joint response that excites me about the future of CFA and the role your Board will play in ensuring CFA remains a great place to volunteer and work – for everyone.

As Chair, I understand the importance of finalising the details of fire services reform. We're working hard with CFA leadership to complete any unfinished business and bed down processes.

Our focus is on taking CFA forward, ensuring all our members feel valued. Our organisation will maintain a highly reputable status within Victorian communities, where our passionate volunteers are supported by dedicated staff across the state.

From bushfires and structural firefighting, to road crash rescue and special response, our volunteers undertake vital first responder duties across multiple areas of expertise.

It is easy to be optimistic about our future, when we have such a proud history as evidence of our commitment, capability and care.

This was reflected last bushfire season when CFA received generous donations from the community. We're working speedily to identify and fund projects. You can read about some on our intranet, our CFA News and Media website and page 26 of this issue.

As well, the Victorian Government is investing \$126 million in CFA and we're assessing the best way to use this funding. We will significantly enhance our infrastructure and training. Some of the projects already identified include: the replacement of 16 CFA fire stations and 50 firefighting vehicles; CFA volunteers' health and safety initiatives including more firefighter training, new generation PPC for operational volunteers, and the rollout of a respiratory protection pilot; and critical brigade and volunteer support such as leadership training, more timely training for new recruits, upgrades of ICT systems, more brigade administration support and volunteer support officers.

A vital piece of work we're involved in with other members in the emergency services sector is the Government's implementation plan. We'll be liaising with the Minister and Implementation Plan Monitor on the items important for the development and growth of our volunteers.

As CFA Chair, I'll be committed to securing the resources that will aid our volunteers to help people in need.

## A/CHIEF OFFICER



# Garry Cook

**This time last year we were looking down the barrel of a bad fire season. As the season unfolded more than 2,450 CFA firefighters and IMT personnel were deployed interstate, and more than 8,000 CFA firefighters to large-scale bushfires in Victoria.**

In Victoria, bushfires burned 1.5 million hectares, destroyed more than 400 homes, killed more than 7,000 livestock and thousands more wildlife as well as, sadly, five people, but together with our fellow emergency services we saved many more people, homes and animals.

It's what we do when the summer bushfire season hits, what we prepare for all year round and what we know the Victorian landscape can challenge us with.

What we didn't know was that a pandemic was about to affect Australia in a way that we haven't experienced before. In true CFA spirit, we have risen to this additional and ongoing complex challenge by adapting to new processes, guided by our Pandemic Management Team.

CFA continues to respond to fires and other emergencies, but non-essential activities have been postponed. All activities are continually reviewed against the Government's health advice and critical firefighter safety requirements.

It's been a hard six months, especially as a big part of how we recover from a challenging season is through the camaraderie we enjoy with our fellow members. To overcome this, our brigades and groups have drawn on their initiative and adaptability to stay connected in a variety of ways, including online meetings and social gatherings.

Members have embraced the opportunity to train and broaden their knowledge and skills through our online Learning Hub, with more than 22,000 courses commenced over the past six months.

We clearly will have to do things differently this year, but I will not compromise on the individual safety of CFA firefighters. Compulsory training such as the annual pre-season entrapment drill will still take place under COVID-safe guidelines and we are exploring all options for undertaking skills maintenance training. We are also looking at how COVID-19 will affect staging area management, shared facilities in incident and regional control centres, hygiene, transport, accommodation, briefings, and more.

Fortunately, the spring seasonal outlook indicates a later-than-average start to the season, and a lower risk of long campaign fires in the Eastern Ranges due to above-average rainfall during winter and early spring. Drier-than-average areas in the west and north-west may see the season underway in early to mid October.

I understand this fire season will be different and will throw new challenges at us, but we'll navigate our way through it with the unwavering support, outstanding leadership and commitment of our volunteers and staff.

## DCO SOUTH EAST REGION



# Trevor Owen

**This year continues to be very challenging for everyone. We've experienced a substantial level of change and uncertainty after a very busy bushfire season and are now dealing with a pandemic. Our world is certainly dynamic and forever changing.**

I've been really impressed with our volunteers and staff during this difficult period, showing a high level of flexibility and resilience. During tough times it's important that we take a moment to reflect on our accomplishments and acknowledge the work of our frontline volunteers who remain focused and positive amid the uncertainty. At CFA we are the community and we put our community at the centre of everything we do.

The 2020-21 bushfire season is fast approaching and we must all turn our minds to the planning and preparation needed to successfully respond, looking through the lens of the COVID-19 operating environment. Many of our traditional practices and systems we use during bushfire response will be difficult to achieve. At all levels we will need to have clear plans in place, while remaining open minded in our approach to this new normal.

I recently issued a South East Region Operating Intent which provides high-level guidance on the three key priorities I expect all South East Region members to focus on: COVID-19, CFA 2.0 and preparation for the 2020-21 bushfire season.

I'd like to touch on what I mean by CFA 2.0. Fire services reform has brought about significant change in our sector, including the establishment of Fire Rescue Victoria. While the establishment of FRV has been a focus of the reform, our focus must be the future of CFA. We have a once in a multi-generation chance to make CFA the great organisation we all know it can be.

We need to empower our volunteer members and have a strong partnership in everything we do. To be successful, we must listen to and learn from our members right across the state. It's up to all of us to drive this change with positive energy and I'm confident we have the members to do it.

I'm encouraging all our members to consider what CFA 2.0 means to them. It would be great to share your thoughts with each other and generate discussions at all levels. I'm currently working with our District Planning Committee Chairs and Group Officers to get their views about CFA 2.0. This will form the basis for our planning priorities and future direction.

For me, it's about volunteers and staff walking the talk together to provide the best community-based volunteer fire service. I'm incredibly optimistic about the future CFA and I'd really encourage you to be optimistic too.

## ED COMMS &amp; STAKEHOLDER RELATIONS



## Sally Pickering

**As we enter the next phase of CFA's history, we're strengthening and redefining our story. Building on our proud history, we will emphasise the central and reliable role we play in emergency management in Victoria.**

We emerge from reform as a proud volunteer-based organisation focusing on our people, our connection to our communities and our knowledge and skills in fire safety.

It's important for us to show our communities that CFA remains a world-class fire service with more than 50,000 volunteers and over 1,200 brigades. We are continuing to build a dedicated and skilled team working alongside Victorians to empower them to manage risk and to be ready for fire.

To coincide with our post-reform role, we've released our updated narrative: *Our Community, Our CFA: 2020 and Beyond*, which outlines our unique value proposition as Victoria's volunteer fire service, operating across the state to reduce the occurrence and impacts of fires and other emergencies.

The narrative was developed following widespread consultation with members who identified our strengths as a trusted authority in fire safety, community connectedness and volunteering. It describes how we perform a wide range of roles, from community engagement and hazard reduction to emergency response across a range of landscapes and situations.

We've highlighted how our brigades come from, and serve, their communities, and strengthen the social fabric of those communities, from the smallest town in remote areas of the state to large, outer metropolitan suburbs.

We are proud to be one of the world's largest volunteer fire services, offering those who join us a range of roles. Our future focus is on increasing the skills and knowledge of our volunteers and on continuing to promote diversity, flexibility and inclusiveness.

The CFA vision has been updated to reflect our end state; that Victorian communities are prepared for and safe from fire. Our new strategy will be released shortly, articulating our focus on community and people to deliver on this vision.

To support the narrative, we've released an inspirational video (see page 17) which has been viewed more than 60,000 times. I'd urge you to watch the video and be proud of how you contribute to this great organisation.

The outpouring of public support for CFA, from across Australia and around the world, over the past fire season reinforced our reputation as a trusted and respected emergency service. We will continue to build on our past, and our future is one that we can write together.

## ACFO DISTRICT 12



## Rob van Dorsser

**As we are about to go into a new summer fire season, there's a lot we need to consider around preparedness, operations and how our current climate will affect us. When I speak about our current climate, we think about the COVID-19 environment and how fire services reform will impact us and how we operate.**

District 12 is an area that has a diverse landscape and occupancy. It stretches from the outskirts of Melbourne in the southern end with exploding population growth and the consideration for additional resources, to the rolling hills and ranges in the eastern part of the district where our families, friends and lots of tourists come to enjoy getaways from the suburban life in Melbourne.

We have also recently seen the first wind farm in north-east Victoria come into operation just outside Seymour.

The risks to this part of Victoria sees the Hume Freeway intersect the district, with the Melbourne to Sydney railway line running alongside. We also have significant areas covered by national parks, and Lake Eildon to the east which has an extreme risk in the recreational boating environment. During normal years, this area swells heavily with people on holidays.

This year brigades in District 12 have already attended some significant incidents which show the diverse range of emergencies faced by our dedicated brigades and members. For example, two planes collided and resulted in fatalities, the XPT train from Sydney crashed causing two fatalities and multiple casualties to deal with, a search in the Tallarook Ranges for a lost child and a house fire with several fatalities.

When our people arrived at the house fire, they faced an horrific scene with occupants with a variety of burns having fled the house. Our peer support team at District 12 does amazing work with our people during these incidents. They support our firefighters and help them to work through these situations.

The District 12 volunteers are dedicated to their communities and work closely with them. As we prepare for the critical few months ahead, we will need to do it looking through a different lens on how we can protect our communities.

The volunteers are also well supported by their families. We owe them a great deal of gratitude for the behind-the-scenes support that much of the time appears to be taken for granted.

In all the situations we face, it's always important to remember that safety comes first and needs to be in the forefront of everything we do. We want everyone to come home safe and although this year we may need to do things a little differently, I'm confident our members will be agile and adaptable.

# Queen's Birthday 2020 Honours

Congratulations to the three CFA members who received the Australian Fire Service Medal (AFSM) for their work in emergency services.



## RUSSELL PARDEW

Bemm River Fire Brigade firefighter Russell Pardew has been a CFA member for more than 47 years. As captain of Bemm River brigade and group officer of the Orbost Group, Russell has dedicated much of his time developing working relationships with the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Parks Victoria and the East Gippsland Shire to keep the broader community safe.

"CFA is a community-based organisation and when you live in a small community it's important to give back in whatever way you can," Russell said.

"I've enjoyed the challenges along the way, as well as the camaraderie between the brigades and the wider community. This relationship is so important to ensure we're able to keep people safe during incidents."

Russell is known for his expert local and operational knowledge, using this along with his strong connections to influence important fuel reduction burns and other collaborative public safety projects.

Bemm was in the thick of some of the fires that ravaged East Gippsland last fire season. "It was very full on. We are a very small and isolated community so ahead of this past fire season our brigade came together to run through a plan to ensure we were all on the same page in case a fire struck in the way it did," Russell said.

Russell said without local knowledge it can be extremely difficult to understand the needs of the community and how the surrounding landscape will react to different types of incidents.



## ROBIN PARSONS

Belmont Fire Brigade firefighter Robin Parsons first joined CFA as a volunteer reserve member at Geelong City brigade in 1962 and became an active firefighter in 1963.

"When I first joined CFA as a volunteer I set myself the goal to one day become a career member," Robin said. "I volunteered under a number of excellent mentors and as I gained more experience I tried to model myself on them."

Ten years later, in 1973, Robin joined the career staff as a firefighter at Geelong City and climbed the ranks to serve as a station officer across a number of brigades before he eventually took up a position to be a senior instructor and operations officer at Fiskville training campus.

Robin distinguished himself as an eminent source of information relating to the practices of the Australasian Inter-Service Incident Management System (AIIMS) and the implementation of the Incident Control System (ICS).

"Camaraderie is certainly developed on the fireground, but it's also built in the classroom and my objective as an AIIMS Instructor was to help personnel build that team spirit early on so that when they found themselves working together at an incident, the teamwork came easily," Robin said.

"I loved both sides of my involvement with CFA. I enjoyed teaching other members the AIIMS structure in the classroom, but I also loved being out on the fireground with other brigade members.

## IAN SYMONS

Clyde Fire Brigade member Ian Symons has given more than 55 years of service to CFA as both a volunteer and staff member. He began his service at Lardner Fire Brigade in 1965 and has served in different roles within the organisation ever since. Ian was appointed as a regional officer in 1970 and his strong abilities led him to be appointed as deputy chief officer (operations).

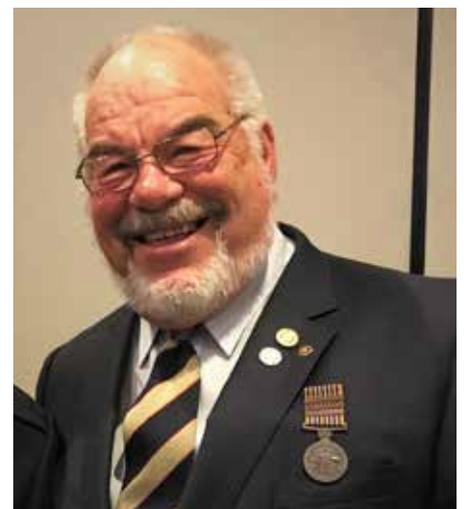
"I would watch on as my father worked for CFA when I was younger and I saw a future in being a part of the fire services family," Ian said.

"Volunteers are the salt of the earth. They'll do anything for their community and I've always had a healthy respect for any volunteer because when the chips are down they'll always be there for each other and we saw that this past summer."

His impact on public safety in CFA spans far and wide. He has been recognised for his contribution in leading the Critical Incident Stress Management Program, serving as an instructor at Fiskville training campus, and writing training material and fireground practices for new equipment and major vehicles introduced to CFA between 1977 and 1982.

Since retiring as a staff member, Ian has continued to devote his time to the community as a volunteer mentor to younger brigade members.

"The reason I have remained involved is because I understand I have a lot of experience and knowledge behind me and there are still ways I can help CFA protect the lives and property and local communities," Ian said.



# CFA farewells Steve Warrington

Earlier this year, CFA farewelled its Chief Executive Officer and Chief Officer Steve Warrington. Following his departure, Steve was incredibly touched by tributes written by hundreds of colleagues and CFA members across Victoria using a digital card.

Steve first joined CFA in 1978 as a volunteer at Chelsea Fire Brigade. He served as a volunteer for about five years before he became a career firefighter in 1983.

Over the years, he had a range of roles including operations manager in District 8 and working in community safety, before he became a deputy chief officer in 2008. He was appointed chief officer of CFA in 2016 and accepted the concurrent role of CEO in 2019.

Steve's wealth of knowledge and broad experience across the organisation will be missed, from responding in a CFA truck to a local incident as a volunteer, to expertly leading CFA through substantial fires such as the 2019-20 bushfires.

He worked with CFA through Ash Wednesday, the 2003 and 2006 campaign fires, and the devastating 2009 Victorian Fires.

Current Acting Chief Officer Garry Cook said Steve has been an incredibly passionate and committed CFA firefighter and senior leader throughout his career.

"Since I first met Steve through CFA in 1987, he has always been a diligent leader and reliable colleague," Garry said. "He has guided our organisation with expertise through a number of significant events in CFA history.

"He has always listened and learned from others to continually improve the functioning of CFA. Steve's passion for, and commitment to, all CFA members was unquestionable."

In 2017, Steve was awarded the Australian Fire Service Medal to recognise his commitment to the fire services sector and people of Victoria.

CFA is incredibly grateful to Steve for his committed service to the organisation and all Victorians for more than 40 years and wish him all the best for the future.

STORY MITCHELL GASTIN



PHOTOS: KEITH PAKENHAM AFISM PHOTO COLLECTION

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# HEAVY TANKER PRODUCTION ROLLS

**The next build of heavy tankers is about to roll off the production line despite a number of significant challenges caused by COVID-19. Eighteen new trucks are starting to come off the production line, and a further 25 have been ordered for next year.**

Project Manager Peter Hill explained that these new vehicles build on the previous production of more than 80. We've incorporated several new features based on considerable constructive and positive feedback including from last fire season.

The truck is now fitted with a full automatic Allison transmission with hydraulic retardation that will further enhance on-road and off-road capability.

"We are also extending the trialling of new heat exchangers for pump engine cooling," Peter said. "A couple of years ago we first fitted one on the Ferntree Gully Fire Brigade vehicle. We found it improved pumping performance and is noticeably quieter because we have removed the need for the noisy radiator cooling fan."



This is an entirely new and innovative concept for CFA and other fire agencies are watching this development closely.

The first six off the production line will be put through more extensive field trials over the next fire season under the watchful eyes of our district mechanical officers (DMOs).

But it doesn't stop there. Many other improvements have been incorporated into the truck such as locker stowage layouts and DMO access and servicing.

The main features of the vehicle are:

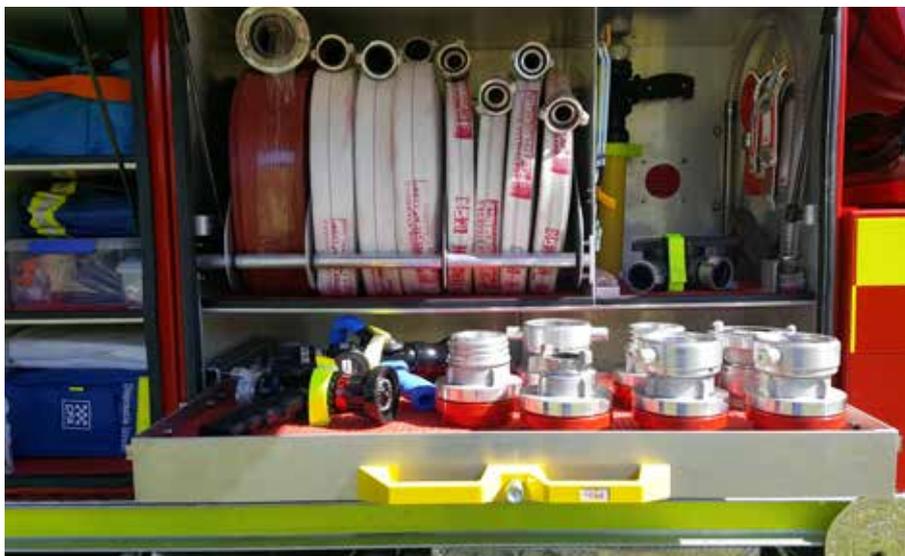
- 15T Iveco Eurocargo 4x4 crew cab chassis with Allison automatic
- 4,000-litre water tank
- 1,200 litres/minute water pump
- Class A foam capability
- Full stowage inventory
- 0-450 litres/minute front-mounted monitor with joystick control inside the cabin.

"Our drive is to continually improve, and a number of new and exciting ideas are being considered for the next generation build," Peter said.

Executive manager Fleet and Protective Equipment Danny Jones reinforced the team's desire to provide and maintain critical equipment.

"Our team will continue to work hard to develop new and improved vehicles and equipment for our members, collaborating with you along the way to make sure the design and features are what you need for the important role you play in protecting lives and property," Danny said.

STORY ANDREW WEBB



# ON DURING COVID-19



# ABR 2019-20 pilot evaluation

The Annual Brigade Review (ABR) program involves more volunteers in discussions about the health and capability strengths and gaps in their brigade than the traditional inspection. The outcomes of the sessions will be used in CFA planning to better support brigades to improve risk reduction outcomes for Victorians.

After nine months and 151 sessions with brigades, the 2019-20 ABR pilot was recently evaluated by the ABR team and an external specialist. The team gathered essential feedback from a large cohort of volunteers and staff through surveys, interviews and workshops. They also confirmed that when the end-to-end process is designed and implemented, ABR will comply with Section 29(b) of the CFA Act.

Overall, our people said the ABR was worthwhile, informative and a move in the right direction. The findings indicate that the program should continue, and the participants' valuable suggestions will lead to improvements.

Importantly, the participants thought that the ABR will be more valuable than the traditional s29 inspection process when business processes improve. This is a view shared by Acting Chief Officer Garry Cook, after he observed an ABR session with Rutherglen Fire Brigade.

"I was impressed with the level of detail covered in just one session," Garry said. "The commitment and openness of the brigade members, combined with the ABR model and great facilitation, resulted in a much more enlightening and mature annual inspection."

The evaluation showed that both staff and volunteers agreed that embedding accountability into the ABR cycle is critical to maximise long-term success and acceptance of the ABR. This includes getting follow-up information back to brigades and following through on actions. To achieve this, processes to integrate ABR data into business planning are being developed and trialled by districts 9 and 24.

"Through whole-of-business collaboration, we're confident the program will drive positive change across CFA and over time deliver on accountability, which was highlighted in the evaluation," said Deputy Chief Officer and ABR Project Control Group Co-Chair Trevor Owen.

"It's great that we now have a solid foundation for improvements, and more detailed results will be shared across the organisation over the coming weeks."

## Recommendations to improve the ABR process

### Design and implementation

- Provide comprehensive training for participating staff on all aspects of the ABR process.
- Standardise expectations, develop a best-practice guide/toolkit.
- Improve session length for smaller brigades.
- Explore anonymous voting tool and cater for sessions.

### Achieving program objectives

- Refine criteria to maximise understanding, address gaps and include flexibility for smaller brigades.
- Develop talking points for staff.
- Explore brigade access to BCPA and a data dashboard for ABR sessions.
- Improve software and hardware quality to deliver business efficiencies and report generation for brigades.

### Lessons and improvements

- Review ABR session frequency.
- Address s29 weaknesses in the ABR process and improve accountability by integrating ABR data into business planning and governance processes.
- Define and clarify roles and responsibilities to achieve overall benefits and maintain confidence in the ABR.

## What's next?

Sessions were postponed because of operational activity over summer and because of COVID-19 restrictions, so the ABR has been extended into 2021 which Garry said will have a positive impact.

"With CFA now a volunteer-focused emergency service, continuing the ABR into 2021 is an opportunity to understand how we can better support brigades," Garry said.

"As volunteers live in the communities they serve, tailoring services to help them reach their potential will maximise their ability to deliver local risk reduction outcomes.

"This is the best way to empower our volunteers and in turn their communities to prevent and respond to emergencies."

To read more about the ABR Pilot Evaluation, visit Members Online > Running a Brigade > Brigade Administration > Annual Brigade Review Project or [email abrteam@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:abrteam@cfa.vic.gov.au)

STORY ALEKS WAKEHAM



## 'Our Community, Our CFA' video launched on 1 July

On 1 July 2020 CFA became a proudly volunteer fire service.  
A new video, which features Vance Joy's Fire and the Flood, pays tribute to our people and their diverse roles as they work together with Victorian communities to prepare them for fire.  
We are from the community and for the community.

You can view the video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=erZvIAis-6Y>.  
We encourage you to watch and share it.



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# 2020 CFA Photo Competition winners

**As part of CFA's celebrations during National Volunteer Week in May 2020, CFA announced the winners of its photo competition. Each entrant nominated which one of CFA's values (safety, teamwork, adaptable, integrity and respect) their photo represented.**

Congratulations to Firefighter Scott Mulheran from Eynesbury Fire Brigade for winning the amateur category. Scott captured the image while on deployment at Kremnos in north-east NSW on 18 November 2019.

"It was a great opportunity to support other colleagues and I was excited to be part of a strike team," Scott said. "I had flown up that day and wanted to document my first day on deployment. The sun was going down and I thought what a great view, so I captured it and sent it to my family."

"I joined the Bayswater team as an extra so the two people in the photo are from that side of town. Photos can become wonderful memories of your experience."

Congratulations to First Lieutenant Luke Commisso from North West Mooroopna Fire Brigade for winning the professional category. On 4 January 2020, Luke was part of a strike team at Mount Balmattum near Euroa, battling a fire on a hillside.

"I captured this photo during one of the bad days of the season," Luke said. "I had taken the day off work to go on a strike team."

"My captain was the driver and there were two other members from our brigade along with two neighbouring brigades all involved. We tried to fight the fire ourselves but couldn't contain it. I could see the helicopter coming over, so I captured the moment."

Luke has been on hundreds of strike teams with his dad. "I joined CFA with my dad over 18 year ago," Luke said. "The skills I've learned are incredible. Joining CFA was probably the best thing I've ever done."

"You don't always need the best camera; phones can do an excellent job," Luke added. "Occupational health and safety is key, being considerate of who you're taking photos of and be responsible."

There were more than 130 entries in the competition this year. Thank you to everyone for entering.





**Above:** Amateur category winner was Scott Mulheran from Eynesbury Fire Brigade

**Far left:** Professional category winner was Luke Comisso from North West Mooroopna Fire Brigade

**Left:** Amateur category runner up was Mandy Wallace from Kiewa Brigade

# Why we stop, drop and roll

**Shennel Martin was just eight years old when her life changed in the blink of an eye. At her Port Fairy home a candle stood on her dresser. Though 25 years ago, the memory of what happened next has stayed with Shennel.**

"I had a candle on the dresser and found some matches," she said. "I remember thinking at the time 'I know I'm not allowed to light this' – mum had warned us about being supervised when around candles and matches.

"But I lit it. I turned around to do something else in my bedroom, then when I turned back, the flames whooshed up my arms and chest. I had no idea what to do. I had never learned to stop, drop and roll. I started screaming and I was fully on fire as I fled downstairs and outside.

"I found out later that was possibly the worst thing I could have done, but I managed to reach an outside water tank. My sister and mother found me there trying to put water on myself. Thankfully, they knew what to do. My sister pushed me to the ground and threw a towel over me. Then the neighbours ran over to help."

The paramedics came and immediately threw Shennel into the shower. Shennel doesn't remember anything more from that day. Her next memory is of being in hospital, two weeks later.

"I learned they took me first to Port Fairy, then to Warrnambool and airlifted me to the Royal Children's Hospital in Melbourne where I spent the next 10 weeks."

Shennel had third degree burns to 44 per cent of her body. She had to spend weeks laying on her back with her arms outstretched at a 90-degree angle after skin grafts, to ensure they didn't split.

"For the first couple of weeks my parents were told that I may not survive. The first operation performed was a skin graft over my heart. I couldn't eat for a long time and I had to have a nasogastric tube. The pain was unbearable at times, especially the baths and dressing changes," she said.

For six weeks her mother kept vigil at Shennel's hospital bedside, while her father commuted to and from Port Fairy, so he could look after Shennel's two sisters at home.

"I had spent so much time in bed in the end that I had to learn to walk again," Shennel said. "I loved to run. It took a lot of physio, rehab, but eventually one day I just ran again.

Despite her substantial injuries Shennel thought she was lucky.

"I had a polyester T-shirt on, but I had thick-waisted track pants and they only got singed. I had also cut my hair short not long before, so was spared my hair catching on fire, or burning my face."

Even so, the scarring was substantial, and the teenage years, tough for anyone, were hard on Shennel.

"I have significant scars to my chest, back and both my arms. I also have scarring on both my upper and lower legs where they took skin for the grafts," she said.

"The bullying started, different kids who didn't know me started calling me names. It was very difficult. I used to cover right up, cover over my scars and wonder why this ever happened to me."

But Shennel's positive outlook on life saw her through this period – and the years of skin grafts she undertook.

"My skin wouldn't stretch as I grew so I pretty much had 11 years of operations. I had my last operation when I was 19. Because of the degree of scarring I don't sweat and have problems regulating



heat in summer. If I put on only a little bit of weight, three kilograms or so, I can feel my back start to constrict."

But through all that time, Shennel maintained one dream – of becoming a nurse. And yes, she was inspired in her career choice by the nurses at the Royal Melbourne Hospital.

"I wouldn't say the nurses made the stay enjoyable, because it could never be," she said. "But they were kind and caring and inspired me. At age 20 I decided to fulfil my dream and I've now spent 10 years in nursing."

Today Shennel works as a district nurse in the Mornington region and has a 10-year-old daughter.

"Being a parent myself, I can only imagine what my mother went through. And that's why I'm telling my story, working with organisations like KidSafe and CFA.

"My story says accidents do happen and they can happen to anyone. Know what to do and make sure your kids know what to do. The first step in prevention is awareness."

Shennel teaches her own daughter fire safety awareness but draws the line at banning candles and other sources of fire from her own house and garden.

"It sounds strange but I've never feared fire. I also believe it's important not to run away from things, or just ban them. I believe education is far more effective long-term. Kids are always going to encounter things like candles and matches. It's how we teach them to be safe that matters. Stop, drop and roll needs to be part of that.

"It's such a crucial element and I think it would have made a huge difference to the severity of my burns and my recovery journey if I had known to do that."

**STORY MIRANDA SCHOONEVELDT**

# Child suffers severe burns

AN eight-year-old Port Fairy girl suffering severe burns is flown to the Royal Children's Hospital burns unit in Melbourne yesterday.

The girl suffered burns to between 30 per cent and 40 per cent of her upper torso, ambulance communications officer Peter Hadden said yesterday.

Royal Children's Hospital public relations secretary Natasha Smith said the child was in a satisfactory

## Girl airlifted to Melbourne

condition yesterday afternoon. The girl was still in a satisfactory condition last night.

Ambulance officers were called to Crowe Street in Port Fairy, at 9:09 am yesterday to treat the child, Mr Hadden said.

The girl was first taken to the Port Fairy hospital for assessment and

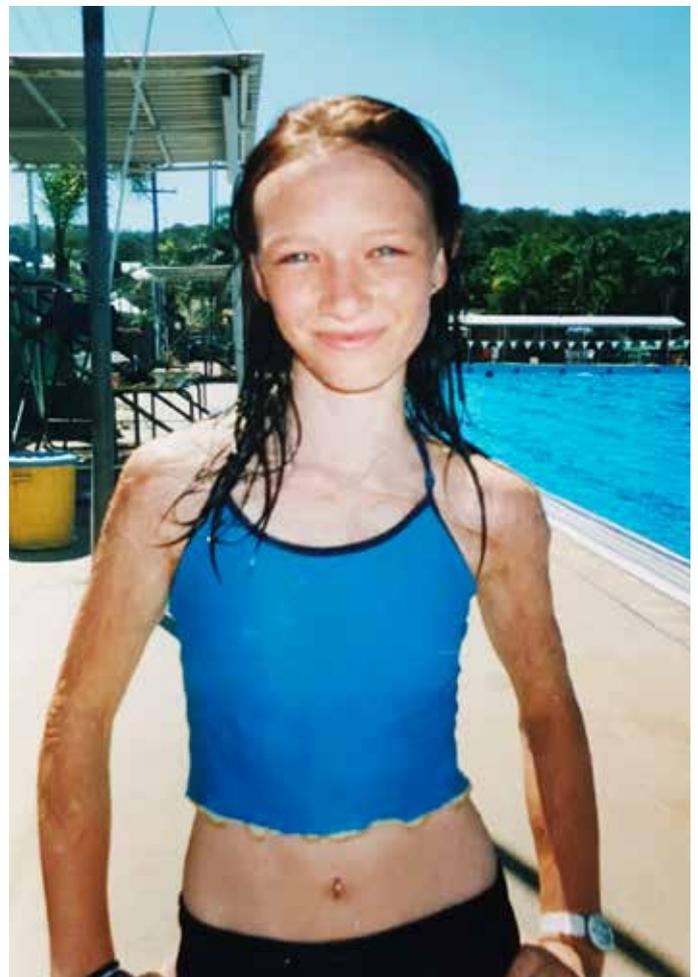
was then transported by road to the Warrambool and District Base Hospital.

She was then airlifted from the Warrambool base hospital about 2 pm and was admitted to the Royal Children's, approximately an hour later, he said. Mr Hadden said he did not know the cause of the incident.

Warrambool base hospital emergency services Director David Poffler said the incident was "totally sudden" but he could not say how the child received the burns.

Miss Smith said she was not permitted to release further details about the injured girl's condition.

The Standard, Tuesday, Mar 11, 1997



# New prototype pumper tanker

**The next generation prototype pumper tanker will soon hit the road for review. Project Manager Peter Hill said the build has presented a number of unique challenges and the prototype will trial several new ideas.**

Peter explained that we have tried to incorporate some innovative thinking into this build. There are some features you will notice straight away such as new control screens, a thermal imaging camera mounted on the bull bar with a display inside the cabin, and battery-operated tools (including a battery-operated chainsaw). But some features may not be so obvious unless you look more closely.

"The pump, tucked away behind the rear control panel, is hydraulically driven," Peter said. "Traditionally, most of our pumps are either diesel engine or PTO [power take-off] driven. The new hydraulic drive will mean it will be a lot quieter."

Operationally, we have included a new tank 'auto fill' system, which means the tank is always full when boosting from the mains.

But it doesn't stop there. Many more new ideas have been incorporated including new tray door locks, luminous handrails for ease of use at night, and a rear body-mounted electronic messaging board.

"We have even changed to a new low profile, black painted bull bar with an integrated light bar," Peter said.

Unfortunately, production has not been immune from the effects of COVID-19.

"We've been challenged by a number of unique issues," Peter explained. "A prototype build usually requires a lot of direct, hands-on work with the builder. A lot of tweaking is required. We couldn't do that this time because of the access restrictions, so most of the design review and build control had to be done remotely via drawings, photos and videos."

Our body builder has had to change the way the build has progressed and has had a lot of issues sourcing parts.

"It's not until something like this happens that you realise how interconnected the world really is. The cab chassis, controls and electronic components come from Europe, the pump from the US and valving and raw metal from China."

Early on there was a lot of discussion about the role of the vehicle. Was it to be a pumper-tanker or a tanker-pumper? In the end, the Engineering team agreed that the vehicle's primary role was as a pumper.

It was also important that the vehicle had a footprint the same or smaller than the current new heavy tanker (see page 14).

"Keeping the vehicle to a maximum of 8.2 metres was more challenging than expected and we had to work through a number of design layouts," Peter said.

The main features of this vehicle are:

- 15T Iveco Eurocargo 4x2 crew cab chassis with full Allison automatic transmission fitted with hydraulic retarder
- 3,000-litre water tank
- 2,500 litres per minute water pump
- One 30-metre Ø25mm live hose reel
- 200-litre Class B and 50-litre Class A foam capability
- Full stowage inventory.

The prototype will tour the state later this year – look out for details on our News and Media website, [news.cfa.vic.gov.au](https://news.cfa.vic.gov.au).

"We hope that many volunteers are able to have a close look at the vehicle when it's in their area. We look forward to their feedback."

**STORY ANDREW WEBB**



# General Firefighter rollout

**Despite limitations on face-to-face training because of COVID-19, the General Firefighter project team has worked hard to finalise a mountain of materials to support brigades to undertake our new basic firefighter training course.**

The course will be ready to deliver as soon as face-to-face training can resume, and some elements of the course are being adapted for remote delivery. The team is now working on adapting the General Firefighter Orientation and Theory sessions to online video and virtual classrooms.

Our General Firefighter expert educators are being briefed to ensure our brigades and members get consistent training wherever they're based, using recorded facilitator sessions, videos and presentations.

The practical components of the course – Foundation Skill Drills, Consolidation Session and Practical assessment – will be released when face-to-face training resumes. In the meantime, CFA encourages all its new members to go to our online Learning Hub ([learninghub.cfa.vic.gov.au](https://learninghub.cfa.vic.gov.au)) and take the two required courses to enter the General Firefighter

program: Maintain Safety at CFA Incidents and Tree Hazard Awareness.

A new online member induction program and General Firefighter Orientation will also be a prerequisite when it is released. Other modules such as Child Safe Awareness, COVID-19 Cleaning, Electrical Safety Awareness and Protect and Preserve Incident Scene will help new members to better understand how CFA operates.

The Foundation Skill Drills videos, also available on the Learning Hub, are an excellent preparation for what you'll be doing when face-to-face training resumes.

The General Firefighter training content is based on the Bushfire Reference Firefighter Manual. By reading this you will get a good head start before practical training. A digital version of this manual is on the Learning Hub.

These are the activities new members must complete with brigades:

- Hose bowling and rolling a hose
- Water delivery and branch patterns
- Drip torch operation
- Use of Class A foam
- Hand tools
- Obtaining water – reticulated supply
- Obtaining water – static supply
- Radio use
- Entrapment procedures.

Look out for the GFF Foundation Skill Drills Training Guide and information sheets on the Learning Hub.

We will continue to provide updates on our News and Media website ([news.cfa.vic.gov.au](https://news.cfa.vic.gov.au)) about the rollout of the course over the coming months, and members can also head to the intranet ([members.cfa.vic.gov.au](https://members.cfa.vic.gov.au)) and search for 'General Firefighter' to access the latest developments and tools.

Briefings and information sessions are being conducted now online across districts. During September and October, all brigades will receive an Information pack with a Foundation Skill Drills Training Guide, course information and a USB with copies of all the Foundation Skill Drills videos, electronic versions of the Training Guide and other useful information.

All the material in the information pack can be found in the General Firefighter section of the Learning Hub now.



STORY MIRANDA SCHOONEVELDT

# Empowering communities to take on their bushfire risk

**How many times have we told the community that CFA can't guarantee that a fire truck will protect their property during a major emergency? How do we encourage behaviour change and genuine shared responsibility for emergency preparedness? One way is to take a community development approach to reducing bushfire risk. The critical focus of this approach is the development of strong community connections, involvement of all stakeholders and respectful, roundtable discussions.**

Community Based Bushfire Management (CBBM) is a one such community development approach to bushfire risk reduction. CBBM aims to support communities to build resilience, through the development of community, agency and local government connections. While for the past five years CBBM has focused on reducing bushfire risk, the project has also proven its ability to build community resilience in the face of other challenges due largely to its ability to help grow healthy, well-connected communities.

What sets this approach apart is the simple step to building connections, providing all stakeholders with an opportunity to listen to and understand one another, and a genuine desire to work together in a mutually beneficial way. The development of connections and networks leads to information sharing, lessons learned and planning across the community. These connections ensure that hazards and risks such as bushfire, flood or economic disaster, are identified, and the community has the opportunity to develop and plan.

Learning from and about one another is at the very heart of this approach to community engagement. It allows the opportunity for a truly community-centred, strengths-based approach to bushfire risk reduction. By learning more about local skills, knowledge and resources (both community and agency), and providing opportunity for facilitated, roundtable discussion, a community development approach results in a wide variety of approaches to bushfire risk reduction, many of which break away from traditional approaches. Furthermore, the concept of shared responsibility becomes central to the discussions undertaken.

Community members working in collaboration with agency and local government champions has resulted in a range of tremendous community outcomes including:

- the installation of a water pump by the Daylesford/Hepburn community
- house numbering projects by the Clonbinane and Tolmie communities
- community green waste clean-up days by the Clonbinane and Timboon communities
- a fire safety video competition by the Briagolong community
- community bushfire exercises by Mallacoota, Wye River and Buchan communities
- planning with schools by Lorne, Airey's Inlet, St Andrews and Timboon communities
- vegetation management plans by Balmoral, Healesville, Strathbogie and Moe South communities
- presentations by expert speakers by Healesville, Fryerstown, Mallacoota and Lorne communities.

Community development approaches work with, and value, local knowledge, skills and experiences. The lived experiences of the local land and its people are the mainstay of this place-based approach – an approach now strongly favoured by the Victorian Government. Better and shared decisions can be made by combining local knowledge of community assets (such as schools, community halls, bush nursing centres or CFA stations) with agency and local government knowledge of risk, fire behaviour, resources and planning.

During 2020, there have been plenty of opportunities to test the mettle of CBBM networks facilitated by the team of CBBM project officers around Victoria. From Digby to St Andrews to Mallacoota, the positive impacts of working with a facilitator to bring community members together with agency and local government are startling. Many community members from the 21 CBBM communities around the state have reported that the connectedness created by this approach has increased resilience on multiple levels.





Any of the CBBM facilitators will tell you that their role is incredibly rewarding. For some, the highlight is making lasting friendships with members of the communities they work with. For others, it's being part of the journey that each and every community is on. Witnessing the development of skills and knowledge which serve in the face of disaster is an honour for them all. While a community naturally has a level of resilience, facilitators view their role as something of an opportunity to help community members do what they already know how to do themselves. In times of adversity, community leaders naturally step up, community groups naturally form (consider the history of bush fire brigades pre-1942).

The 2019-20 fire season was perhaps the first time since 2009 that communities impacted by fire benefited so much from the strong social connectedness brought about by a community project. From Buchan to Mallacoota, Cann River to Club Terrace, one after another small communities felt the full force of the Black Summer fires. Now, these communities are facing recovery in an almost unprecedented time of a pandemic.

By having a community development-focused facilitator working with these communities, some contribution to a community-led recovery process has been provided. Cann River, Tamboon, Bruthen and Club Terrace have all been assisted in this way by the CBBM approach. However, without the opportunity for face-to-face debriefs with agency personnel or even each other, people in these communities have led their own recovery for many months. Although agencies, local government and others (such as Bushfire Recovery Victoria) are there to help, when it comes down to it locals are helping one another – as it always has been. With community comes resilience.

Some local community-led recovery examples include:

- Cann River, where the local community is leading its own relief effort, including the restoration of the local hall which is an important local asset
- Tamboon, where the community formed its own association to manage donated funds and to secure, among other things, a much-needed shed in which to store firefighting equipment

- Buchan, where the local community group has taken hold of recovery and is ensuring a truly diverse community voice is heard
- Club Terrace, where residents are devising plans for the rebuilding or restoration of their local hall and sheds
- The Koori community in Cann Valley, which is considering how it can be better prepared for future fires – including finding a safer way for their elders to evacuate and become more involved in cultural burning and vegetation management on their country. In addition, this community is working with Landcare Australia to devise plans to spend available funds to restore the land and prepare for another fire season.

Local networks were in the communities before the fires. They are still there now and will be there when the next emergency strikes. Communities drive recovery and communities should drive future planning. Emergency management is best done with community not for community, because it should be formed around the knowledge, skills and strengths of locals, particularly those with lived experiences. We need to make the space and time to listen – a community development approach such as CBBM creates that space and time.

CBBM is funded by the Victorian Government's Safer Together program. To find out more, go to [safertogether.vic.gov.au](https://safertogether.vic.gov.au).

#### What CBBM participants have said about the project

"Did you notice that everyone was listening to each other?"

"It is exciting. This is the way I have been hoping and encouraging CFA to engage for years."

"With the right knowledge the community will accomplish far more than fire services ever could alone."

"This is actually about life and death – we need to work together to prevent deaths."

STORY FIONA MACKEN WITH BIRGITTE HUTCHENS, SHARON MIFSUD AND GAIL CUMMING

# How donations to CFA benefit our volunteers

**It's often said that adversity brings out the best in people and the public response to the 2019-20 fire season delivered on that in spades. From the beginning of December 2019 to the end June 2020, CFA received \$24.2 million in donations from 22,101 deposits.**

Acting Chief Officer Garry Cook said CFA members were beyond grateful for the outpouring of support over summer.

"CFA was incredibly humbled by the influx of donations from all over Australia and the world during the extreme 2019-20 season," Garry said.

"From Kylie Jenner, Chris Hemsworth, Kylie Minogue and significant corporate donors, to everyday people giving what they could, every donated dollar was an acknowledgement of the vital and often dangerous work our members do to protect their communities.

"Our largest donation was \$1.84 million generated by private citizen and former Portland resident Jodie Silva on a Facebook fundraiser – a hugely generous initiative.

"We cannot thank our donors enough; it means so much to our members."

CFA Executive, the CFA Board and the Trustees of the CFA & Brigades Donations Fund collaborated on a plan to spend the funds in line with donor intent and to ensure all our 1200-plus brigades would be positively impacted.

By 30 June 2020 CFA had allocated about 80 per cent of donated funds. Donations designated to specific brigades or groups have been paid directly to those brigades, and they are already using them to educate and support communities and boost the capabilities of our brigades.

Allocations were spread through three channels:

- Direct donations to specific brigades or groups
- A District Pick List Program to support brigades with practical items at a local level
- Organisation-wide transformative initiatives.

Items allocated through the District Pick List Program range from a significant purchase for the whole district to some smaller items for brigades such as hoses, torches and chainsaws. Some of the most popular items allocated to date have been thermal imaging cameras, apparel and defibrillators.

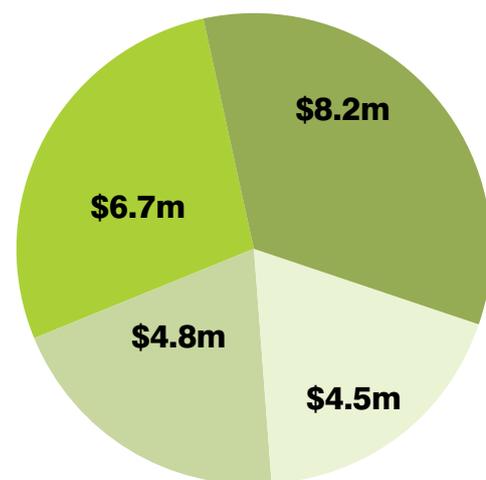
## Organisation-wide initiatives

Following endorsement by the CFA Board, Executive and an independent panel, CFA will deliver on three projects under our Transformative Initiatives Program to provide funding for statewide initiatives to help transform the capability of our volunteers. These projects account for \$10.45 million of donated funds to be spent over the next five years and include the following.

**Volunteer leadership development:** We will build leadership capability through programs such as external leadership and management training, CFA bespoke leadership training, mentoring and coaching programs, scholarships and wellbeing training.

**Community education vehicles:** We will buy a fleet of vehicles kitted out with props, digital capability and collateral to support innovative and accessible community education and to provide community briefings during major incidents.

**Volunteer digital training:** We will improve the capacity of CFA's volunteer trainers and assessors by purchasing hundreds of 4G-enabled tablets for use in training delivery and assessment.



- Organisation-wide transformative initiatives (plus \$2.25m in prior donations)
- Designated brigades/groups/districts
- District Pick List
- To be allocated after 30 June 2020

## Help for East Gippsland

Many small businesses and community members decided to give back to brigades who worked tirelessly over the 2019-20 fire season to help protect lives and property.

Many brigades in CFA's District 11, which protect all East Gippsland Shire, have received items from organisations and members of the public that will help them continue their efficient work fighting fires and responding to emergency incidents within the community.

Winners of a raffle at the Australian Superbike Championship donated their prize, a Yamaha petrol generator valued at around \$2000, to Bruthen Fire Brigade.

Bruthen Fire Brigade Captain James Nicholas said the donated generator and two quick fill pumps will benefit several brigades across East Gippsland.

"Members from the Islamic Centre of Coburg also contacted us asking if there's any equipment we wanted," James said.

"We requested two quick fill pumps priced at around \$3000 each. These are primarily used to draw water and fill up from a number of different static water sources such as a firefighting water tank.

"We'll be pairing the generator and the quick fill pumps with a trailer owned by the brigade to make them available for wider use across District 11 when they're needed.



Buchan Fire Brigade Captain Peter White said his brigade was the lucky recipient of a trailer that will help members transport firefighting equipment to where it's needed most.

"We were looking for a particular trailer to help move the quick fill pumps and the hoses around the township," Peter said.

"I was calling around to Trik Trailers in Pakenham and they told me instead of selling to me, they'd like to donate the \$1200 trailer.

"I have been extremely humbled by the generosity of people from all over Australia for helping not only our brigades but our communities."

Brigades will also have access to a portable generator (pictured right with Bruthen brigade member Rick Cameron) which is located at District 11 Headquarters.

District 11 Assistant Chief Fire Officer Daryll Hunter said it's not uncommon for power outages in East Gippsland and thoughtful donations like the portable power generator will allow brigades to continue their important work through tough circumstances.

"The generator allows our members to move it to where it is needed most during an emergency," Daryll said.

"Many of our brigades experienced power outages during last summer's bushfires which meant they lost light and were unable to use pumps for water."

Twenty small rural brigades in the district also received E-flares and helmet torch packages thanks to thoughtful donations to District 11 earlier this year (pictured above with Fernbank Captain Lionel Rose, left, and brigade member Clancy Edward).

"The E-flares help guide firefighters to water sources when travelling through thick smoke that creates poor visibility on the roads," Daryll said. "They can also be used to assist in directing traffic when brigades attend motor vehicle collisions."



# New app makes turning out easier

The new Supplementary Alerting Service (SAS) app is now available free to all CFA members. CFA worked with Emergency Management Victoria, SES, Ambulance Victoria and ESTA to develop the SAS which works together with EAS Paging to give increased functionality and enhanced communication during fire and incident response.

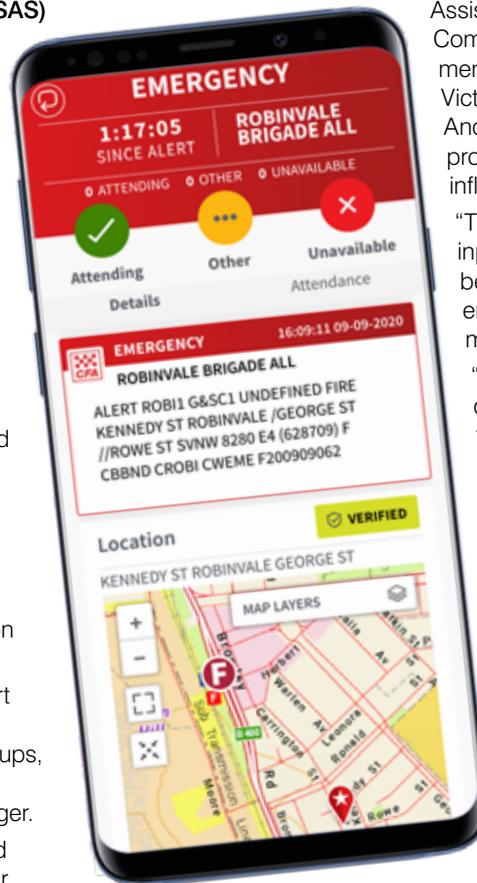
With the SAS app members can:

- set availability for turnouts and indicate if they are responding to an incident
- see who from their brigade is responding and view their ETA
- view responding-member qualifications and competencies
- chat with fellow brigade members
- experience one-touch navigation to their station or the incident.

Additional features include access to pager message history and robust privacy protection measures.

Brigade management teams and CFA support staff will also be able to use the application's dashboard functionality to manage pager groups, create reports and add new users, including brigade members who don't have an EAS pager.

Members use their CFA volunteer number and password to access the SAS and can link their logins if they are also a member of SES and/or Ambulance Victoria.



Assistant Chief Fire Officer Operational Communications Jason Lawrence said members from CFA, SES and Ambulance Victoria had tested the app on the iOS and Android platforms during the development process, and given important feedback that influenced the design and functionality.

“Thank you to everyone who has provided input into this project. Your feedback has been vital in developing its scope and ensuring we end up with an app that best meets the needs of our people,” Jason said.

“The SAS app will evolve and be enhanced over time to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of our members.

“The EAS will remain the primary means of receiving pager messages because of its reliability across Victoria, and CFA members will be expected to continue to use and carry their pagers. We believe both the EAS and SAS have an important place in providing an efficient and effective service to the communities we serve.”

The SAS app is available to download from Google Play and Apple iOS stores. For more information on the SAS visit [cfa.vic.gov.au/sas](http://cfa.vic.gov.au/sas).

STORY SHAUNNAGH O'LOUGHLIN

# Hygiene packs on more trucks

For the past four years, the District 24 Women's Reference Group has implemented several initiatives including the development of feminine hygiene packs for trucks. These packs are now on all trucks and in all fire stations in District 24 and will ensure that women in the district can turn out to incidents knowing they won't get caught out without essential supplies.

Each kit contains a box of tampons, two sanitary pads, ten antibacterial wipes, two disposal bags and a packet of tissues.

Following this successful implementation, the North East Region Inclusion and Fairness (I&F) Advisory Council was instrumental in rolling out the kits to the rest of the region.

Colleen Furlanetto, the District 22 District Planning Committee Chair and member of the NER Inclusion and Fairness Advisory Council, said it's important for everyone in CFA to have access to basic supportive equipment and that includes the hygiene kits.

“It's important to appreciate that hygiene kits benefit all members, like first-aid kits, because they contain everyday hygiene products,” Colleen said.

“We are one CFA and we are all valued and supported in the really important work we all do. It's a great initiative and a no-brainer for these kits to be available for our members.”

Feedback received by District 22 has been positive, with many comments along the lines of “we can't believe we never had them”. Many of the positive comments were from men, and District 22 group officers have been supportive of the initiative.

A woman in District 24 said it was reassuring to know there were emergency supplies available on vehicles for those times when female members might get caught out due to the unpredictable nature of emergency responses which can be at any time of the day or night.

“This fantastic initiative was developed in response to the need to support our diverse membership in our day-to-day brigade activities and particularly during fireground operations and deployments,” North East Region Deputy Chief Officer Ross Sullivan said.

“The pack provides essential supplies that support our dedicated firefighters. I congratulate and thank members of the District 24 Women's Reference Group for this initiative and for their significant contribution to the welfare of our firefighters.”

The success of this initiative demonstrates inclusion and fairness in action in CFA, which benefits all our members.

STORY TERRI WRIGHT

# Disaster resilience of communities

Understanding disaster resilience focuses on ways that a community's chance of adapting to future change can be improved, rather than focusing on its ability to react to hazards that have already occurred. A new research-based website, the Australian Disaster Resilience Index, has been developed to help industry, business, government and emergency services improve the resilience of their local communities before, during and after natural hazards.

Developed by the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC and the University of New England, the Index is the first national snapshot of disaster resilience. It's available to everyone at [www.adri.bnhcrc.com.au](http://www.adri.bnhcrc.com.au), and allows people to understand the resilience of their local community. It sets a new benchmark for measuring future changes in resilience to natural hazards and promoting resilience-building initiatives.

"The Index captures a national picture of disaster resilience," said lead researcher of the Index, Dr Melissa Parsons of the University of New England. "This national picture will help communities, governments and organisations further develop the capacities for adapting to and coping with natural hazards."

The Index provides everything needed to explore the resilience of a community, including an interactive map that generates data reports for specific areas and information about the strengths and barriers to disaster resilience for each area. You can examine the resilience of your local community and start planning to improve resilience, as well as look at other areas around Victoria or the country that are similar.

Not all communities have the same capacity for resilience given the many social, economic and institutional factors that play a role. This cross-community mosaic of resilience within larger areas can be used to identify strengths, form alliances and develop targeted improvements.

It should be used to inform policy, resource planning, community profiling, strategic planning, emergency planning and preparedness, risk assessment and other crucial processes. Together, this will enhance how communities are supported before, during and after a natural hazard, thereby building a more disaster-resilient country.

STORY BETHANY PATCH, BUSHFIRE AND NATURAL HAZARDS CRC

## SURVEY ON BUSHFIRE PREPAREDNESS

In April 2020, CFA undertook a post-season community telephone survey of 600 households who live in extreme locations based on the Victorian Fire Risk Register – Bushfire (VFRR-B). We've been doing this survey each year since 2017 to measure individual and household attitudes towards bushfire risk and levels of preparedness.

Community attitudes towards CFA were extremely positive, with respondents agreeing that CFA was highly trusted (97 per cent) and respected (98 per cent), and 93 per cent thought that CFA was an excellent place to volunteer.

More than 70 per cent said they received or sought information about bushfire safety in the past six months, which is almost 10 per cent more than in 2019. The most common sources of information were letterbox drops and the VicEmergency app.

### Perceived risk of bushfire

The proportion of respondents who thought the bushfire risk at their property was major or extreme (51 per cent in 2020) has remained consistent at around 45-55 per cent over the past five years. However, that means about 50 per cent of respondents continue to describe the risk of bushfire at their home as only moderate, minor or no risk at all – even though they live in VFRR-B extreme locations.

### Response to bushfire in the area

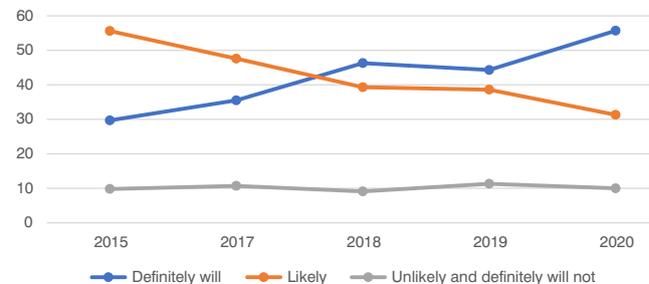
Nearly half (47 per cent) of respondents intended to 'wait and see'. This includes those who intended to wait and see how a fire developed (11.5 per cent), those who would wait for advice from emergency services (9.5 per cent) before deciding on their response to the bushfire, and those who would take action to protect their property but leave if threatened (25.6 per cent).

One third of respondents (34 per cent) said they would leave as soon as they were aware of a fire that could threaten their town.

Just over one in ten (11 per cent) intended to stay and defend their property.

### Community expectations

More than half of respondents (55 per cent) believed they will definitely (18 per cent) or are likely (36 per cent) to get help from firefighters to defend their property. This response has been stable over the past five years.



There is an increasing trend from 2015 to 2020 for respondents to definitely expect they will get an official warning of fire (see graph). There is also a similar increasing trend that respondents expect they will definitely be told when to leave their property (21 per cent in 2015 and 39 per cent in 2020).

### What this means for CFA members

We still have challenges to convince many people who live in or near bushland areas that:

- there is a very high bushfire risk where they live
- leaving early is the safest option – and leaving late will significantly increase their risk of being injured
- CFA cannot guarantee that a fire truck will defend their property
- they should not rely on receiving an official warning to leave – and should monitor several information sources to ensure they can protect themselves on high fire risk days.

For more information email the Knowledge and Evidence Team: [m.bourne@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:m.bourne@cfa.vic.gov.au)

STORY LERNA AVAKIAN

# HEALTH MATTERS



Bonang Captain Laurie Reed with District 11 BASO Anthony Cousin

## Defibrillators save lives

**Defibrillators are gifts that can keep on giving as long as they are ready for use and maintained on a regular basis. It would be heartbreaking to offer a potential life-saving piece of equipment to someone in need only to spend time unboxing a brigade defib, or finding the battery wasn't installed or was past its expiration date.**

The District 11 Health, Safety, Environment and Wellbeing (HSEW) Committee recently checked brigades' first-aid kits and defibrillators. According to Commander Aaron Worcester, some brigades may have overlooked checking and maintaining their first-aid kits and defibs following the busy fire season.

"We want to provide some useful resources to give our brigades confidence that when they need to use their first-aid skills, they have the best tools in the best condition for the job," Aaron said.

A pager message will now go out once a month from the district support

staff to remind brigades to check their defibrillators. Feedback from group health and safety coordinators attending the District 11 HSEW meeting highlighted that a reminder pager message would be of great assistance as it can be difficult to manage at brigade level. Reminders for brigades to check their first-aid kits will also be sent via pager message twice a year.

District 11 BASO Anthony Cousin had a winning idea to support the checking process. Based on CFA's PE Branch record card Anthony designed two different coloured record cards that will be placed with either a first-aid kit or defib. When brigade health and safety coordinators or other brigade members carry out their monthly inspections, they will now have a simple process to follow and cards to fill in. Green cards are for first-aid kits and blue cards are for the defibs.

As Anthony observed across a number of brigades in his patch, "Brigades

need to look for out-of-date defibrillator batteries and pads, and everyone should understand the difference between the 'install before' date and the 'shelf life' date". Anthony also recommends writing the date the battery was first installed on the back of the battery using a permanent marker. District Business Manager Vanessa McLeod will also coordinate support for replacement accessories such as batteries and pads.

"Where CFA has provided a defib, the district will pay for accessories, and where a brigade has purchased their own defib the district will order and process replacement parts via a recharge," Vanessa said.

Options are being examined for restocking first-aid kits, with consideration being given to brigade finances and distances from suppliers such as chemists. Contact your local district office for advice and support.

**STORY SAMANTHA SUTHERLAND**

# Are you losing sleep over losing sleep?

As the number of people across the world contracting COVID-19 continues to rise, many people are experiencing a good deal of stress and worry. Those worries might even be following us to bed, keeping us awake and leaving us tired the next day. When you add poor-quality sleep to the disrupted sleep of an operational volunteer, you have a recipe for ill health and potential safety issues.

Experts agree that it's quite understandable to be fearful or worried by this unprecedented event impacting our lives. For some of us, we churn through our daytime experiences in the quiet of the night when we just want to be resting.

Without reasonable sleep many of us will struggle to function because of tiredness and fatigue. We may struggle to think clearly, make decisions and concentrate on anything longer than a social media post. Many of us are still woken by pagers in the night and reclaiming the disrupted sleep can be challenging. Apart from being more cranky than usual, more emotional or less tolerant, we may eat more comfort food, binge-watch TV, be less inclined to get out when the weather's cool and simply forget to take medication because our routine is out of whack.

Sleep is important to consolidate our memories, repair our bodies and help our immune system fight infection. The amount of sleep required varies from person to person, but most need between seven and nine hours. Sometimes it takes someone else to realise how tired we have become because we can lose our self-awareness when tired.

South East Region's Member Wellbeing Adviser Anne Duff has these words of advice.

"Be kind to yourself. To obtain quality sleep time we need to make sleep a priority and establish a routine around bedtime. Try to give yourself a sleep-prep time in the evenings by lowering any ambient lighting, turning the heating down a little and getting some screen-free time," Anne said.

## Tips for better sleep

**Limit your screen time before bed.** Too much screen time at night can cause us to absorb and attempt to process new information when we are already tired, which can distract us from going to sleep. Blue light (from screens) can also trick our minds into thinking it's morning and make us alert when we are trying to wind down.

**Take time to unwind.** Before bed take some time out to relax by reading, listening to music, doing mindfulness, or any other activity that helps you shut down. Try not to look at work emails or the latest COVID-19 news update before bed.

**Care for your body and lifestyle.** Try to keep a normal routine during the day, including exercise and (virtual) connection with friends and family. Eat well, try to avoid caffeine in the evenings and limit your alcohol consumption. Find time for fun, laughter, and connectedness.

**Take care of your mind.** If worries are keeping you awake at night, try to take some time before bed to think about them, how they make you feel, and how you might be able to address them the next day. Maybe even try writing a list or some notes to assess the following day. Practising mindfulness can also help. Check out the app Smiling Mind for short mindfulness activities to help you relax.

**Your bed is predominantly for sleep.** Lying in bed getting worried or frustrated about sleep won't help you get to sleep. For good sleep we need our minds and bodies to associate our beds with sleep and rest. If you are restless or can't get to sleep, get up and do a quiet activity in another room with the lights dimmed. Go back to bed when you feel sleepy. Try not to watch TV, make phone calls, or check emails in bed if you are having trouble shutting down.

**Have a set sleep-wake routine.** Try to go to bed and get up at a similar time every day. Even if you have a late night the night before, try to get up at a similar time to help keep a good sleep routine. Consistency is important for good sleep.

**Manage fatigue but don't overdo it.** Everyone has nights when they don't sleep well and wake up tired. That's OK, you will most likely get through the day feeling fine and actually sleep better the next night. A lot of people use caffeine and naps to help combat fatigue, but it's important to remember that both of these can also lead to poorer sleep in the long run. Keep naps short (ideally less than 45 minutes) and try to avoid using caffeine in the hours before bed.

**Get Support.** We all have times of stress and worry, and for many of us that could impact our sleep. If you're struggling to sleep regularly, or if worries and/or tiredness are disrupting your day-to-day life, it's important to get support. Contact the CFA Wellbeing Support Line on 1800 959 232, 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

## References:

<https://www.sleephealthfoundation.org.au/getting-good-sleep-during-the-covid-19-pandemic.html>

<https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/news/how-to-get-a-better-nights-sleep-during-coronavirus/>

STORY SAMANTHA SUTHERLAND



# CFA peers are there for you

CFA has for many years maintained a Peer Support Program designed to provide mental health and wellbeing support in times of personal crisis, tragedy or after a potentially traumatic event. The program is an important prevention/early intervention pillar provided by the Organisational Wellbeing team and is available to all CFA members and their immediate family members. It's a key support for people from across the emergency services sector, including its associated contractors, during major incidents.

This support was most evident during the tragic loss of the Coulson C-130 firefighting aircraft in New South Wales on the 23 January 2020, which resulted in the death of its three American crew members. The Coulson aviation company provides aerial fire suppression support to many states in Australia during the summer months and at the time of the crash there were several crews also deployed in Victoria who were friends and colleagues of the deceased crew members.

Members of the Peer Support Program were notified of the incident and the implications this may have for Coulson employees stationed in Victoria and the agency personnel who worked with them. Following the crash, peers were immediately deployed to incident control centres and made available under the direction of incident controllers to support anyone who needed their services. Peers made regular visits to Victorian airbases to offer their services and let both staff and contractors know how they could access their services.

There are currently 14 peer teams spread across Victoria which include both volunteer and staff members. They have all completed comprehensive training including Psychological First Aid.

Peers are not confined to the borders of Victoria with several interstate deployments having taken place over the years. Most recently, peers were deployed with each strike force deployment to New South Wales. Peers accompanied firefighters to provide services as required in real time. This showed the great adaptability and responsiveness of the Peer Support Program, and it's reassuring to know that firefighters can effectively access these services on the fireground following tense and traumatic situations.

While the Peer Support Program is specifically designed to support CFA members and their families, it's important to note that they will provide support to whoever is standing in front of them at the time, whether they are a CFA member or a member of an affected community.

These scenarios personify the adaptability, compassion and responsiveness of the Peer Support Program as they support those who volunteer their time to help those in need.

To access Peer Support, you can contact the CFA Wellbeing Support Line on **1800 959 232** and follow the prompts to be put through to your local peer team.

STORY JUSTIN TILSON

## CFA WELLBEING SUPPORT LINE

One number to manage your wellbeing

# 1800 959 232

24/7 support for CFA members and their family

- Psychologists
- Counsellors
- Peer Support
- Chaplains
- Other support services



[cfa.vic.gov.au/wellbeing](https://cfa.vic.gov.au/wellbeing)

# Diesel exhaust is easy to manage

**As the HSE Adviser for West Region, I assisted a contracted occupational hygienist to monitor diesel exhaust gases and particulate matter in motor rooms at a class 1 and class 2 brigade. The testing occurred in the motor room during a scenario of a typical CFA call-out. The aim was to monitor the atmosphere using a gas detector and diesel particulate sensors.**

The brigade captain followed the process used for turning out to a job – opening the motor room door, starting the truck, donning PPE/C, driving the truck out of the motor room and closing the motor room door, though not necessarily in that order.

The local process to turn out for each brigade was similar but not the same. The first brigade moved the truck onto the apron, then left the motor room door open while members donned their PPE/C. The second brigade opened the motor room door, started the truck, donned PPE/C, then drove the truck out of the station and closed the door behind them.

I wondered if the differences between the two brigades would be noticeable when it came to the results of the test. I was

shocked at the difference it made to the real-time diesel gas levels as I watched the gas detector readings drop dramatically for the test at the first brigade. It took less than two minutes for the gases to drop significantly and then plateau, whereas the second station took well over 20 minutes to drop to the same level.

The diesel particulate results mirrored the gas readings – lower particulate levels were found at the first brigade. Getting the motor room door open and the truck out of the station as soon as possible made a significant difference. Keeping the door open to allow air flow through the motor room added to this.

The occupational hygienist's report stated that diesel gases and particulates measured at both locations were well below the guideline figures specified by the NSW Minerals Council. CFA members should not suffer any adverse long-term or short-term health effects because of exposure, and getting the truck out of the motor room early further reduces the risk.

STORY DAVID MACFARLANE

## COVID-19 requires effort by all

**The COVID-19 pandemic has required a bewildering amount of change and CFA continues to adapt. Over the past six months all brigades and supporting directorates have been working hard to learn new ways to deliver essential and emergency services to the community. All this effort has occurred while undergoing the most significant organisational change we are likely to see.**

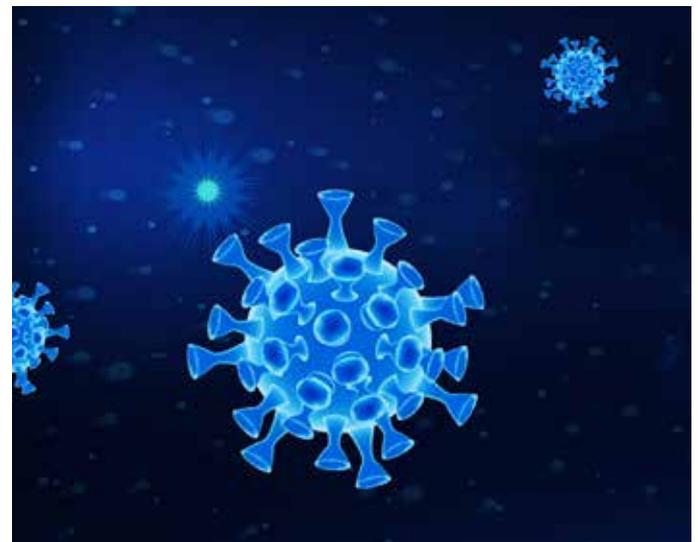
The people managing and supporting our response to COVID-19 have had to deal with a wide variety of issues. Through the ongoing efforts in CFA – at brigades, groups and districts, as well as in collaboration with our sector partners – we've identified, assessed and controlled risks as best as we can.

At the time of writing, the metro area of Melbourne is in Stage 4 restrictions and regional Victoria is in Stage 3 restrictions. Feedback from around the state has shown how complex working under these conditions is. We've also been very happy to see that brigades have responded to the challenge by using technology to conduct skills maintenance sessions and check in on the wellbeing of their members. For example, Knox Group runs a fortnightly online meeting for captains to keep up with the changing requirements and local operational issues.

As a CFA member, you're required to comply with the directions and processes provided to you by CFA. But let's face it, doing this for CFA should not be the key reason. Every day we hear how many new infections and deaths have occurred. It's easy to dissociate from these numbers if you don't know someone on a ventilator. It's easy to forget, if like me, you're a long way from Melbourne and still have a job.

Living with COVID-19 restrictions is hard but doing the right thing can save a life just like responding to an incident. You may not know the person you save, but you don't work with CFA for reward and recognition

Please apply the basic principles of this pandemic and be brave in calling out others:



- Distancing and isolation: if you don't need to be around others then stay away.
- Cleaning and disinfecting: cleaning removes, and disinfecting kills, viruses and other risks.
- Personal hygiene: wash your skin and clothes regularly. Scrubbing with soap works.
- Health checks: confirm you don't have symptoms or a temperature when you arrive.
- Face masks: help stop the virus leaving your body and entering another's.

CFA provides a range of specific advice and procedures for use by all members. See the COVID-19 page on Members Online for information or contact your local district office for support.

STORY JEREMY WATSON

# CFA online exercise programs

CFA Health Services has developed a suite of online exercise programs to help CFA members improve their health and fitness and prevent injury.

Programs are designed to be completed anywhere, whether you're at home or in a gym. Programs include body weight training, exercise using minimal equipment, high intensity interval training (HIIT), improving mobility and stability and preventing falls. They cater to a range of fitness levels and allow for progressions.

It's important to note that these programs are general in nature and may not be suited to all people, so it's important to talk to your doctor before starting a new exercise program.

To find out more, visit the Health Services Generalised Exercise Program page on Members Online ([members.cfa.vic.gov.au](http://members.cfa.vic.gov.au)) or email [healthwatch@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:healthwatch@cfa.vic.gov.au).

STORY GEORGIA THACKER

**HEALTH SERVICES**  
Bodyweight workout - Level 1

**Circuit A**  
Complete each exercise one after the other. Repeat the circuit 2-3 times total.

<p><b>A1. GLUTE BRIDGE</b> 2-3 sets, 12-15 reps</p>	<p><b>A2. FOUR-POINT KNEELING HOLD</b> 2-3 sets, 20-30 second static hold</p>
<p><b>A3. STEP UP</b> 2-3 sets, 10-12 each leg</p>	<p><b>A4. INCLINE PUSHUP</b> 2-3 sets, 12-15 reps, Rest 60-90 seconds</p>

**Circuit B**  
Complete each exercise one after the other. Repeat the circuit 2-3 times total.

<p><b>B1. FORWARD STEP WITH ROTATION</b> 2-3 sets, 10-12 each leg</p>	<p><b>B2. BIRD/DOG</b> 2-3 sets, 12-16 alternating reps</p>
<p><b>B3. CHAIR SQUAT</b> 2-3 sets, 12-15 reps</p>	<p><b>B4. LYING BACK EXTENSIONS</b> 2-3 sets, 12-15 reps, Rest 60-90 seconds</p>

**HEALTH SERVICES**  
HIIT workout - Level 3

Perform each movement for 30 seconds followed by 10 seconds rest before moving to the next one. Complete 4 rounds in total.

**30:10 x 4 rounds**  
**Total workout time 14 minutes**

<p><b>A1. MOUNTAIN CLIMBERS</b></p>	<p><b>A2. SQUAT JUMPS</b></p>
<p><b>A3. PLANK WALKS</b></p>	<p><b>A4. SINGLE LEG SITUPS</b></p>
<p><b>A5. FEET ELEVATED GLUTE BRIDGE</b></p>	

**HEALTH SERVICES**  
Minimal Equipment - Level 1

**Circuit A**  
Complete each exercise one after the other. Repeat the circuit 2-3 times total.

<p><b>A1. Dumbbell Chair Squat</b> 2-3 sets, 12-15 repetitions</p>	<p><b>A2. Dumbbell Shoulder Press</b> 2-3 sets, 12-15 repetitions</p>
<p><b>A3. Dumbbell Bicep Curl</b> 2-3 sets, 12-15 repetitions, rest 30-60 seconds</p>	

**Circuit B**  
Complete each exercise one after the other. Repeat the circuit 2-3 times total.

<p><b>B1. Weighted Hip Thrust</b> 2-3 sets, 12-15 repetitions</p>	<p><b>B2. Single Arm Banded Row</b> 2-3 sets, 12-15 each side</p>
<p><b>B3. Tricep Extensions</b> 2-3 sets, 12-15 each side, rest 30-60 seconds</p>	

**Circuit C**  
Complete each exercise one after the other. Repeat the circuit 2-3 times total

<p><b>C1. Plank Hold</b> 2-3 sets, 20-30 second hold</p>	<p><b>C2. Dead Bugs</b> 2-3 sets, 12-16 alternating, rest 30-60 seconds</p>
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**HEALTH SERVICES**  
Mobility Program

**Purpose**  
This program is designed to improve your mobility, reduce your risk of injury during exercise and assist in functional movement.

**How to use**  
This program can be used either on its own or as a warmup prior to a workout.

**Target Muscles**  
A whole-body approach with a specific focus on commonly restricted areas such as thoracic spine, shoulder, hips and ankles.

Perform all of these moves with purpose and control.

<p><b>A1. Ankle Mobility</b> 2-3 sets, 10 repetitions</p> <p><b>Key Performance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Using the support of a wall or door.</li> <li>- Press up into a tip-toe position.</li> <li>- Press firmly through the big toes</li> <li>- Then slowly rock back onto your heels, lifting your toes off the ground. Pause at each stage and control the movement</li> </ul>	<p><b>A2. Walking Hip Openers</b> 2-3 sets, 10 repetitions each side</p> <p><b>Key Performance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Stand tall, feet under hips. Lift your left knee to your chest</li> <li>- Make a circle with your left knee, across your body and out to the side and down.</li> <li>- Imagine drawing big circles with your hips. Using a wall for support if needed.</li> </ul>
<p><b>A3. Thoracic Spine Windmills</b> 2-3 sets, 5 repetitions each side</p> <p><b>Key Performance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Slowly lift your top arm and rotate it away from you, opening your chest to the ceiling.</li> <li>- Exhale as you rotate</li> <li>- Inhale to come back to start position</li> </ul>	<p><b>A4. Shoulder Pass-Through</b> 2-3 sets, 10 repetitions</p> <p><b>Key Performance</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Stand tall, holding a broomstick with overhead grip</li> <li>- Keep your arms straight, slowly pass the stick behind your head as far as you can</li> <li>- Keep ribs tucked and maintain good posture. Avoid arching through the spine</li> </ul>

**For more exercise programs visit our [Health Services](#) page**

# SEASONAL FOCUS

## CHIEF OFFICER'S EXPECTATIONS



1. Your safety is our first and most important consideration. Every one of our team returns home, every time, safely. All members responding during the summer bushfire season must complete the safety requirements of Minimum Skills, hazardous trees and completion of the annual entrapment drill.
2. Consider how you will prepare yourself this year, understanding that the way you did it in previous years will be different.
3. Respond with effective weight of attack. Hit fires hard and fast keeping them as small as practically possible.
4. Slow down and take the time to protect yourselves and those around you from Coronavirus (COVID-19). I acknowledge that good hygiene and social distancing practices, taking time and thoughtful behaviour are our most powerful PPE.
5. Leadership at every level is critical to our success. Act decisively and deliberately, brief your team well, empower them to speak up and listen to instructions or directions when required. Leaders of our brigades, group and districts are vital to our operational cohesiveness and ultimate success. Crew leaders and strike teams leaders – your role is even more critical this season. Stay informed and ensure you promote and model the additional safety measures that we have put in place to protect your teams during the pandemic.
- 6 Continue to find innovative ways to engage and prepare with your crews using the technology that has emerged and has been embraced in recent months.
7. Protect our most vulnerable especially those members who are most at risk of severe illness from COVID-19.
8. Above all, look after yourself both physically and mentally. Take advantage of the resources available to you in times of need and acknowledge that we are living through very difficult times.



## CHIEF OFFICER'S MESSAGE

We move into the 2020-21 summer bushfire season surrounded by a world that is affected by a pandemic and as a result is volatile, uncertain, chaotic and ambiguous. There are two lines of battle this year – the visible one being fire, and the invisible one being COVID-19. However, we will do this as a committed group of tens of thousands of Victorians, focused on doing whatever is necessary to protect lives and property through our substantial network of brigades and groups across Victoria.

There are two basic but important principles I would encourage every member to consider and take forward, not just for the upcoming season but always:

1. Look after your people and those around you
2. Always be ready

The experiences of the campaign fire season we endured 2019-20 across three states was a testament to our ability to sustain our rotations for months on end, with many of our members building on experiences and for many more developing knowledge and skills which will serve them well in future events.

I am a great supporter of the benefits of skills maintenance training and this has been a challenge for us over the past few months as we have taken a balanced approach against the risks that face us now. I am constantly looking for ways in which we can achieve good outcomes in this area while managing everyone's safety.

It is likely that our operations and movement on and around firegrounds may need to be altered to limit the spread of COVID-19. This may mean that it takes longer to get through staging areas, and how we travel may need to be different from what we are used to. This will require your patience and leadership to ensure we keep everyone safe.

This year the minimum safety requirements of the Chief Officer are unchanged, but this will need to be undertaken with a COVID-19 overlay as we continue to put safety first.

Our ability to train new operational firefighters in the practical elements of the General Firefighter training package continues to be challenging and like the skills maintenance activities, we will constantly be looking for ways in which this may be delivered, again while managing the safety of all involved. The hazardous trees package can be easily completed online and CFA will provide advice on how brigades with the help of districts will facilitate the entrapment drill

I cannot afford to exclude the entrapment drill from this year's safety requirements as we cannot reduce our commitment to every single one of our member's safety. It is also the opportunity for every one of our members to practise operating as a crew in a COVID-19 environment in a controlled simulation. I am very confident that our firefighters have the necessary operational skills – the challenge will be that we need to modify behaviours on the fireground that we could naturally fall in to. The normal practices of firefighters huddling around a map, mingling at quick fill points or around a barbecue and taking off masks while travelling back to the station in the tankers or FCVs, will need to be modified in line with COVID-19 safe practices.

The key cohort of people in our brigades during operations are our brigade officers and crew leaders and once again I call upon their leadership to play a critical and expanded role this fire season. With this in mind, I will provide a SMEACS briefing for crew leaders in CFA and ask them to support me directly by being the COVID-19 field safety adviser for your crew.

We are also completing work on six key operational activities. These are:

- Land travel and accommodation
- Air travel
- Fireground management
- Strike team management
- LCF Management
- Staging area management

We are also working with a multi-agency team to ensure ICCs and RCCs can operate in a safe but effective way.

My objective is for these six operational activities to have a simple, statewide and widely understood overlay to support COVID-19 safety. These pieces of work will be communicated separately via the districts.

Lastly, I encourage everyone to work to CFA's values. I do this regularly and it helps me to ground myself and informs every decision I make.

- We put safety first
- We excel through teamwork
- We are dynamic and adaptable
- We act with integrity
- We respect each other.

## Coronavirus - COVID - 19 Guidance

For feedback please contact [covid19@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:covid19@cfa.vic.gov.au)

# Information about COVID-19 for the 2020-21 summer season

The outbreak of coronavirus or COVID-19 has been declared a pandemic. CFA is taking all necessary precautions to protect the health of our members, both staff and volunteers. As the situation and advice is constantly evolving we recommend all CFA members to keep up to date with the latest official information through CFA's website. It provides the latest updates, Chief Officer's Direction, guidance notes, work instructions, operation bulletins and general COVID-19 information.

<https://www.members.cfa.vic.gov.au/mycfa/Show?pagelid=covid19>

## Operational readiness and preparedness for the 2020-21

A significant amount of planning is currently being undertaken to prepare for a summer season that will need to include safe operation in a COVID-19 environment. This planning is looking at a range of facilities, work locations and team environments, including ICCs, DCCs, LCFs, staging areas, strike teams.

Further information will be provided by your local ACFO in coming weeks.

## Incident control centre signage and procedures

All CFA-managed incident control centres across Victoria have been inspected and COVID-19 signage and directions are in place. COVID-19 procedures and guidelines are being developed for ICCs so that

attending personnel, facility managers, safety officers and COVID-19 advisers are supported. There will be limits on the number of people attending ICCs and where they are located. Readiness, response and recovery activities will be carried out with the safety of our people foremost and in compliance with the latest advice on social distancing, hygiene, personal protective clothing.

## COVID safe in the field

CFA and agency partners from across Victoria are working on several areas that will support our operational response this summer in a COVID safe way. This work includes guidance for brigades and members in normal firefighting response, strike teams, local command facilities, field command, staging areas and base camps, and incident and regional control centres. This will be provided by your district towards the end of September.

## Face masks

Face masks must be worn when undertaking permitted CFA activities including responding to incidents and while in vehicles. CFA's State Logistics Centre has procured a large supply of hygiene face masks.

For CFA purposes, the face masks are the hygiene type, not the P2 vented masks issued as part of wildfire PPC allocations. P2 face masks are only to be used as part of operational activity and not in the general community to comply with State Government rules. Similarly, surgical face masks must not be used in operational situations in lieu of breathing apparatus or P2 face masks.



Used disposable face masks can be placed in the normal domestic rubbish. When removed, disposable face masks should be placed in a rubbish bag to prevent cross contamination.

CFA members should continue to undertake hygiene and cleaning practices to support a virus-free environment in CFA locations and vehicles.

## CFASafe reporting

If the COVID-19 exposure occurred in the workplace an **incident report in CFASafe** is required as per normal reporting processes. If the impacted individual is unable to enter the report, their line manager/OIC should do this for them.

The report should be classified as follows.

- At the 'Incident Classification' option, select '**Contact with, or exposure to, biological factors**' from the drop-down list.
- At the 'Significant Cause' option, select 'Biological agencies' from the drop-down list.

Assign the CFASafe to the individual's line manager or catchment officer, who will enter an action plan. The risk may be assessed depending on the control measures in place at the time noting that correctly using PPC and undertaking adequate hygiene practices provides an effective and layered defence. Example actions may include:

- tasks to improve member awareness and use of PPC/hygiene practices
- isolation or the isolation of others if close contact occurred (i.e. without the use of operational PPC)
- the cleaning and/or disinfecting of equipment, vehicles, sites
- No action if the report is being made only as a record of a potential uncontrolled exposure.

Incident reports and action plans will be reviewed by the HSE team to identify possible causes and contributing factors to the exposure, and assess the suitability of the proposed actions to eliminate or reduce the risk.

# Crew leader responsibilities in a COVID-19 environment

**As a crew leader you are responsible for the safety of your crew and you need to ensure the following has been conducted.**

## Before responding

- Are you and your crew fit and feeling well?
- Are you or any of your crew waiting for COVID-19 test results?
- Are you or any of your crew experiencing any COVID-19 symptoms?
- Have you all had a temperature check?

## At the incident

### Masks

- Surgical (hygiene) masks must be worn at the station and when travelling in vehicles.
- Use P2 vented masks when on the fireground when required.

### Crew details

Do you have the crew's names for contact tracing and the fire report?

### Socially distance especially:

- at briefings
- at staging areas
- while waiting to be tasked
- at fill points
- during rest breaks

Do not share drink bottles or food.

## Back at the station

### Cleaning

- Clean any touch points of equipment, vehicles and station.
- Clean your PPC especially helmets and firefighting gloves.

Restock hand sanitiser, wipes, disposable masks and gloves in the vehicles.

# LACES

LACES must be used as a guide to help mitigate the risks that firefighters face, including burnover and entrapment during bushfire, planned burning operations and when a weather change increases tree hazards.

**Lookouts** A fixed, aerial or mobile lookout shall be deployed to maintain a clear appreciation of risks and to provide timely advice of the need to use escape routes and safety zones.

**Awareness** Firefighters shall be aware of the impact of changes in fire behaviour including those resulting from variations to fuel, weather and topography and of other fireground hazards.

(Use WATCHOUT to maintain awareness)



**Communications** All fire crews shall follow the Communications Plan, communicate with your crew and surrounding crews to discuss and address safety issues.

**Escape routes** At least two escape routes should be agreed and made known to all relevant firefighting personnel. The suitability of escape routes should be continually reviewed to ensure they remain effective. In fire operations, crews must maintain a safety zone close at hand as the progress, allowing the fuels inside the control line to be consumed before going ahead.



**Safety Zones** Safety zones should be identified and made known to all relevant firefighters. Firefighters need to consider escape time and safety zone size requirements, and these will change as fire behaviour changes.

**Remember: LACES on every fire and in every situation.**

# WATCHOUT

**WATCHOUT** is used to remind firefighters about potential dangers to their safety and to give advice about safe work practices. Understanding the meaning will help you perform a more comprehensive risk assessment.

<b>Weather</b>	dominates fire behaviour so keep informed
<b>Actions</b>	must be based on current and expected fire behaviour
<b>Try out</b>	at least two safe escape routes
<b>Communicate</b>	with your supervisor, your crew and adjoining crews
<b>Hazards</b>	beware of variations in fuels and steep slopes
<b>Observe</b>	changes in wind speed or direction, temperature, humidity and cloud
<b>Understand</b>	your instructions and make sure you are understood
<b>Think</b>	clearly, be alert and act decisively before your situation becomes critical

Firefighters 'watchout' when:

- building a control line downhill towards a fire
- on a slope - rolling material can ignite fuel below you
- the wind changes speed or direction
- the weather gets hotter or drier
- there are unburnt fuels between you and the fire
- terrain or vegetation impedes travel or visibility
- in an area you haven't seen in daylight
- unfamiliar with weather and local fire behaviour
- frequent spot fires occur over your control line
- you cannot see the main fire or communicate with anyone who can
- unclear instructions or tasks are given
- you feel exhausted or want to take a nap near the fire
- attacking a fire or constructing a control line without a safe anchor point
- working alone with no communications link to crew members or supervisor
- you are not fully informed about strategy, tactics and hazards
- safety zones and escape routes have not been identified
- the potential of the fire has not been assessed
- water levels are getting low.

## 10 Standard Fire Orders (CFA)

1. Always stay in contact or tell someone where you are going.
2. Know where the fire is and its direction.
3. Know the country or have someone with you who does.
4. Plan an escape route.
5. Park your vehicle in a safe spot.
6. Ensure that your instructions are clear.
7. Build a fireline from a safe anchor point.
8. A full set of safety gear is compulsory.
9. Don't panic – keep calm and make logical decisions.
10. Accidents and ill-health can endanger all the crew.

## More information

Vic. Emergency Operations Handbook (page 36).

<https://files-em.em.vic.gov.au/public/Doctrine/ManHand/VIC-EOpsHandbook.pdf>

Case Study – Bald Mountain Fire, US:

<https://www.members.cfa.vic.gov.au/mycfa/Show?pageId=displayDoc&docId=033565>

# FIRECOM call sign

To ensure consistency of communications across the state, CFA has moved to the call sign 'FIRECOM'. This move reduces confusion for brigades responding within shared FRV/CFA boundaries and assists ESTA operators to deliver information effectively and efficiently, while ensuring the safety of our people and our communities. FIRECOM is used by fire services in NSW, Queensland and Tasmania, providing synergy for interstate deployments.

FIRECOM has now replaced VICFIRE for all operational radio call sign communications with ESTA, for all CFA volunteers.

Find out more: <https://www.members.cfa.vic.gov.au/mycfa/Show?pageId=cadOperations> and refer to the Operations

Bulletin 005/2020 <https://www.members.cfa.vic.gov.au/mycfa/Show?pageId=displayDoc&docId=034371>

# Smoke and heat

## Smoke and dust hazards

Smoke and dust are ever-present irritants to your eyes and lungs at fires. Prolonged exposure to heavy smoke can be hazardous to firefighters. In addition to restricting visibility, heavy smoke contains higher concentrations of carbon monoxide (CO) which is a poisonous gas.

Inhalation of smoke and dust can:

- reduce your performance on the fireground
- bring on fatigue more quickly
- bring on illness
- alter perception and judgement
- cause death due to carbon monoxide poisoning.

### Precautions

Minimise the effects of smoke and dust by:

- avoiding unnecessary exposure
- using approved personal protective equipment when travelling or operating in any smoke or dust-affected areas (for example, P2 particulate filters and goggles).

## Respiratory protection

Respiratory protection against atmospheric contaminants (particulates) at bushfires can be provided by wearing an approved particulate filter mask which removes contaminants from the air that you breathe.

### Particulate filter masks

P2 particulate filter masks should be worn when working to prevent the inhalation of particulates contained in dust, exhaust fumes and smoke.

Firefighters may suffer irritation to the respiratory tract from exposure to airborne particles and need to leave the area to recover in fresh air.

Particulate filter masks, rated as Class P2, can be relied on to provide reasonable protection to the nose, throat and lungs from ash and larger airborne particles that may be present in smoke.

When using these masks, some discomfort associated with sweating and inhaling warm exhaled air may be experienced so only wear them when required. Seek advice from your crew leader.

The mask needs to fit the wearer securely to achieve an air-tight seal. If the mask is not fitted properly or becomes clogged with particles from extended use, it will be even less effective.

P2 particulate filter masks are disposable and should be replaced when breathing becomes restricted or for reasons of general hygiene.

For further reading go to Bushfire Firefighter Manual, CFA 2017.

## Heat stress

Heat stress has been noted as one of the top three leading causes of injury during bush fire suppression. Personal protective clothing (PPC) provides considerable protection from the external environment during fire suppression. However, PPC restricts the ability to dissipate body heat through sweating. As the environment becomes hotter, the body's natural cooling system is compromised.

The human body will tolerate a core body temperature increase of only 3°C before heat stress could occur. Under high ambient temperature, the body may experience exhaustion, mental confusion, disorientation, loss of consciousness, heart attack and in extreme cases death.

## Safety Actions - Hot working conditions.

- Ensure all members are aware of prevention and management of heat related illness
- Pre-hydration and nutritional practices should be encouraged.
- Incident controller should ensure all crews are monitored for signs of fatigue and heat illness
- Ensure extra supplies of water and electrolyte drinks are available- fluid and electrolyte replacement during work in the heat is critical to restore body fluid levels lost when sweating.
- Where members are not involved in active fire attack and are in a safe location have them remove coats and when worn remove flash hoods.
- Correct PPC for the task should be worn.
- Where possible task rotation should be used to assist crews (eg. BA task then swap to light task then back to BA,
- Ensure hydration procedures and rest periods are used

### Consider early in the incident responding a Rehab/Health team

- Implement cooling techniques
- In Extreme conditions, under heavy workload, respond extra support
- Brigade/s to assist with 15-20 mins task rotation.
- In Extreme + conditions, under heavy workload, consider task rotation time of 10-15 mins followed by up to 20 mins rest period in shaded area.

For further information refer to Bushfire Firefighter Reference Manual [http://www.repository.cfals.info/content/bushfire\\_firefighter\\_0](http://www.repository.cfals.info/content/bushfire_firefighter_0)

# Mallacoota fire 2019-20

## Incident summary

In December 2019 and January 2020 several fires threatened communities across East Gippsland. Many townships and isolated communities had been under siege from fire for some weeks. On 29 December 2019 a fire started at Banana Track at Wingan River (5km south of Princes Hwy) and spread quickly, growing to more than 1000 hectares in just a couple of hours. Within 48 hours the fire impacted the coastal township of Mallacoota. Many people heeded warnings and evacuated from Mallacoota before the fire reached the town. However, more than 4,000 people were stranded. Between those people and the fire was a CFA team comprising the local brigade and three strike teams, plus a handful of Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMV) and Victoria Police personnel. They were led by a small team that had prepared for this moment for many years, including CFA senior staff who were deployed before the roads were cut off.

## Planning and preparation

Emergency management has been a priority in Mallacoota for some time with emergency services organisations, local government and other partner agencies all taking part in planning and exercising for a range of significant scenarios. A local Incident Management Plan was in place and well-rehearsed by all personnel and agencies involved. CFA and FFMV led a strong community engagement campaign to ensure the community in Mallacoota was aware of the risks and took steps to prepare for a bushfire emergency.

In the lead-up to the 2019-2020 fire season, Mallacoota Fire Brigade was heavily involved in community engagement and preparation for the season. These activities included home visits, public information sessions, Fire Ready Victoria sessions and attendance at community events. These activities were run several times a week for more than two months in the lead-up to the fire season to ensure Mallacoota Fire Brigade, supported by regional community safety staff, were well connected to the local community and that the messaging reached its audience.

During the season when the fires were burning in the forest and forest fire services knew Mallacoota would

be impacted, three CFA strike teams were deployed into Mallacoota to support the local brigade and FFMV resources. At a public meeting on the morning before the fire impacted the town clear, professional and informed messaging was delivered to the audience.

The community knew what to expect, they knew about the Neighbourhood Safer Place as a bushfire place of last resort, and knew that all emergency vehicles would sound their sirens just before the fire impacted.

The fire crews were well briefed by ACFO Stewart Kreltszheim ahead of the fire impact – the deployed fire crews knew what was expected, they had plans that had been prepared by CFA staff at Bairnsdale ICC which included QR codes with links to mapping of critical infrastructure. CFA strike teams began to identify critical infrastructure as soon as they arrived and worked with the local brigade to familiarise themselves with the surrounding terrain and layout of the township. This initiative provided a solid foundation to build the subsequent plan.

## The fire

An Emergency Warning was issued for Mallacoota at 4.40pm on 30 December 2019. The fire behaviour was severe with the highest intensity in areas of greater fuel loads. In some areas the fire spread from structure to structure while in others it burned among vegetation. Reports concluded that the fire behaviour was severe.

The fire took a heavy toll despite no lives being lost. The event took a personal toll on locals and tourists financially, physically and emotionally. There was a substantial loss of private dwellings, holiday houses, and rental stock (more than 100 homes). Economically there was a loss of business assets, future income and potential for growth. The Abalone Cooperative building, a major employer in town, was partially destroyed.

The work of the leaders of CFA, Victoria Police and Parks Victoria immediately before and at the time of impact was exceptional. The strong performance of these leaders meant that large numbers of people in the community were prepared for, and responded to, what was happening to them. While leadership was displayed at a range of levels, including from community members themselves, the efforts of ACFO Stewart Kreltszheim (CFA), Sgt Stuart





Johnston (Victoria Police) and Darryl Burns Ranger in Charge-Fire & Emergency Operations, (Parks Victoria) contributed to the personal safety of the thousands of people they were charged with protecting.

Fire crews performed exceptionally well in the most arduous conditions. Their training, skill and discipline were evident throughout the sustained firefight. The losses sustained by the Mallacoota residents were substantial, but would have been much greater without the efforts of tanker crews, their strike team leaders and local brigade personnel.

## Lessons identified

**Relationships are vital** The integration of crews into the Local Incident Management Plan (LIMP) was seamless because of the strong relationships between agencies in the town. The ability of all agencies to carry out their roles under emergency management arrangements occurred, not in isolation, but because of great coordination and support of one another during the emergency.

**Shared responsibility** The Mallacoota community was aware of its risks and had planned and exercised accordingly. Locals who defended properties also had contingency plans showing a great understanding of the issues confronting them.

**Protection of townships is essential to save lives when full evacuation is not possible** Despite many people leaving in the 24 hours before the fire, the remaining population was large. CFA led a conscious effort with local, Mallacoota-based agencies to protect the remaining people.

**Pre-planning for such events is vital – having people that know those plans, have exercised those plans and then implementing them is critical** The LIMP was a vital document, but the inclusiveness of council and local emergency services to involve the community in the planning definitely contributed to the positive outcomes.

**Standard predictive tools should not be relied on in all circumstances** Local knowledge and skilled fire behaviour analysis can interpret all factors and give appropriate advice to incident controllers. The initial predictive tools did not identify the requisite focus on Mallacoota about the impact of the Banana Track fire. CFA personnel did analyse the data and undertake

the work to identify the risks to Mallacoota and this influenced the preparation and resourcing to protect the community.

**Warnings and advice** There were some challenges with the public Information function in the ICCs. Examples of confusion between ICCs included the responsibility for publishing information, the lack of information flow and the inadequate resourcing in the public information function. There are opportunities for better and clearer command, control and coordination in the public information function. It is essential ICCs collaborate on public messaging to ensure communities receive consistent advice in a timely manner.

**Use of sirens to warn community** The use of audible warning devices (sirens) on vehicles to warn and communicate with small communities does work and prepares the community for the onset of fire. This approach was effective in Mallacoota, where the community was well informed about the use of sirens through meetings.

**LACES** There was a strong emphasis on the use of LACES by the fire agencies and achieved the following:

- **L**ookouts were deployed to identify when the fire was approaching.
- **A**wareness was supported by a strong structure to maintain situational awareness of fire activity and community action.
- **C**ommunications: radio communications plans were tested and maintained to ensure the LCF remained in constant communication with the fireground.
- **E**scape routes and **S**afety zones were identified and all tankers were aware of their location, the procedures for their use and when to do so.

## Conclusion

The 2019-20 bushfire emergency in Mallacoota was a significant and severe challenge to the community, tourists and emergency services. Despite the extraordinary challenges faced, the operations to protect and preserve life and property were overwhelmingly successful because of the skill and dedication of emergency services personnel, government and community. Lessons learned from this incident will benefit Victorians in future emergencies and continue to assure them that CFA is up for the challenge.

# Seaford fire

## Summary

What began as a complex structure fire grew rapidly in extreme weather conditions to a ferocious grass and scrub fire that threatened residential and commercial properties with a perimeter of 1.5 kilometres. This resource-intensive and fast-paced fire presented numerous complex challenges to responding emergency services. The conditions encountered by firefighters and the extreme weather contributed to 10 firefighters being hospitalised and several others treated on scene for heat-related illness. Several important lessons were identified in this incident for consideration in future emergency response.

## Incident overview

On 20 December 2019 CFA responded to a structure fire in Seaford, Victoria. The weather conditions on the day were severe for fire behaviour with temperatures above 40°C and northerly winds of 30km per hour, gusting to 48km per hour. The fire originated from a number of LPG cylinders in the driveway of a residential house and spread quickly to involve the house and garage. Properties on either side of the house were also impacted.

Frankston and Patterson River brigades attended with three heavy pumpers. They established a control point and began immediate fire suppression at the residential properties. Driven by wind, the fire rapidly spread south behind the houses into a large unmaintained block of land, overgrown with grass, scrub and trees.

Multiple pumpers, tankers and aircraft were requested with a focus on asset protection and fire suppression. At the height of the incident a total of 37 vehicles responded including pumpers, tankers, FCVs and other operational vehicles were on scene. The fast escalation of the incident, driven by extreme weather, from a complex structure fire to a grass and scrub fire meant that extra resources were required quickly. The Incident controller had good situational awareness and concentrated on the attack. Due to the conditions and initial amount of resources it outpaced the ability of brigades to supply and transport relief crews to the active fireground. This meant that some crews could not be rotated out which contributed to fatigue and heat-related illness with some firefighters.

On the south side of the block, the fire impacted commercial structures including an abandoned factory and large debris piles, an operating BP petrol station and other businesses, causing fencing losses, equipment damage and external structural damage. The fire also damaged power infrastructure, residential properties and sheds.

The fire behaviour was aggressive and driven rapidly by wind. After being contained the fire area was mapped at 2.3 hectares with a perimeter of 1.5 kilometres. The size of the incident with its number of resources stretched the District 8 Communications Plan and created challenges for incident command and control. Furthermore, the incident was in a communications blackspot which presented additional radio communications challenges for the incident controller, which was overcome using mobile phones. It was not until later into the incident that a mobile command vehicle from Knox SES arrived to ease the communications burden.

Rehabilitation units were on scene to provide shade, cooling, rest and hydration for fire crews. However, they



were limited by the amount of equipment they carried and how many firefighters they could process at one time. Conveying firefighters from the fireground to the rehab facilities was also challenging because of the lack of changeover crews available for relief.

Health monitoring was undertaken by Ambulance Victoria crews who made the decision to transport 10 firefighters to hospital with heat-related illness. The deployment of CFA liaison officers to destination hospitals established communications about patient condition and allowed for next-of-kin to be notified. It is critical to consider that during times of extreme weather, these types of complex incidents can overwhelm local Ambulance Victoria capacity. Heat was a major factor in this incident, challenging firefighters, command and control and crew resourcing.

## The impact of heat

During the incident, 10 firefighters were hospitalised with heat related illnesses. As the event was initially paged as a structure fire, many responding personnel had been wearing the appropriate personal protective clothing and equipment (PPC/E) for this type of event including donning the full structural ensemble and breathing apparatus (BA). Full PPC/E was essential for firefighter safety and the execution of their tasks. However, full PPC/E combined with clothing layers underneath, the temperature of the day, and radiant heat and smoke contributed to increased body temperature, dehydration and exhaustion which impacted the health and welfare of the fire crews. Therefore, it's critical that crew leaders and crew members take steps to manage the risk and prevent heat illness on the fireground.

The remainder of the hospitalised firefighters were in bushfire PPC/E but had been working hard in hot and smoky, challenging conditions for an extended period. Smoke from the structure and grass and scrub fires was also likely a major contributing factor to the firefighter illness. P2 masks were worn and are effective against larger particles in smoke but they don't filter out chemicals and products of smoke such as carbon monoxide.



## Lessons to reinforce

**Heat illness:** The incident identified the severe danger of firefighting in extreme weather conditions. Monitoring the welfare of firefighters is crucial to identify the signs and symptoms of heat illness. Crew leaders also identified the challenges around self-identifying heat symptoms and the need to maintain their own welfare. Preventative measures include hydration, rest-work cycles, reducing PPC/E where safe to do so, crew rotation and the use of air-conditioned truck cabins for relief where possible.

**Resourcing and relief crews:** On days of extreme weather consider the need for relief crews early to reduce the length of time first responding crews are exposed to arduous firefighting in extreme conditions. This includes the relief of command personnel, crew leaders and crew members.

**Mobile command vehicles:** Mobile command vehicles can reduce the communications burden at an incident and provide relief from the conditions to command personnel, thereby supporting their welfare and reducing the need for additional transfer of control.

**Health monitoring:** Health monitoring is essential for firefighter safety and welfare. In the Seaford fire incident this was initiated early which allowed for the treatment and transport of firefighters afflicted with heat illness.

## Managing the heat

Heat-related illnesses such as heat cramps, heat exhaustion and heat stroke are all forms of heat stress. Heat stress occurs when the body fails to maintain a normal and healthy core temperature. The onset of heat stress can be triggered by extreme temperatures or high workload. The risk of heat stress for firefighters is increased because of the nature of their work, and work conditions that are hot, humid and dusty, often within range of radiant heat, combined with wearing PPC/E.

The incident controller, crew leaders and crew members need to remain vigilant and monitor each other for signs and symptoms of fatigue and heat illness.

## Actions

- Monitor all personnel for signs of heat illness.
- Respond extra crews to assist with task rotation.
- Ensure hydration procedures and rest periods are used – 10-15 minutes of work followed by 20-30 minutes of rest in the shade.
- Arrange back-up supplies of water and electrolytes for the incident.
- Request ambulance standby.
- Use active cooling techniques.
- Report in CFASafe

Know the signs and symptoms of heat illness

• Headaches	• Dizziness
• Fatigue	• Changes in mood
• Thirst	• Loss of coordination
• Dry skin	• Confusion
• Light-headedness	• Loss of consciousness
• Nausea	

If a firefighter presents with signs and symptoms of heat illness

- Move them to safety and apply first aid. Notify the incident controller.
- Request an ambulance.
- Remove clothing.
- Actively cool the firefighter.
- If they are fully conscious supply cool water to drink.
- If unconscious follow 'DRSABCD' and if they are breathing place them in recovery position and continue to cool them.



Photos: By Keith Pakenham AFSM

For more information on preventive actions read the following CFA Health and Safety information on heat illness: <https://www.members.cfa.vic.gov.au/mycfa/Show?pagelId=displayDoc&docId=030581>

# Aviation firebombing

Victoria will contract 50 aircraft for fire and emergency aviation activities over the 2020-21 summer season. Additional aircraft will be available from interstate or on call when needed if they are available.

Last season aviation focused on firebombing safety (<https://youtu.be/X5Gl6rGO17A>) and communication with aircraft (<https://youtu.be/19FP-x3Jp6Y>) which are still very important and should be viewed again. This season the focus is on drop patterns and length of drops from various aircraft available in the Victorian fleet.

There are two types of aircraft that deliver firebombing.

- Rotary wing: Firebird and helitack. These draw water from a static source such as a collar tank, creek or dam.



PHOTO WAYNE RIGG

- Fixed wing: bomber. Water/retardant is supplied at equipped reloading airfield.



PHOTO NED DAWSON

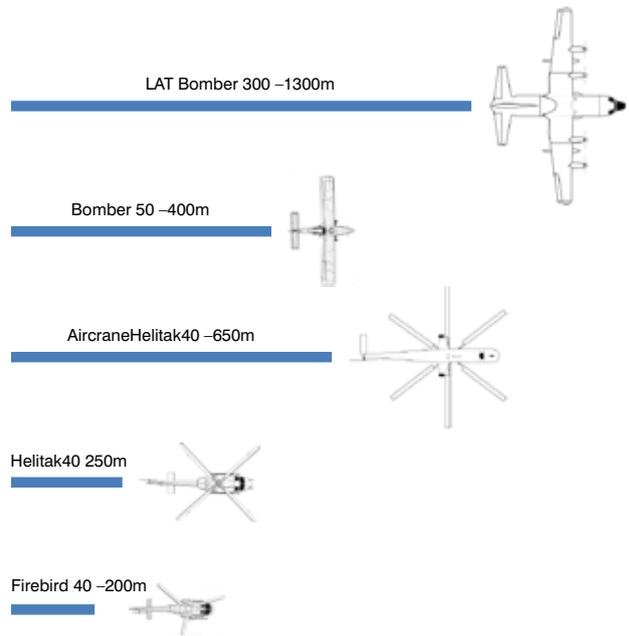
In most initial attack events in Victoria, you will be given the closest aircraft on pre determined dispatch – where the aircraft responds at the same time as the brigade if the Fire Danger Index is above 12.

For extended attack operations consideration should be given to how much an aircraft can deliver to a fireground, allowing for turnaround times for retardant. How much line (water drop length) can be created in a given drop time?

### State Airdesk dispatches

During the 2019-20 fire season, The State Airdesk system recorded 2,126 dispatches for all agencies and 846 of those dispatches were to CFA incidents.

Below are illustrations of the different drop lengths and width from aircraft with length trail behind. The information provided is a guide and indicative only – doesn't consider factors of weather, topography, vegetation and pilot skill.



Ground incident controllers and commanders need to communicate effectively with aircraft. High quality, short, precise information must be directed to them describing the intent and location of the firebombing.

Imprecise information can cause significant delays. For example, an ineffective drop from a fixed wing bomber could prove costly because the round trip to return to refill and journey back to the fireground could take 20 to 45 minutes. A rotary wing Firebird or helitack may only take five to 15 minutes in country Victoria.

“We need to ensure we don't rush our decisions on using firebombing loads from aircraft,” explained CFA Commander Aviation Luke Patterson. “Have the resolve to pick the highest productive location to deliver a firebombing load.” This might mean holding the aircraft for 10 minutes to see whether the fire can be contained.

“Save the load for the greatest gain or risk – not just the quick use – evaluate the best use of the load’.

Crews can also consider placing the aircraft on the ground and shutting it down to wait for a more effective time to use it. For example, waiting for a forest fire to burn into grassland where aircraft are more effective, or waiting for a wind change to ensure containment.

Every time our state aircraft fly we put our contracted pilots and ground crews at risk, so let's use them only for productive, necessary tasks that will assist with control.

See the current Victorian fire aircraft status in EMCOP > Desktop > Sections > Aviation > Aircraft Status.

Details about aircraft: <https://nafc-arena-help.s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/2019-+2020+National+Fleet+booklet+v002.pdf>

# Chris Heywood

## Skipton Fire Brigade, District 16

faces of  
CFA



### What is your CFA role?

I joined CFA 22 years ago as a Junior. Over the years I moved up the ranks at Skipton, part of the Westmere Group in District 16, and I am currently captain.

### Why did you join?

My father was involved in CFA and I was always interested in what he was up to. I think when children are young a lot of them say they want to be firefighters. When I was 11 years old, I joined as a Junior at the same time as some of my friends to run in the rural competitions. As I got older it was the sense of community and ability to help others in their time of need that made me continue on to be a firefighter.

### What incident has had the greatest impact on you?

The Black Saturday fires may have had the greatest impact on me. After that fire season I felt compelled to step up and take on more responsibility in the brigade, which ultimately led to me taking on the captain position.

### Who have been your mentors in CFA?

I am lucky to have had many people mentor me in different aspects of CFA. Past captains and lieutenants at Skipton brigade have all been forthcoming with lessons learned and advice. There are also a couple of ex deputy group officers.

Ex Captain Vernon Dawson was a great mentor and spent countless hours helping me transition into the captain's role.

District 16 staff have also been instrumental in helping me get where I am now. While I was working my way up as a lieutenant we had a very patient operations officer who guided me. I may not have always got what I wanted, but Ian Morley gave me plenty of time. That support was backed up by past and present BASOs who've helped me navigate the CFA waters.

### What has been the highlight of your time in CFA?

It's hard to single out just one thing as there have been a few highlights throughout my time in CFA. Rural Championship trophies as a Junior and some great saves out on the fire line come to mind. However, I have to say the true highlight is the achievements the brigade has made with securing new vehicles and equipment, and members stepping up again and again to further their skills. To sit back and appreciate the state of the brigade now knowing I helped to get it there would be the most satisfying highlight so far.

### How do you motivate your brigade members?

Keeping members motivated can be tough at times and there are different ways to motivate different members. Some are self-motivating and just need the support to keep going, while others might need training to reflect and build on a recent incident they attended or to continually be learning something new. Some members respond well to being given more responsibility.

I believe that catching up regularly for training, a station clean up or meeting can help a great deal.

### What lessons are you most keen to pass onto other members?

Teamwork is essential. The brigade, group, rank or personality don't matter. Working together as one is the key.

Don't rush into situations. The adrenaline can run high sometimes but in those situations it's most important to slow down and look at the whole picture. It's everyone's responsibility that the crews come home safe.

Ask questions, lots of them. If you're not sure keep asking until you are sure. Once you're sure pass on what you have learned.

INTERVIEW BY DUNCAN RUSSELL

# Being a Level 3 incident controller

CFA's Level 3 incident controllers often say no two jobs are the same. We asked four incident controllers, who are also volunteer firefighters, to share their experiences.

## Lachie Gales

### Helping people to do their best

Wangaratta Deputy Group Officer Lachie Gales became a Level 3 incident controller by working his way up through the fireground leadership roles.

"I joined CFA as a volunteer firefighter in 1986 and I was lucky enough to have people like Stewart Kreltszheim, Peter Creak and Paul King to mentor me in the role," Lachie said.

"I'd be quite happy on the back of a truck chasing grassfires, but I do appreciate that this is the kind of role that's not for everybody and if I can make a positive contribution in the role, then I should."

Lachie (pictured receiving his accreditation) has been an accredited Level 3 incident controller for five years and said the role is about consequence management.

"A Level 3 job, which we saw last summer, has the potential to have statewide impacts. Level 3 incident control teams are made up of people from a range of areas and agencies and with a vast amount of experience.

"While Level 3 control teams often get criticised when things don't go as well as they ought to, it's never because people aren't doing their best. My role is often around making sure people get every opportunity to do their best, making an atmosphere where members feel they can bring what they know and contribute."

Lachie said he will always remember the 2019 Black Summer fires.

"I was the incident controller on the first three nights in Walwa," Lachie said. "The first night was an enormously fluid situation, where the fire moved across mountainous terrain like no one had ever seen before.

"We had a fire prediction that proved to be accurate. It predicted we would have fire in Corryong in the early hours of the next morning and at the time we didn't have nearly enough resources to protect the town," Lachie added. "We had to make a Code One call to get members out of bed from over 100 kilometres away in Benalla, Wangaratta and Wodonga to bring strike teams in.

"They got there at dawn in the nick of time. It was the right call and I remember that morning when I was released just how emotionally drained I felt throughout the whole thing.

"You don't make those decisions on your own; an incident control team makes them together.

"I guess that's the challenge for the incident controller – to make decisions from an imperfect set of information and get it right.

"We need more volunteers to step up into these roles because they bring knowledge of what happens on the fireground."

For Lachie there are many reasons he continues to be an incident controller.

"It's not onerous for me to give up my time because I've gotten so much out of the training and personal development. It has benefited both my personal life and my career.



"The first formal CFA bushfire training I had back in the 80s was from Graham Healy. He was at the very start of my journey and he made such an impression on me. So now, viewing Graham as some sort of peer is just staggering to me.

"I feel blessed that people had faith in me to take on this role, as it has enriched my life. Although it's demanding, not everything in life is meant to be easy and the rewards have been there for me.

"I hope to be able to contribute at this level for some time."



## Cameron McKern

### Every incident teaches you something new

"If you had told me 21 years ago that I'd be a member of CFA for 20 years and take on roles including captain and incident controller, I wouldn't have believed you," Cameron McKern said.

A Level 3 incident controller, Cameron lived in Melbourne for the first 35 years of his life and moved to Yackandandah just over 20 years ago.

"Before moving out to Yack I would have never thought I'd be a firefighter. I come from an IT background and lived in the city so it wasn't something I even thought was possible.

"Like many people, a year or two after joining Yackandandah Fire Brigade I found myself in a lieutenant position and then the captain," Cameron added. "I am now a Bogong Deputy Group Officer.

"After being encouraged by the district, I stepped into the incident control space but more as a planner. It wasn't until the district commander asked me to step up into incident control that I took on the role.

"Naively, I thought only paid staff did the role but there are actually quite a few volunteers in this position and I'm honoured to be one of them."

In December 2019 Cameron received a phone call asking if he would work in the Albury Incident Control Centre.

"I remember being asked if I could support in any way that I could," Cameron said. "So I arrived, introduced myself and asked what I could do. They said, 'didn't anyone tell you, you're the incident controller'. For the next 12 hours I was the controller for an unfamiliar state, people and systems.

"The team was in a sombre place due to losing two firefighters only hours before. It challenged me but everyone was supportive and I think I acquitted myself well. I learned so much from that experience.

"You learn something from every single incident that you control or work on.

"I'm sure you've heard it before, but honestly communication is the key. You need to communicate with everyone. Emergency management team, including other agencies, incident management team, you need to communicate with the community, regions, with the firefighters and they need to communicate with us," Cameron added. "Without this your response falls apart.

"Five years ago, I led the first Victorian strike team to Sydney when they had fires in the Blue Mountains. There were busy times and quiet times; 'hurry up and wait' is a phrase members often use.

"I made sure I kept all the members on the strike team informed every 30 minutes. It kept members from feeling frustrated; they appreciate the communication and put their trust in you."

Cameron started his Level 3 journey five years ago and has been doing the role for the past four years.

"I'm an organised person. I think you need to be mentally organised to perform the role because there's a lot happening in an ICC and there's pressure. You need to remain calm otherwise you can't really do the job."

Cameron finds the role intellectually stimulating and enjoys the challenge.

"I do enjoy the role but I know every time I perform it there are devastating effects out on the fireground. It would be nice if we weren't needed at all.

"I do think that I am contributing something even if it's a small part. I'm helping my neighbours, community and state and that's a reward in itself."

## Being a Level 3 incident controller

### Graham Healy



#### Everything we do is for the community

For Graham Healy the pathway to becoming a Level 3 incident controller was quite different. Graham has been a volunteer since 1965 and was previously an assistant chief officer at CFA. He became a Level 3 Incident controller in 1997.

“Back then CFA had a Chief Officer Endorsement Program to facilitate a common use of the AIMS arrangements in Victoria,” Graham said.

“In 2012 CFA and what is now DELWP adopted an assessment and panel review for Level 3 appointments. CFA decided to put all the existing L3 controllers through the process,” Graham added. “The assessment was two days at Fiskville Training College followed by an interview in front of a joint CFA/DELWP panel.”

Graham later went on to become one of these panellists, helping assess members wanting to qualify as Level 3 incident controllers.

“The pathway for incident controllers is now very different. It’s about presenting evidence of the experience you’ve had, which can make the process slower as not everyone gets experience all the time.”

Graham is currently a firefighter and group comms officer at Wodonga Fire Brigade.

“In the north-east all our big fires are multi-agency and with our river systems prone to flooding there are opportunities for Level 3 ICs to work across all agencies.

“We work closely with DELWP as our landscape is about 90 per cent forest,” Graham added, “and being on the NSW border means we also make sure NSW Rural Fire Service is involved. It doesn’t matter what agency you’re working for or the colour of your shirt, we all have the same goal and working together is crucial for success.”

During his 23 years as a Level 3 incident controller Graham has led a wide range of incidents. The one he remembers most vividly is the 2009 fires.

“I remember doing the first two night shifts at Kilmore. The day shift members handed over to us and we were trying to play catch-up, but the fires were so colossal we just couldn’t keep up.

“There are always lessons to be learned as an incident controller. You might not always have the answers but it’s about working as a team and understanding what members need on the fireground.

“Everything we do in an incident control centre should directly relate to our people and the community, and if it doesn’t then we don’t need to be doing it.”

### Geoff Rowe



#### Understanding the bigger picture

“As an incident controller you need to look at the big picture: how quickly will the fire grow, who will it impact, what might happen to the community and its assets? You can’t get stuck micro-managing; you have to work as a team,” Geoff Rowe said.

Geoff, pictured with his daughter Kate, is currently the captain of Lurg Fire Brigade and joined CFA when he was 18 years old. Geoff has taken on many roles in CFA and in addition to being captain, he is Benalla deputy group officer and a Level 3 incident controller.

“I gradually got involved with incident management at a local level,” Geoff said. “In 2006 I was the sector commander at Mount Buller when the fires went through. After the 2009 Beechworth fires, a formal accreditation process for level 3 incident controllers was set up and I was asked if I wanted to take part.

“The process took a couple of years and you have to maintain your accreditation each year by performing the role, attend training sessions and generally gaining experience.”

Geoff has now been accredited in the role for more than six years.

“I was the incident controller at a complex fire in Abbeyard just prior to Christmas last year. Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMVic) and Parks Victoria were the main responders due to the steep, mountainous terrain. I enjoyed working with other agencies.

“The incident management team normally isn’t happy unless there’s a bulldozer line around the fire and we have a control line. But in that situation after some rainfall we needed to be flexible and managed to control the fire by patrolling, dealing with the hazardous trees and use of thermal imaging which benefited the environment.

“Every fire is different and you need to be prepared to be flexible.

“The role is about managing people. You don’t need to know everything, you just need support and to know who to get the information from.

“Volunteers bring not only their experience on the fireground to the role, but also their life skills through their career. Outside CFA I’m a full-time accountant with an accountancy practice and I also run a beef farm. These factors help me in my role as a Level 3 incident controller.

“The strength of CFA is in its volunteers; they bring so many additional skills to incident management teams and understand how it feels to be on the front line.”

# A different way to celebrate Ramadan

Ramadan, which was celebrated from 24 April to 23 May, is a month of fasting, prayer, reflection and community interaction. *Brigade* magazine spoke to two Muslim CFA members about their experiences of Ramadan and about their time with CFA.

Asim Siddiqui (pictured right) has been a volunteer firefighter at Epping Fire Brigade for seven years. He said he joined CFA for two distinct reasons.

“At the time of Black Saturday I was living in South Morang and I remember the sky turning red and the intense heat,” Asim said. “I woke up one morning and saw my car covered in a fine layer of ash and the severity of the fires really hit home. In the aftermath I registered to become a volunteer, but I moved to an MFB area shortly afterwards so was unable to join.

“The second reason was that not long after moving, I came across a car accident and didn’t have the knowledge or know-how to help the people involved, and that really motivated me to join CFA.”

When Asim moved to a new house, he specifically chose Epping so he could volunteer with CFA. Coincidentally, Epping brigade also has rescue capabilities. He was the only Muslim member at his brigade for quite some time, so he was the only member taking part in Ramadan each year.

“It can be challenging sometimes turning out during Ramadan because we don’t eat or drink anything from sunrise to sunset.

“I remember once when I was fasting we got called to a grass and scrub fire and I had to drag a charged line up a steep hill, then manoeuvre the line on the rough and patchy terrain while attacking the fire, and then drag the line back down when done. It was quite exhausting on any account – even more so when fasting.

“In the end, it’s a matter of finding the right balance between civic duty and spirituality during this particular month, and in the worst case if I need to break my fast due to exceptional circumstances I have an allowance for that.



“With Ramadan we normally fast throughout the day then break our fast with family and friends in the evenings. We would normally invite people over to break our fast. Given the social distancing rules this year because of COVID-19 it was more of a solo affair.”

Asim said his faith definitely helps him in his role as a firefighter.

“Helping others, be it friends, family, neighbours or even strangers is a core part of our faith. This aspect is heightened even more during Ramadan as we’re encouraged to better ourselves. Protecting life and property is an intrinsic part of my faith, just as much as it is a part of the CFA core values and it’s an aspect that I’m happy to fulfil in my capacity as a firefighter.”

Sheik Sulaiman (pictured left) is a volunteer firefighter and joined Noble Park Fire Brigade in April 2016.

“I was born in Sri Lanka and came to Australia as a refugee,” Sheik said. “I joined CFA because I wanted to give back to this country because it saved my life.

“Volunteering for CFA for over four years has allowed me to become part of the community. I’ve made many friends in the brigade and love volunteering.”

Sheik normally celebrates Ramadan by visiting mosques, but this year was different.

“Mosques have community gatherings to pray, celebrate and break our fast. Sometimes I attend these with CFA, as they are always invited. However, due to the physical distancing rules I couldn’t do that. Noble Park’s mosque has a Facebook page and they posted their speeches and prayers so I was able to connect online. It was a very different way to celebrate.”

This year’s Ramadan was Sheik’s fourth celebration since joining CFA. “Ramadan doesn’t usually affect my ability to volunteer. I still turn out when I can and attend training when required.”



STORY HOLLY PENKETH

# The role of a group officer

What makes a good group officer? *Brigade* magazine talked to five from around the state



## Mentoring members for brigade succession

"You have to regenerate every now and then so that others get a chance and the experience of previous group officers (GO) stays in CFA," Richard Hicks said.

Richard has been the GO for the Terrick Group in District 20 for two years. He said mentoring is important to ensure knowledge and experience is passed on.

"Having support from the previous GO has definitely helped me to gain experience and feeling like I can complete the role.

"I've always had a soft spot for CFA," Richard added. "I've got two uncles who were district mechanical officers and a cousin who was captain of a brigade.

"When I was younger the brigade wanted me to join. They said to me if I joined CFA they would help me to get my truck licence. And here we are 23 years on.

"In the past two years as GO, I've continued to support our brigades and have been a conduit between CFA and our brigades, especially through the fire season.

"I'd had Deputy Group Officer (DGO) experience for 10 years when the previous GO came to me and said he was looking to step down," Richard said. "He said he thought I'd be a good choice and that I should go for it.

"It wasn't a role I was looking to fill initially, but I knew if I had his support I'd be able to do the job. The GO role is one that relies on the experience of many different members.

"Having a replacement lined up is a positive thing for the brigades' and the group's succession planning.

"I'll be mentoring the next group officer, for sure. I want to make sure there's a replacement for when I want to step down. You have to support and learn from each other. I want to step down knowing the role is in good hands, it also gives the brigades confidence that the next GO will know what they're doing.

"I've always believed in succession planning."

Richard said he had many memories from 24 years of being in CFA, but the teamwork was something that stands out.

"We all work really well together. We are a real country unit with most of the brigades being rural.

"We are lucky because we aren't struggling with the effects of rural decline as much as some other rural groups. Most of our captains are under 55 years of age and a lot of our brigades have younger members," Richard added. "We are lucky to have a range of ages."

Richard said having experience is important to carry out the role, but having support is key.

"At the moment I believe that our group is functioning really well and I want to continue down that path to provide support where needed and also improve our group's capacity to handle any incidents as they arise.

"Our group mainly attends grass and highway fires and our busy season starts generally at harvest, but lately we have had an increase in haystack fires.

"To prepare for the upcoming season, we always have group training where we pick a risk that's common with our brigades and train and talk around that.

"We also have a preseason briefing as well as incident control training to increase our knowledge and ability to handle different incidents as they arise. I also think it's important to have a post-season debrief with the captains so the whole group can learn from each other to improve our ability to confront similar events in the future.

"I'd encourage anyone to give the GO role a go. Find the right person, give them the responsibility and support them. I got mentored through all my roles and it's helped me get to where I am today."



## Encouraging youngsters to step up

"I want to encourage more young people to get involved in behind-the-scene roles, just like me," Group Officer Campbell Hickey said, when asked about his priorities. "I want to see youngsters step up and take on more responsibility. I'd highly recommend it to anyone."

Campbell Hickey has been a CFA member for eight years and during that time he's been a firefighter, fourth Lieutenant and second lieutenant at Nagambie Fire Brigade. Campbell was elected as the Tabilk Group Officer in District 22 in 2019.

"One of the biggest achievements for me is being elected as a group officer. A lot of members have been part of the brigade for more than 20 years. I've been part of the brigade for eight and am still relatively young. It means they obviously have a lot of trust in me and the elected Group Management Team," Campbell said.

The 2019-20 fire season was Campbell's first as group officer.

"That fire season is going to be a memory that remains in everyone's minds for a long time.

"To experience a season like the one we've just come out of, in my first year in the role, was mind boggling.

"A lot of work was done behind the scenes to deploy members interstate as well as all the local major significant jobs in the area. It's been a really rewarding experience."

The Tabilk Group is made up of five brigades that work closely together.

"Communication is key. To me the most important aspect of being a group officer is being able to liaise with all members of the group. We're all within 18 kilometres of each other so we are always supporting one another. If one of the group's brigades is called out to an incident, every brigade from the group responds."

Campbell has been group officer for almost twelve months and is enjoying the challenge.

"It's very rewarding to be able to work with and learn from such experienced members," he said.

"You're only as good as the team you have around you. I'm not a one-man team as I rely on the deputy group officers. They are the rock supporting the group."

## Always learning, never dull

Preparing for an upcoming fire season brings new challenges every year. Based on his nine years' experience as a group officer Alan Hives said each year is different.

"Preparing for the fire season is about pre-planning and looking for clues around the areas to understand the dangers for the year ahead," Alan said.

"You start to look early in the season and think about the things that can go right and wrong. Although each year is different, planning locally helps to fine-tune what to prepare for."

Alan is currently the Birch Group Officer in District 15 and despite being a CFA member for more than 44 years, he said he never stops learning.

"There are always new challenges in the role; we have never fixed all our problems," Alan said. "I find myself constantly learning new things even after 44 years in the organisation."

"As a group officer, members look to me to lead them. This is something that wouldn't be possible without support around me."

One of Alan's clearest memories of an incident that taught him a valuable lesson came early on in his role.

"In 2010 we had a season of extreme flooding that put a town under water. As a group, we found ourselves supporting incidents in different ways. It was a case of supporting the SES, and each member was pushed outside their comfort zone.

"That's what really taught me the role is about coordination and communication, not only with other CFA members but also with the community."

Alan said sharing your own personal experience and knowledge was key to the success of a group.

"I use knowledge that I learned from other members over the years; knowledge I intend to pass down to members wanting to learn.

"I've been blessed with having a good team around me, so anything I've been able to do has been achieved together."

## The role of a group officer



### Hard work pays off

"My view is that the group officer role is about maintaining harmony, supporting members and advocating for members," Bass Coast Group Officer Damien O'Connor said.

Damien has been a member of CFA for more than 36 years and is in his 16th year as a group officer.

"Most of the fires in our area are grass and scrub fires that take a few hours to put out, but occasionally we get some bushfires that last for days," Damien said. "We get a diverse range of incidents within the group so it's important for our members to train regularly."

Each year the group can prepare effectively for the upcoming fire season because of the volunteers' local knowledge.

"Members know the conditions of the local area because they live in it, so we can plan ahead for what might happen each fire season. You start to use experience from previous years to plan and prepare.

"Being a group officer is about knowing each brigade's capability. You are a communication channel linking the district office to brigades, and it's important to make sure members know they are being heard."

In September 2018, Damien received the Australian Fire Service Medal (AFSM) in the Queen's Birthday Honours list for outstanding service to Wonthaggi Fire Brigade, the Bass Coast community and CFA.

"I'm extremely proud of being awarded the AFSM, and I feel honoured to be able to support the community through my work with CFA. But my biggest achievements as group officer are when I see hard work paying off.

"When a brigade gets a new appliance or piece of equipment they've worked hard for, that's when I feel I've achieved something. It's a reward for all the hard work they have put in, and it's a real highlight when we get to use that resource in the community."

Damien said being a group officer is a dream role. "CFA is central to many communities. You know in the country there will always be a station nearby and I find it rewarding knowing I'm a part of it."



### Preparation and readiness

As the fire season begins, so do people's holidays. But for members of the Coastal Group in District 7 it's a crucial time to stay alert. Ross Girvan has been a group officer for the Coastal Group since 2012.

"Looking back at 30 December 2019, the forecast fire danger rating was extreme," Ross said. "The coastal towns were full with tourists along the Great Ocean Road.

"By lunch all seven stations along the coast were manned as the temperature reaches 43 degrees and the wind reached 70 kilometres an hour. At this point Aireys Inlet was the hottest part of the state.

"As a group officer you often think what else can I do, knowing full well that if a fire started in these conditions the first attack would more than likely fail.

"Luckily, a south-west change brought cooler weather and showers," Ross added. "It's moments like these that put the commitment and support of our members into perspective."

The Coastal Group works extremely closely with partner agencies Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) and Parks Victoria (PV).

"During a normal year, members will start pre-summer training with our local leaders at DELWP, PV, Victoria Police and our local council," Ross said. "This allows members to refine their readiness and build relationships."

Ross joined CFA in 1979 at Aireys Inlet Fire Brigade and went on to become a first lieutenant and captain.

"Bill Bubb was captain of Anglesea brigade and also my boss at the time," Ross said. "He encouraged me to join the brigade and taught me everything I knew. He's had a huge impact on me."

For Ross, the role is about supporting members and providing them the opportunity to grow.

"Brigades and groups have an enormous range of talent and skilled personnel. It's important to support them as well as the younger members coming up the ranks who are our future leaders.

"You never stop learning and I want to pass on what I've learned to others."



Despite the restrictions because of COVID-19, some brigades held a dawn service on Anzac Day either at their station or at a war memorial. All members observed the social distancing rules during their ceremonies.

**Pictured:**

- 1 Buxton Fire Brigade
- 2 Warrandyte Fire Brigade
- 3, 4 Epping Fire Brigade



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3



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# Reducing fuel without burning

**CFA is proudly working with communities across Victoria to reduce fire risks in innovative ways. Nowhere is this more evident than the work we are doing through the Safer Together partnership.**

Funded by the Victorian Government, Safer Together brings together CFA, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, Forest Fire Management Victoria, communities and local councils to find innovative solutions to fuel reduction based on each community's input and backed up with expert, scientific advice.

## Wannon Falls Reserve

At Wannon Falls Reserve in the Southern Grampians Shire, everyone has worked incredibly hard on a major habitat enhancement and fire-risk reduction program. As the project's original facilitator and CFA's Vegetation Management Officer Andy Govanstone put it, the Wannon Falls Reserve project embodies everything that the Safer Together program stands for.

"It's an approach that combines stronger community partnerships with the latest science and research to more effectively target reducing bushfire risk across the landscape," Andy said.

"Initially, there was considerable criticism of the shire from the Wannon community regarding the management of the reserve. Relationships were strained – even between community members."

To build relationships, a wide range of community activities were carried out including a listening post, public meetings,

simtable exercises, brigade workshops, forums and a vegetation management bus trip. Through these activities it became clear there was significant concern with the over-abundant *Acacia paradoxa* (commonly called hedge wattle) spreading through bushland and the fire risk it presented in Wannon Falls Reserve.

Everyone worked together to address the reduction of fire risk in the reserve and developed a bushfire reduction plan. The plan has already seen hedge wattle cleared, and the reserve made safe from a fuel management perspective and for visitors.

Strict permit conditions meant the hedge wattle had to be hand-cut and carried (not dragged) to an area to be mulched. Because the task was so labour intensive the job was done by contractors, as was the mulching component. The hedge wattle was turned into mulch which was then used in community revegetation projects in the surrounding area. Wannon residents have offered to keep their eyes open for emerging hedge wattle seedlings and remove them by hand to prevent them taking over the site again.

By implementing a Safer Together approach in Wannon, the fire risk is under control for the coming fire season.

Wannon-Nigretta Community Group Secretary Shirley Bramley thanked the partnership for delivering this project to the community.

"On behalf of the Wannon community, I thank you so very much and look forward to the continued improvement of these unique community assets," she said.





## Moyston

Likewise, the community of Moyston has benefitted significantly from the Safer Together approach by reducing elevated fuel, mainly hedge wattle, in the Asset Protection Zone to the south and west of the township. The Moyston Common is managed by a Committee of Management and abuts both private land and areas maintained by Parks Victoria and Forest Fire Management Victoria.

Moyston Public Parks Secretary and President of Moyston Progress Association Max McLean explained.

“Rampart growth of elevated fuel in this area for many years has been a source of concern for township residents and all groups within the town because of the risk it will allow bushfire either directly into the township or sweep through on a wind change. We came close to both these scenarios during 2006 and 2015 major fires.”

The area is regularly burned by Moyston Fire Brigade members and the encroaching hedge wattle has impacted the burn program and increased the risk to the community.

The brigade, Forest Fire Management Victoria and CFA's Vegetation Management team produced a plan to treat the

affected areas using a skid steer forestry disc mulcher. The mulching program took five days and covered an area of approximately 11 hectares.

The result was a significant reduction in the bushfire risk to the town, plus an enhancement to the local area.

The Moyston Landcare Group was appreciative of CFA's efforts to carry out hedge wattle control work. President Madelene Townsend said including the areas south and west of Moyston in the township fire prevention zone, allowed CFA to not only carry out vital fire preparation work, but also enhance biodiversity and reduce the rabbit population.

“Acacia paradoxa unfortunately can take over, choking other native species and creating a perfect rabbit harbour,” Madelene said. “Over a period of time, a range of native flora will again return, especially native grasses. The Landcare Group can plan to assist this process by planting native grasses to enhance the area and also create a walking track for locals and visitors to enjoy the outdoors and learn a bit of its mining history.”

**STORY MIRANDA SCHOONEVELDT**

# ARCHITECTURAL GEMS FROM A



- 1 Dandenong
- 2 Beechworth
- 3 Sale
- 4 Yallourn
- 5 Eaglehawk
- 6 St Arnaud
- 7 Castlemaine
- 8 Geelong City
- 9 Ballarat
- 10 Maryborough
- 11 Wangaratta
- 12 Ballarat West
- 13 Bendigo



# BYGONE ERA



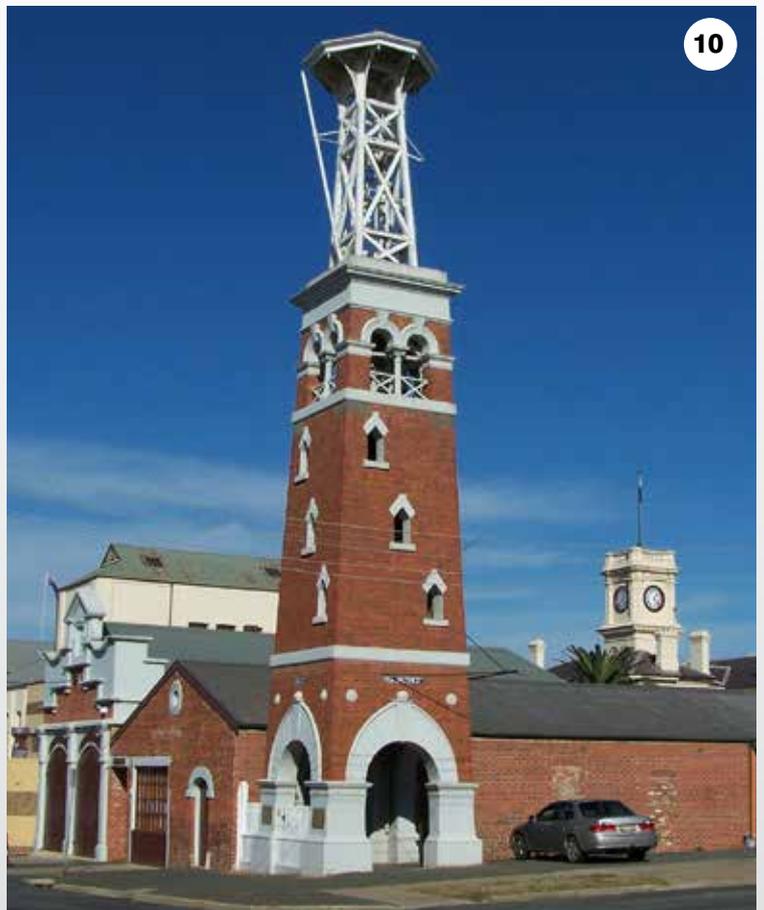
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# Developing the next generation

Engaging our Junior brigade members builds their capabilities and confidence. We talked to four Junior leaders about how they motivated their Juniors.



## Stepping stone to seniors

The Morwell Junior Brigade has been running for the past six years. Junior Leader Craig Coleman has been part of the brigade for three years and said the program helps young members not only learn firefighting skills but overall life skills.

“As a Junior leader I try to design a program that enables kids to learn something and enjoy their time,” Craig said. “We have over 20 Junior members at the brigade, most of which have come from friends of the kids so it’s important to provide a program they enjoy.”

Although Craig is a Junior leader at Morwell, he’s a member of Traralgon Fire Brigade.

“Unfortunately there’s no current Junior firefighter program at Traralgon, so I offered my assistance to the neighbouring Morwell brigade. And prior to moving to the Traralgon brigade, I was a Junior leader with Narre Warren Juniors.

“I try to align the Junior program with the Volunteer Charter in terms of teamwork and leadership.

“I see the Junior program as a step up into seniors; we hope to teach the kids enough to inspire them to want to become senior members.

The brigade gives the 16 to 18-year-olds the opportunity to become assistant Junior leaders.

“So far two of our Junior members have stepped up into senior membership and both are currently assistant Junior leaders. Taking on an assistant role is a great way of easing them into seniors while also keeping them connected to the Juniors.

“When members turn 18 years old they can become a full Junior leader.”

Craig said Juniors is an opportunity for young people from across the town to meet up and make new friends.

“We have kids from all sorts of backgrounds, and many of them don’t attend the same school and some are home schooled. Joining Junior gives them an opportunity to mix with kids they normally wouldn’t.”

The Morwell Junior Brigade meets every Wednesday night but because of COVID-19 they’ve had to suspend training.

“In summer the brigade usually does more practical training outside such as mock car fires, maps and radios, burn over drills and search and rescues. In winter we focus on indoor activities and host a number of trivia nights to get the parents involved.

“In light of the coronavirus restrictions, we’ve been operating Juniors online using Zoom,” Craig added. “We’ve been doing quizzes, first-aid recaps, ropes and knots, and will be doing a trivia night electronically as well.

“It’s important to have Juniors because it teaches the kids fundamental leadership and teamwork skills. I like to see Juniors as the modern version of scouts but with fire trucks.”

Last year the Junior program added the crew leader role to give the young members more responsibility.

“Crew leaders are responsible for a group within the brigade for the session. This is a great opportunity for them to step up and take on responsibility.

“Seeing the kids develop through the Junior program has to be a highlight for me. Often the kid that walks through the door on the first day of Juniors isn’t the same as the one who leaves. They gain so many skills and their confidence grows significantly. I’m really proud of being able to support that.”

STORY HOLLY PENKETH



## A passion to lead CFA's next generation

Leading the next generation of CFA volunteers has come naturally to 20-year-old Colac firefighter Caitlin Willsher, who has climbed the ranks through the Junior program to now take the reins as Junior leader.

Caitlin (pictured above as a senior firefighter and a Junior competitor) followed in the footsteps of her father and older brother, who were members of the brigade, when she joined as a Junior member at the age of 12.

"The Junior team was struggling when I first joined, we just didn't have many numbers there," Caitlin said.

"I'm glad I got to give it a go as a Junior. I really enjoyed it and was particularly competitive with my brother who was also a member.

"It provided a great environment for me to make friends and socialise with other members too. Since then we've been able to get the membership up and have built a really strong Junior group."

She applied to be a senior member when she turned 16 years old and officially started as a Junior leader in 2018.

"I didn't want to leave the group and knowing this the coach asked if I wanted to help out as a Junior leader," she said.

"My role is to discuss with the coach and other leaders how we can improve as a group, as well as organising events, competitions and social nights.

"I took on the role because I like to see the kids happy and enjoying what they're doing. Every time they win something, when they place or when they give something a go, I just really like seeing that."

Caitlin has been an active member of the brigade, especially over the last summer season.

"I got the opportunity to be deployed to the New South Wales bushfires last year," she said.

"It was nerve-racking but I loved it. I was able to meet so many new people and learn a range of new skills from them and was eager to bring them back to the brigade."

The Colac Fire Brigade Junior Program has grown a lot since Caitlin first joined eight years ago, with 12 committed young members now participating.

"A strong social aspect has helped grow our Junior group. One person would give it a go and then ask their friends to come along and we also have a few family members involved as well," Caitlin said.

"When they first join they are quite shy, but it's great to work with them to build their confidence and watch them come into their own and now they all work so well together.

"The program is great not for socialise reasons, but we also help them with their training, building a range of skills and helping them get involved in their community in a bit of a different way through CFA."

Caitlin hopes to continue to work as a Junior leader at the brigade for the foreseeable future.

"I love helping our Junior members where I can and want to remain a Junior leader going forward," she said.

"I'm very keen to stick with the brigade and continue to grow in my firefighting role as well."

STORY MITCHELL GASTIN

## Developing the next generation



### The joy of being a Junior leader

Given that Stuart Mill has about 40 residents, CFA volunteer Sheryn Lloyd wondered whether a Junior brigade would be sustainable.

"When we started the Junior brigade it was just my kids and their cousins," Sheryn said, "but it just snowballed from there.

"They invited their friends and their friends invited others and now nearly five years on, my kids have graduated to seniors and we still have 12 new Junior members this year.

"The Junior leader role is extremely fluid," Sheryn added. "It's not a specific role you complete each week."

Stuart Mill brigade trains with Beazleys Bridge brigade, which means they sometimes have more than 30 Junior members in one place.

"Barry Wiseman and Kevin Haynes, who are also both Junior leaders, train the Stuart Mill and the Beazleys Bridge running teams.

"Barry and Kevin have been with CFA for over 40 years and are amazing at teaching the kids," Sheryn added.

"Barry said if we got the kids to start up a Stuart Mill team, he would train them. He gives a confidence to the kids that they sometimes don't have in themselves.

"I'm truly passionate about inclusion. Sometimes with after-school activities, kids with learning difficulties or disabilities are left out. Football and netball, for example, can be selective as it's all about your level or ability. But with CFA Juniors everyone can participate because it's not all about how fast you can run or how high you can jump. There are so many activities the kids can be involved in.

"Heading up to the Wodonga State Championships in 2017, I was amazed by the level of abilities included in the competition teams."

The Stuart Mill Juniors compete in the Junior Championships alongside the Beazleys Bridge brigade each year.

"A huge achievement for the Stuart Mill brigade was winning the 2017 11-13 years aggregate trophy at the State Championships. We also achieved the combined aggregate trophy with the 11-16 age group for that year as well.

"I get a lot of joy out of seeing the kids progress and achieve. It's amazing what a little support can do."

STORY HOLLY PENKETH

### Melton Juniors calm and in control

Melton Fire Brigade's Junior program has been part of Anthony Rhodes life since he joined CFA. Starting as a 12-year-old, Anthony ran in competitions and quickly transitioned into leading the team from an early age.

"I started coaching the Juniors when I was 17," he said. "I may not have always had the Junior leadership title, but I've always been around helping them."

Anthony's long-running association with the younger members has helped grow the popularity of the program at Melton. "We're the largest team in Australia and we get incredible support from the parents and kids.

"Probably the last six years have been the most memorable period for me, as I've been very successful in getting mums and dads to be a part of their kids' Junior careers."

The group has also had great success at competitions, winning the Junior Championships for the first time in Kerang two years ago and just missing out by one point this year.

"We train twice a week through summer, and we basically concentrate on competitions from October through until February."

But the focus isn't only on the championships, with training continuing once a week during the winter months with activities such as general firefighting skills, or information nights with the senior group about the tankers.

Anthony said the skills learned as a Junior can be applied to an operational firefighter role and are beneficial life lessons.

"We teach them what's important to the brigade; things like respect, discipline and how to keep calm and in control.

"When people call for a fire truck, they're in dire straits and want someone who's calm and in control so we do some exercises around both competition and general training so that when it's time to join as a senior member they've got an idea about keeping their cool."

Anthony said Juniors are also a great benefit for the wider community. "Without the Junior program in some small towns, I don't believe they'd be able to keep the public interest in their local fire service."

STORY MARK BLACKMAN



# Tatura's new station

## **Tatura Fire Brigade, located 20 kilometres south-west of Shepparton, is receiving a new home.**

The new station features a three-bay motor room with drive-through bays for emergency vehicles, has bifold front and rear roller doors and a concrete apron at the front with direct access to the road.

Other features include a brigade office, a group office, multipurpose room, kitchen, breathing apparatus room, communications alcove, as well as male and female toilets and a unisex disabled toilet at the rear side of the motor room. With 40 new hooks for station gear in the new turnout area, brigade members will have plenty of space to continue to provide a great service to the local community.

With a building space of more than 560 square metres, Tatura volunteers are gaining much more space compared with the old two-bay station.

Tatura Fire Brigade Captain Trevor Franklin said the most important aspect of this new station was the improved health and safety at the facility, and the additional capability to conduct training on site.

"We no longer have appliances parked close to each other, and we have

separate changing facilities away from the engine room," Trevor said.

"We've conducted annual 'cluster' training, which is interagency, often with the local police, SES or Ambulance Victoria, and this was previously held on public roads and areas.

"This training can now be conducted in the boundary of the station, providing a safer training environment for our members and the other agencies."

The brigade scouted possible locations to present to leadership and Land and Building (L&B) Services and drew up a shortlist of six locations that gave the brigade the desired space for their training needs. The decision was made by L&B Services to build the new station at Ross Street, and because the land was previously owned by DELWP the purchase was made easier.

Trevor also considered how the new spaces would allow the use of multiple vehicles in training, including those from nearby stations, during combined training events.

"Part of the initial planning for the station included having enough area that we could have multiple brigades take part in training at the rear of the station," Trevor said. "This location is

fantastic, as we also have direct access to our running track at the racecourse which is a part of our regular training routine."

Outside the building, there is also a five-bay shed, and external site work includes creating a sealed crossover, new driveway, on-site car parking for volunteers, and perimeter fencing.

With two large water tanks, as well as landscaping for the property, the volunteers said they will enjoy a beautiful new facility both inside and out.

"Apart from the training benefits, we're most looking forward to being able to host our own brigade functions and events such as annual dinners. We'll be able to cater for the group with the extra space and new kitchen.

"Tatura Fire Brigade wants to acknowledge the excellent support from ACFO Owen, Commander Dedman and Commander Harris to assist in the planning and execution of the building program," Trevor said. "We can't thank all the people involved enough for their support.

"This new station is a real winner for our brigade and for the Tatura community."

**STORY DAISY CLELAND**



# Keeping our waters safe

**As CFA's firefighters gear up for another bushfire season, along the Victorian coast our 19 Coast Guard units are preparing for their busy season. Although the rough winter seas present significant challenges, it's the boating season that brings the vast number of marine safety jobs including search and rescue, breakdowns, sinking boats, boat fires, missing swimmers and people knocked overboard.**

Statewide, the Victorian Coast Guard attends about 1200 marine search and rescue incidents each year, with the busiest flotillas being Westernport, St Kilda, Carrum and Safety Beach. The most common job is classified as 'disablement of vessel and unable to return to shore' or, in plain English, the boat has mechanical problems.

Warrnambool Coast Guard Commander Allan Wood leads a flotilla of more than 20 members, ranging from former commercial boating professionals to nurses and paramedics.

"We've got six skippers, five of whom are on a roster, and five really competent crew members. It's a concentrated group of members supported by our non-operational volunteers," Allan said. "People join for all sorts of reasons including learning new skills and gaining knowledge."

The flotilla trains every Sunday morning whatever the weather.

"You've got to have a good degree of faith in one another. Training allows us to spend time together to learn about each other's capabilities. We work really hard to make sure our skills are up to scratch."

For member Gary Warren (pictured with Sam Delaney) it was a matter of bringing his existing skills to the volunteer flotilla, where he can pass them on to new members.

"I was commercial but retiring – this gives me the opportunity to use my skills and play with boats," Gary said.

On more serious days, though, their work can be the difference between life and death. They work closely with other emergency

services, including Lifesaving Victoria, Ambulance Victoria and fire brigades on shore.

"We support each other. We participate in joint exercises managed by the MSAR Office within EMV with Volunteer Marine Rescue Port Fairy, and with the Portland Coast Guard which operates from a busier harbour," Allan said.

"We can administer appropriate first-aid – we have oxygen, a defibrillator and more – and we work closely with Ambulance Victoria to make sure we can get the job done when it counts."

In fact, the Coast Guard is instrumental in supporting Ambulance Victoria's accreditation of its Helicopter Emergency Medical Service (HEMS) Mobile Intensive Care Ambulance (MICA) flight paramedics who work on helicopters and are trained to perform winch rescue services.

The ability to winch paramedics into a scene and winch patients out – often from remote areas – allows Ambulance Victoria to respond faster to cases where patients would otherwise be difficult to reach via road. Each year, Coast Guard flotillas volunteer their time for the accreditation exercises at sea.

Queenscliff Coast Guard Commander Michael Donohue, who took part in one such exercise in December last year, said it's an ideal opportunity for Coast Guard members to practise their skills as well.

"All the skippers get an opportunity with the helicopter, which is great," Michael said. "You don't want your first experience with a helicopter when you've got an emergency."

Warrnambool and Queenscliff are both members of the West Victoria squadron, whose management team gets together about once every six weeks. Currently, those gatherings take place through video conferencing.

"It's a good opportunity to share ideas – that's the beauty of getting together," said Michael.



**Left:** Gary Warren, right, mentoring newer member Sam Delaney  
**Below:** Coast Guard member Mike Vafiades

The group's members are keeping a close eye on a drone and a remote-controlled lifebuoy currently being trialled by Warrnambool Coast Guard.

"We believe it's the first time a drone has been used for marine search and rescue in Australia," Allan said. "It's really exciting to be able to add this to the toolkit as there are a lot of areas along the coast here that we can't get to without it. We believe it will considerably improve our search visibility in rough seas."

The flotilla is also one of a few marine search and rescue units in Australia to test a remote-controlled lifebuoy that can make it easier and safer to get a lifebuoy to a person in the water in conditions such as rough seas.

"We've been testing it this winter and it works brilliantly," Allan said.



**ABOUT THE COAST GUARD**

Victorian Volunteer Coast Guard flotillas have been officially part of CFA since 2008.

Victoria has 700 trained Coast Guard volunteers, who work tirelessly to provide marine search and rescue services along our coastline and major waterways such as Port Phillip, Western Port and Gippsland Lakes.

Victoria's 19 Coast Guard units – from Portland in the far south-west to Mallacoota in the far south-east, and at Lake Eppalock and Lake Hume – respond around the clock to about 1200 incidents a year and cover all aspects of marine safety.

If needed, the Coast Guard can take CFA members to marine fires and the trained Coast Guard volunteers can also add to CFA's surge capacity and respond to major disasters on land. They also take part in training with land-based CFA crews.

Coast Guard units help all types of marine users when they get into trouble or have questions about boating safety. The Coast Guard also runs boat licensing qualifications.

Volunteers train every week in addition to their emergency response and their on-duty weekend activity.

Speciality training includes marine radio licensing and navigation.

Volunteer Coast Guard units from St Kilda, Hastings, Carrum, Frankston, Sandringham and Safety Beach were an integral part of the emergency response effort at the Bunyip fires in 2019, providing transport, logistics and catering deliveries to support thousands of firefighters. More than 60 flotilla members volunteered more than 800 hours of service at the fires from 3 March to 12 March 2019.



# How CECs work with brigades



**“The community engagement coordinator (CEC) role has two parts: supporting local brigades in their communities and promoting fire safety messages in the community,” Paul Tangey said.**

Paul has been a CEC in North West Region for more than 11 years and is also a volunteer member of the District 2 Headquarters Fire Brigade and a member of the North West Region Community Education Group – the only one of its kind in the state.

“Every CEC works differently so I can only speak for the work I do, but I’ve found there are many ways to support brigades in the community, whether it’s providing resources or facilitating open days, community safety evenings or community events.

“The largest part of the CEC role is planning,” Paul said.

“Community safety plans are created each year which allow us to identify where brigades and communities need support.”

Each CFA region has a handful of CECs responsible for a number of brigades. Paul is based in District 2 and supports 76 brigades, along with two other CECs who are based in District 14 and Districts 18 and 20.

“We work closely with brigade administrative support officers (BASOs) and commanders to give members the support they need.

“The CEC role gets you out and about mixing with the community,” Paul added. “Emails and reporting are part of it, but our role isn’t a nine-to-five desk job; it involves more than that. I’ve worked a lot of evenings and weekends.

“Being within communities is an aspect I really enjoy. It’s great to be able to have the flexibility in the role and support volunteers when required.”

Five years ago, CFA introduced the role of community safety coordinator in brigades. CECs work closely with these members and are their point of contact for the brigade.

“The community safety coordinator role gives back recognition to the work brigade members are doing in that space.”

Paul said part of his role is looking for new ways to engage with the community.

“Fire Ready meetings don’t have to be held at brigade stations. We’ve found they are more productive when held at community events.

“We often have a presence at local community events to educate the public. This also helps build relationships so people know CFA plays an active role in the community.

“There are so many benefits of having this presence. It helps familiarise us with each brigade’s location and the fire danger risks so we can educate the community on the right subjects.

“We attend these events when the brigade needs assistance. However, a lot of the time my work is supplying resources such as stalls, fire safety handouts, CFA memorabilia and other things such as the Captain Koala suit.”

Promoting fire safety messages is a very important part a CEC’s role.

“We do a lot of work with different agencies across a number of platforms to get fire safety messages out. I have close relationships with local media and community sources such as newsletters, supplying messaging for road signs, creating social media information for brigades and even helping to craft CFA presentations.

“The focus is to educate. We provide up-to-date information across a range of different topics including what the fire danger scale means, what a Code Red day means, Total Fire Bans, preparing for the summer, permits and more.”

As a volunteer Paul is Secretary and Treasurer of the District 2 Headquarters brigade as well as a member of the North West Region Community Education Group

This group comprises 14 CFA volunteers from different brigades who discuss fire safety and support brigades in the work they carry out in their communities. The group has attended many events to fundraise and promote fire safety messages in the community.

The group has its own smoke house (pictured) that’s been renovated into a house fire simulation to educate children about what they need to do in an emergency.

“Although I keep working and volunteering separate, I’m able to draw on my shared experience in both roles.”

STORY HOLLY PENKETH

# Christmas pressies put straight to good use

**Volunteers from Yarrawonga Fire Brigade, 60 kilometres north-west of Wangaratta, have been making the most of a big Christmas haul after gaining a new light tanker, field command vehicle (FCV), and approval for a thermal imaging camera.**

The new equipment is a welcome addition to the local fleet, with Captain Cade Phillips saying Yarrawonga Fire Brigade has worked hard for the new tanker.

"It was mainly the hard work of the previous captain, Laurence Pitches," Cade said. "He applied for the VESEP grant, and after trying for about five years we got it last year.

"Sausage sizzles at Bunnings, and some big donations including one from Club Mulwala helped us to get it."

The new tanker was an early Christmas present, arriving on Christmas Eve.

"It was online within about five days, and it went on strike teams all the way out to the Upper Murray when the Tallangatta and Walwa regions went up.

"It was up there for a week and a half, and was mainly crewed by our guys, as well as a few from Yarrawonga Group and Tungamah."

The tanker is an addition to the fleet rather than a replacement vehicle, and Yarrawonga brigade now boasts two tankers and a pumper.

Also housed at the same station is the new FCV for the Yarrawonga Group.

"That one came at the start of December, so again around that busy Christmas period," Cade said. "Although it's a group vehicle the brigade probably gets the most use out of it.

"There's a lot more storage than our previous seven-year-old FCV and it's much more user friendly, so we think it's a really good piece of kit."

And as if the vehicles weren't enough, the brigade also received good news that a thermal imaging camera was on the way. The hi-tech equipment will boost the brigade's capacity to protect the community by allowing firefighters to safely detect heat sources using infrared technology.

"We haven't had the opportunity to have training with it yet due to the coronavirus restrictions."

With Yarrawonga being a cross-border town, Cade said the brigade had previously worked with fire brigades from Cobram and Mulwala in New South Wales that have thermal imaging cameras.

"We've had a few house fires in Yarra, and they just come through and scan the property using a thermal imaging camera. This makes it that much quicker to extinguish, instead of going back home and getting called out again because the fire has flared up."

Yarrawonga Fire Brigade is hoping to receive the thermal imaging camera by the end of the year, and Cade would like to thank the local community for its support and donations.

**STORY MARK BLACKMAN**



Captain Cade Phillips (left), First Lieutenant Simon Crawford (middle) and CEO of Club Mulwala Allan Rowe

# Business (almost) as usual during COVID-19

## Chirside Park brigade takes fire safety online

How do you take a fire station to the classroom during a pandemic? Chirside Park Fire Brigade member and Fire Safe Kids presenter Dan Ennis was determined to make sure that the show went on for the kids at Chirside Park Primary School.

Dan and Hayley Ennis converted their spare room into a studio and went to work presenting a live, virtual education session called 'Meet the Firefighter' for 10 students who were still attending school. Dan, who led the session for the

kids in grades 3 to 6, said, "We thought about how we could support the teachers and still present a session in a fun and engaging way.

"Technology has enabled us to cross the social distancing boundaries and continue to engage with our local community," he added.

"I'm extremely proud of Dan and Hayley's effort in adapting the Fire Safe Kids Program to push the home fire safety message to young students and support the teachers who are doing a wonderful job during these tough times," Chirside Park Fire Brigade Captain Ben Cash said.

"Given the number of people who have stayed at home and worked from home during the pandemic, it was the perfect time to educate the community about the dangers of fires starting in the home."

## Noojee brigade training continues from home

Members of Noojee Fire Brigade adapted quickly to the restrictions imposed by the pandemic, including David and Jean Edney, pictured.

Brigade members met each other from the comfort and safety of their own homes via



teleconference to work through a training exercise involving a structure fire scenario. Activities included simulated radio calls, establishing a fireground channel, map and grid referencing, identifying hazards, assembling crew leaders, and planning discussions to decide the best way to approach and contain the fire.

This was then followed by a friendly chat and a few laughs between members to boost morale and keep them connected.

The remote training has worked well for them. They are learning new online skills and keeping in touch with each other, which has been good for their wellbeing.

## Maryborough meets online

Maryborough Fire Brigade held a virtual brigade meeting for the first time in its 158-year history during the pandemic.

"On what normally would have been our election meeting we held our very first meeting using Webex, a CFA meeting platform recently offered to our brigade through the joint efforts of the Volunteer Sustainability Team and ICT," Maryborough member Raelene Williams said.

"The meeting was a great opportunity to help keep some normalcy within our brigade and help with the isolation that we are all feeling.

"At times it was hysterical to watch our less tech savvy members work out videos and microphones with younger family members being seen to assist with the set-up.

"The key unexpected benefit that resulted was the opportunity to laugh together, to share our frustrations and to reconnect in a visual way that sent spirits soaring.

"It was uplifting and was unanimously voted in as our new weekly communications medium."

Raelene is also CFA's Volunteer Sustainability Manager and said there has been a strong uptake of CFA's video conferencing options among volunteer brigades.

"We've received more than 100 requests to support brigades in connecting this way.

"I would like to make a special mention and say thanks to Niki Habibis, Maddy Macan and Swapnil Thakkar from VST along with Steve McCormack, David Beards and Paul Brown from ICT for making this possible for our volunteer brigades.

"The quick turnaround to get this project off the ground was exceptional and had tangible and positive impacts in the field."

# Turning out with type 2 diabetes

## Gaybrielle was first diagnosed with gestational diabetes in August 2007 when she was pregnant with her son.

Gestational diabetes is a type of diabetes that can occur in the second part of pregnancy and usually goes away when the baby is born. The diagnosis includes a higher than normal blood glucose level during pregnancy.

"Being diagnosed was a huge wake-up call," Gaybrielle said. "Gestational diabetes is a little different to normal diabetes because it's not only yourself you're taking care of, it's your baby as well.

"I was injecting insulin four times a day while I was pregnant, because my body wasn't producing enough."

Women who've had gestational diabetes have an increased risk of developing type 2 diabetes. This is a chronic condition where your body either resists the effects of insulin – a hormone that regulates the movement of sugar into your cells – or doesn't produce enough insulin to maintain normal glucose levels.

"After my son was born I was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes," Gaybrielle added. "I've had diabetes for over 12 years and over time I have learned to manage it.

"I actually don't inject insulin at all anymore; instead I'm taking three types of medication that I take twice a day.

"Alongside the medication I try to lead a healthy lifestyle which includes a balanced diet, staying fit and getting regular health checks to make sure my eyesight, circulation and teeth are healthy, as diabetes can affect all these things.

"Being diagnosed with diabetes has been a game changer for me. It's affected every part of my life including volunteering with CFA."

Gaybrielle joined Broadford brigade in 2010 and is currently a community education officer, Fire Safe Kids coordinator and a Junior leader.

"I have learned to control my adrenaline since being in the brigade," Gaybrielle said. "Adrenaline can use a lot of important sugars in my body that I can't replace.

"My diabetes is something I have to constantly be aware of. When attending incidents I have to recognise how I'm feeling and prepare beforehand. I wear a bracelet that explains what type of diabetes I have and what medication I take. I'm very open about my diabetes as I think it's vitally important for members to be aware of my condition and spot when I may need help or a break."

Gaybrielle was deployed to New South Wales last November to support the Black Summer fires.

"While on deployment I found myself with a crew I had never met," Gaybrielle said. "As we introduced ourselves, I made the team aware of my diabetes and any warning signs and how to react. It's important for diabetics to inform members of their condition to keep themselves safe.

"Whenever I had breaks after working hard, I asked a member to check on me if I wasn't back in a few minutes.

"If I work hard and sweat, I might get hungry and that means my sugar level has dropped, I may become jittery and need a couple of mouthfuls of Staminade and I'm ready to go again. Diabetes is a condition that's easily controlled as long as you take care of yourself and listen to your body.

"There's nothing I can't do as a firefighter as long as I'm prepared and communicate with my team."



STORY HOLLY PENKETH

# Recovery continues in north-east



**More than eight months on from the 2019-20 bushfires, the Upper Murray community is still recovering. While green regrowth has sprung back across the region, and support and hard work from the community and beyond has helped with damaged fences, the impact remains for those who live locally and were directly impacted.**

"There's a long way to go for these communities, not just from a physical perspective in re-establishing infrastructure, but also the huge mental health implications," CFA District 24 Commander Brett Myers said.

Since the fires, Brett has been working with CFA volunteers to help them through some of the tough times.

"The area of the Upper Murray is part of my normal CFA catchment responsibility, but in the light of what occurred earlier this year there was a significant impact on CFA members.

"Once I was out of the response role, my job was to spend quite a bit of time in the

area, providing compassion and support for those people."

Across the north-east, 71 residential and 205 non-residential structures were destroyed or damaged by fire over last summer. Brett said about 150 CFA volunteers were impacted either through losing their homes or through associated mental health issues.

"They're an incredibly resilient community in the Upper Murray and often wouldn't be used to leaning on peer support programs, so it was helpful for them to be able to have a chat with a like-minded person who has already built a relationship with them.

"Most of the time I was accompanied by a peer support officer as well of course, not only to help our CFA people through those tough times, but also to support me in having those conversations."

Brett's existing relationships have also helped with the interagency response.

"Tony Long is a former DELWP fire officer in the region and is now taking the lead

In January 2020 Commander Brett Myers led Emergency Management Commissioner Andrew Crisp around the Upper Murray

operational role with Bushfire Recovery Victoria, so that really helps it work well.

"We're not quite as involved in the overall community recovery piece as we were during the response phase, as there are more appropriate organisations for that. But many of our CFA people are leaders in their communities so we're still engaged, just not taking the lead role."

Support for all CFA members and their families can be found at [cfa.vic.gov.au/volunteer-careers/welfare-services-for-families](https://cfa.vic.gov.au/volunteer-careers/welfare-services-for-families) or through the CFA Wellbeing Support Line on **1800 959 232**.

**STORY MARK BLACKMAN**

# Promoting inclusion at Ferntree Gully

**Ferntree Gully Fire Brigade in the foothills of the Dandenong Ranges has always been known as a welcoming place, where new and transferring members are made to feel a part of the Gully crew as quickly as possible.**

New members are mentored closely for the first year of their firefighting apprenticeship and are encouraged to be as involved as possible in the running of the brigade.

"We've found that member retention is directly related to how quickly we can

engage new members in the running of the brigade," Captain Seamus Smith said. "When they feel part of it, and share in the successful outcomes, we all achieve."

This inclusiveness has also been woven into the values that are important to the brigade. Seamus explained that a few years ago the brigade had a review and part of the process was deciding core brigade values. These are family, respect, accountability, professionalism and pride (FRAPP).

"FRAPP raised a laugh at first, however once we put it on all our internal reports and programs and on the sleeves of our station gear polo shirts it became real," First Lieutenant Simon Steele said. "FRAPP became part of our day-to-day language and was used as a reference to the best practice and behaviours we aspire to."

Ferntree Gully members demonstrate this practice in every aspect of training, presentation and operations. Over the years, the brigade has become more diverse in terms of member age, gender and cultures, and the brigade is seen as a reflection of the local community.

Long-serving volunteer Graham Crichton, who's responsible for the brigade's community safety program, remembers a very different time.

"Back in the dark ages this was a very male-dominated environment," Graham said. "Thankfully, this has now changed and the brigade has a gender diverse membership and members who are from all over the planet. This makes for a membership where everyone is equal and the diversity is welcome."

Firefighter Steph Smith, a member for more than six years, noted that a few years ago the brigade made sure there was a feminine hygiene pack placed on every vehicle to make sure women were not in any way restricted while working operationally.

"That inclusion on vehicle inventories made a real difference to members being able to operate while on the fireground or during extended activities," Steph said. "No one batted an eye and we all wondered why we hadn't done this years ago."

For more about the rollout of hygiene kits across regions, see the story on page 28.

Brigade members don't use the words diversity and inclusion in day-to-day language. However, the way they operate ensures that behaviours and how members treat each other reflect the brigade's values. For this to continue, it's essential to keep a close eye on the functioning of the brigade on a daily basis to ensure we all keep practising FRAPP.

So far so good.



STORY LOWAN SIST, FERNTREE GULLY SECRETARY

# Yallourn North sanitary trailer

For a number of years, Yallourn North brigade has understood the need to better support our emergency services personnel. We already had a strong focus on health monitoring and rehabilitation using our rehab unit, and we thought a natural extension of this support would be to provide a portable sanitary trailer.

During the 2018-19 financial year the brigade applied for a grant through the Enhancing Volunteerism Grants Program. We were successful in obtaining funds to put towards a sanitary trailer that could either be towed behind the rehab vehicle or transported to a Level 1 or 2 incident by a field command vehicle.

The trailer was built by Travis Ledger, the captain of Killawarra brigade, and members of his construction company.

The trailer consists of two separate toilets with internal wash stations, an external wash station, and internal and external solar lighting. It also has four wind-down stabilising legs and two access ramps. There are also two 20-litre pedestal rubbish bins, two 240-litre rubbish bins and a lockable box on the drawbar to store incidentals.

Brigade members maintain the trailer with regular cleaning.

It's a great asset for the brigade, group and local emergency services.

STORY MARK KING, YALLOURN NORTH CAPTAIN



# Ken's lifetime with CFA

**A veteran across Victoria's emergency services, Ken Heddle, was recently awarded a 60-year CFA service medal and life membership. Ken has served with CFA and MFB and has been a judge at State Firefighter Championship events. He's also volunteered for the Fire Services Museum for 25 years.**

District 2 Assistant Chief Fire Officer Bill Johnstone presented the award to Ken, with his wife and Eaglehawk brigade Captain Kylie Davis in attendance. Ken has been a member of Eaglehawk brigade for about a year 12 after he relocated from Werribee, where



he joined CFA in 1961. Eaglehawk Captain Kylie Davis said Ken has been very enthusiastic during the time he has been a member.

"He always turns up to training for a coffee and a chat before we head out to train," Kylie said. "He's always interested in getting to know people at the brigade and has been very involved with our young teams for the firefighter competitions."

He grew up down the road from Werribee Fire Brigade. Ex-Werribee brigade Captain and Ken's brother-in-law, Darryl Wells, served for many years alongside Ken at CFA and MFB.

"When he was young, every time the siren went off he was keen to see where the trucks went. He visited the station from a young age," Darryl said.

"Ken also got involved in judging at firefighter competitions, became involved with various committees and ended up being track master for many regional and state competitions.

"He moved into the role of brigade secretary from 1992 to 1996 and was one of the best secretaries I've had the pleasure to work with. But above all, Ken was a firefighter. He was outstanding in his service and absorbed as much information as he could."

Ken said he was surprised to have been awarded the life membership medallion.

"The fire brigade was always a part of my life," Ken said. "My favourite part about being with CFA is the companionship you build. There are still members I keep in contact with all the time."

STORY MITCHELL GASTIN

# Red Hill brigade blown away by donations

**Red Hill Fire Brigade will extend its station thanks to an enormous community fundraising effort, mostly from an auction lunch at Many Little Restaurant which raised \$215,000.**

The planned station remodelling includes a new changing and turnout room to the side of the station and a motor room extension at the front. The roof will also be raised to accommodate modern trucks.

Red Hill Fire Brigade First Lieutenant Sam Norris said the brigade's large-scale fundraising efforts began in September last year by posting flyers to local residents asking for donations to help fund the remodelling of the station.

"The letter box drop raised around \$80,000, which gave us an unexpectedly large boost towards the station extension," Sam said.

Next, members reached out to local businesses to find out how they could help the brigade with their fundraising efforts.

"Sam Coverdale and Emma Phillips, the owners of Polperro Group, jumped at the

idea," he said. "Their entire team did an amazing job of organising a luncheon and then other local businesses jumped on board. Local wines and beers were donated and the support snowballed from there.

"It was decided we'd also have an auction, so anyone who was willing to auction their goods or services threw their hat in the ring. We had artwork, holiday weekends away, wine and firewood among other items.

"Channel Seven sports broadcaster Hamish McLachlan came along to MC the event."

The support from the community was so overwhelming that tickets for the lunch sold out within 40 minutes, so Polperro Group expanded the event and sold another round of tickets.

The auction alone raised more than \$80,000 for the brigade.

Ahead of the event Sam set up a GoFundMe page for people who couldn't attend, and this raised about \$55,000.

Six months on from the fundraiser, the brigade applied for permits and approvals to make the station extension a reality soon.

"We're planning on using the full \$315,000 on the extensions," Sam said. "This money has allowed us to get a few more things fixed up than we initially thought, which is really exciting for our brigade."

Brigade Captain Darrel Setter said the brigade was blown away by the community support during the summer period.

"We'd like to thank the wider community for their generous donations as well as the hard-working volunteers of our brigade for their incredible fundraising efforts," Darrel said.

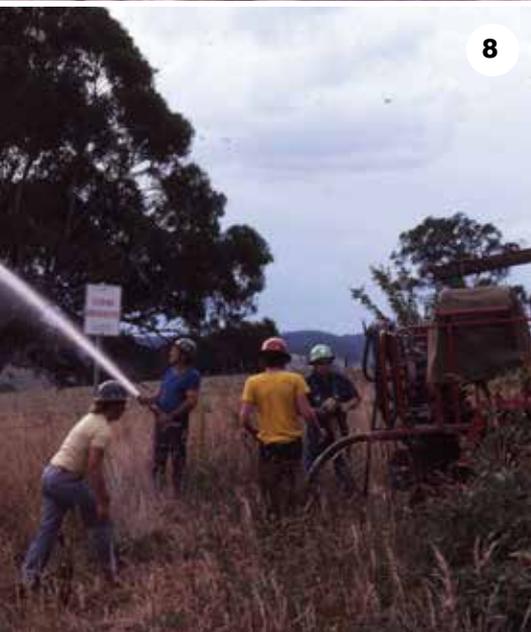
"It's very humbling. Our brigade had planned a range of fundraising activities to help us reach our goal and it turned out we didn't have to do much at all, which took a considerable work load off our members."

**STORY MITCHELL GASTIN**

PHOTO: COURTESY OF POLPERRO GROUP







9

**THROUGH THE AGES  
NEERIM SOUTH**

- 1 Handover of new ACCO tanker with Geoff Cruse and former Captain Trevor Parker
- 2 Old Tarago Valley Fire Station
- 3 Brigade member Janett
- 4 Brigade Auxiliary fundraising, mid 1990s
- 5 Kings Arms Hotel fire
- 6 Brigade FCV in use
- 7 Brigade vehicles outside Parkers garage
- 8 Training on the Austin tanker
- 9 Current Neerim South Fire Station
- 10 House fire on MacKintosh Rd, Neerim South, late 1970s
- 11 Brigade members in front their third station, mid 1990s

COMPILED BY KEITH PAKENHAM AFSM



10



11

# Juniors go digital



**Despite not being able to meet in person, Junior leaders across the state adapted by moving their programs online so they could continue to engage young people during the pandemic.**

While the current situation has presented a range of challenges, Junior brigades around the state have been living the CFA values by being adaptable and working as a team to provide a sense of normality for CFA's younger members. The creativity and dedication shown by Junior leaders and junior members demonstrates the resilience and dedication that CFA is known for.

At the beginning of the pandemic, CFA's Youth Programs team developed juniorsLIVE, an online program hosted on the CFA youth pages of Members Online. This gave Junior members the opportunity to participate in activities including videos, games and home learning, and explore the five themes of the Junior Volunteer Development Program.

Trafalgar Fire Brigade Junior Leaders Haylee Oates and Mark Walshe have been using juniorsLIVE to keep their Juniors engaged during the COVID-19 shutdown and it seems the Juniors are loving it.

"It's been wonderful being able to stay involved with the Juniors program over the past few months, but I'm really looking forward to going back to normal so I can see the other Juniors and socialise while we train," said Junior Johanna Baker (pictured above).

Jett Boothman, a Junior and former captain of the Junior brigade (pictured right) said, "It has been a good experience to still continue learning about CFA with the online training. I've enjoyed the learning tasks that were set."

Werribee Junior Brigade was one of the first brigades to move their sessions online. They've had to cope with limitations such as glitchy internet, distractions from family and not being able to work as a team in the same way. Despite this, the Juniors have continued to engage, and the online sessions have been a hit.

"We enjoy doing online learning because we can still see our mates and still do the fundamental learning that can help us in the future when we are firefighters. Online training has actually worked and people are showing up," said one Werribee youngster. Another enthused that, "CFA online has been better than school work online."

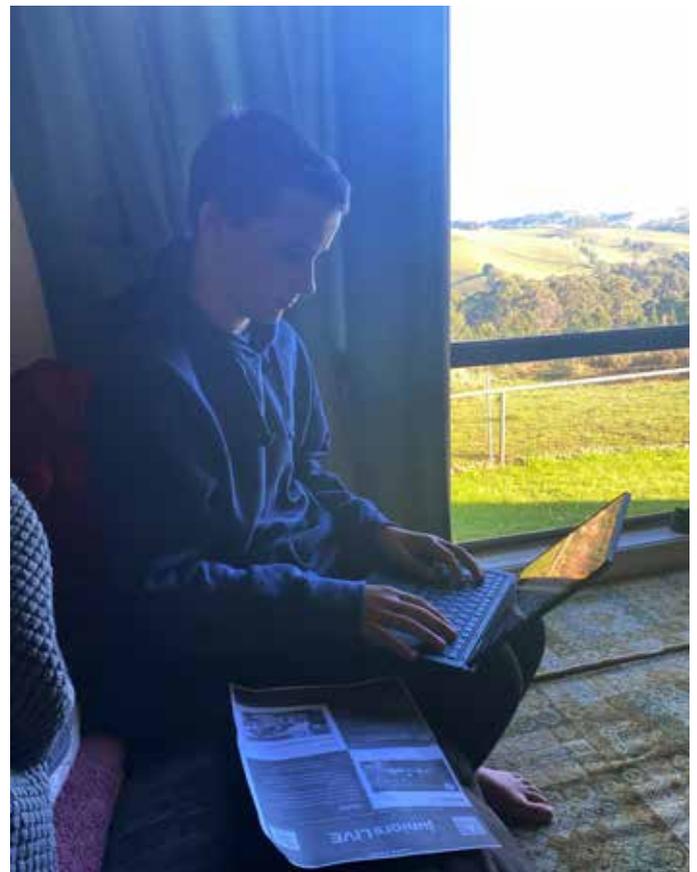
Junior leaders have found that moving sessions online has helped take the Juniors' minds off all the other things going on, which shows the positive impact brigades are having on young people through the pandemic.

"We were asked by the Juniors to train every week, even during the school holidays. Their dedication and enthusiasm have been amazing," Lisa Bubb from Werribee Junior Brigade said.

Werribee's program draws on a range of resources including interactive learning platforms such as Kahoot, brigade-developed training and juniorsLIVE. Sessions have included dangers on the fireground, wildfire tactics and drip torch operations. They even carried out a radio communications session on Zoom which included pro words and practising radio procedures.

"I look forward to preparing and running the sessions each week. Even as a Junior leader I'm still learning new topics and keeping my skills up," Michael Trifilo from Werribee Junior Brigade said.

STORY JEN CLEMENT



# Listening to what young volunteers want

**In a 2016 survey, young CFA members said they were frustrated by the lack of opportunities in brigades. A common belief among the respondents was that they had no voice in CFA. And shortly after that, it was estimated that almost half of CFA members would be over the age of 55 by 2020.**

As a response, the North West Region (NWR) Volunteer Sustainability Team (VST) carried out the Youth Voices research project in 2019 to hear from CFA members aged 18 to 25 about their experiences in CFA. The team also contacted older members to find out about the opportunities and challenges presented by having young brigade members.

The project was the first of its kind for CFA, with VST successfully piloting the Participatory Action Research approach, where the young adults were empowered to be active participants driving the research that will be used to make concrete improvements to their experience with CFA.

The young volunteers in the research team were initially joined by VST staff

in Bendigo in May 2019 for a weekend of intensive training designed to equip them with the skills needed to effectively conduct the research and also to build relationships within the team. There were several workshops over the weekend, including:

- Introduction to Engaging Youth and Young Adults as Volunteers, a three-hour workshop delivered by VST in conjunction with Canadian-based organisation Heartwood Centre for Community Youth Development
- a one-day communication skills workshop by world-class facilitator Peter Dhu
- Practising Leadership without Position workshop delivered by Polykala, a Melbourne-based experiential leadership development consultancy, where the team was provided with skills to influence and lead across all situations.

A subsequent weekend session was facilitated by Dr Tamika Heiden from the Research Impact Academy. The young research team was encouraged to define a vision, a mission and guiding

principles that would inform the research going forward. The team focused on the question of how CFA could better engage with young people to attract, retain, support and train them.

The research included two online surveys of CFA members (one for volunteers aged 18 to 25 and one for those over 25), a focus group with 18 to 25-year-old members, and four interviews with brigade management team members to capture the views of six volunteers.

The team also analysed CFA membership data, exit surveys, and other CFA-authorized research. An extensive literature review and environmental scan provided valuable data to complement the research. Three case studies of external agencies were also explored: Victoria SES; Macedon Ranges Shire Council; and the Australian Defence Force.

The team used thematic analysis to analyse the qualitative data obtained and closely examined the data to identify topics, ideas and patterns of meaning that appeared repeatedly.

In total, 130 volunteer members were consulted between September and November 2019.

Eleven key recommendations were outlined in the final research report and the Regional Leadership Team endorsed the NWR Youth Engagement Action Plan 2020-24 in March 2020. The expected outcomes will be measured across eight key performance indicators over the next five years, and include:

- improved age diversity within brigades
- improved satisfaction of young people involved in CFA
- sustainable brigades and improved service delivery.

If you'd like to know more about the Youth Voices project or the Introduction to Engaging Youth and Young Adults as Volunteers workshops, are interested in replicating the Participatory Action Research approach in your area, or would like a copy of the final report including the key recommendations, email VST members Elaine Hamilton or Bec McDonald: [e.hamilton@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:e.hamilton@cfa.vic.gov.au) or [r.mcdonald@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:r.mcdonald@cfa.vic.gov.au).



STORY BEC MCDONALD

# Junior leader toolkits and tips

◀ **ONE**  
juniorsLIVE

CFA Online ›  
Young People in  
CFA › Programs



**As well as developing our young people, it's important to build the capability and confidence of our Junior leaders. Junior leaders are the backbone of the Juniors program and it's important to invest in them as they invest in our young members. The Youth Engagement Working Group has been busy over the past six months developing a suite of resources to develop Junior leaders, support stronger program delivery and create a safer environment for our young members.**

The Junior Brigade Group Agreement Toolkit helps Junior leaders and Juniors to jointly develop a group agreement for their Junior brigade. The toolkit includes an overview, a facilitation guide, PowerPoint presentation and templates to enable Junior leaders to effectively run the session and create a group agreement for their Junior brigade.

The Junior Leader Network Toolkit helps Junior leaders build a local 'community of practice' where they can share ideas, build skills and support each other as they develop and deliver the Juniors program. This toolkit facilitates a comprehensive, shared approach to building such networks across the state while still reflecting local perspective.

The Disability Inclusion Guide helps build leaders' knowledge about disability and how to support people with a disability in brigades. Currently there is an 'Introduction to Disability' section and a section about autism. To meet the emerging needs of

our Junior brigades, this guide will continue to be developed to include sections about other disabilities.

Three 'Top 10 tips' videos were developed because the Junior Leaders' Forum was postponed due to COVID-19. The key issues addressed by these videos correspond to what Junior leaders thought was important in a recent poll.

- Resources for use with Junior brigades (pictured above). This video covers resources from many different agencies, including CFA, for use with young people. Junior leaders can get creative about how to use them with their own Juniors. Many of the resources mentioned have online links.
- Training for Junior leaders. These training tips are from a variety of sources including CFA's Learning Hub, Sport Australia and Disability Awareness. There is something for all levels of experience to help build skills and develop stronger programs.
- Involving the wider brigade with Juniors. Junior leaders often tell us how difficult it can be to engage the wider brigade with the Juniors program. This video gives tips on practical, easy ways to do this that will have brigades coming together before you know it.

All these new resources can be found on the Members Online youth pages.

**STORY JEN CLEMENT**

# Wellbeing of young volunteers

As first responders our members are usually the first on the scene to face challenging, dangerous and draining situations. They are also the first to reach out to survivors and provide emotional and physical support to them. For these reasons, it's important to support our members before, during and after incidents to help them stay mentally healthy and resilient.

CFA is taking part in a 12-month research project aimed at identifying effective strategies to maintain the mental health and wellbeing of young fire and emergency services volunteers, aged 16 to 25. The research has been funded by the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC and The Hospital Research Foundation and is supported by AFAC.

The overall objective of the project is to develop a wellbeing framework informed by young fire and emergency services volunteers, which can be used to screen, monitor and support the mental health and wellbeing of young volunteers. Although the research focuses on volunteers, the outcomes are expected to be applicable to all young people in fire and emergency services organisations.

Jen Clement, CFA's Volunteer Programs Leader (Youth), is a member of the project working group, and Grady Tyson (pictured right), a young volunteer from Tatura Fire Brigade, is representing CFA volunteers on the Young Volunteer Advisory Committee. Other young CFA members will have the opportunity to participate in a survey to share their experiences and make suggestions for additional support in the future.

The Youth Programs Team, supported by the Youth Engagement Working Group, continues to develop and implement new programs, resources and processes to help our young members and Junior leaders reach their potential, stay safe and discover purpose and belonging in CFA. If you are a Junior leader and have ideas for future resources, or if you need ideas and support for running programs online, email the Youth Programs Team at [juniors@cfa.vic.gov.au](mailto:juniors@cfa.vic.gov.au).

STORY JEN CLEMENT



## Cadets project moves forward

**The CFA Youth Programs Team believes that investing in young people, and raising their aspirations and achievements is vital to them as people, fundamental to CFA values and essential for society more generally. The Cadets Pilot Project is a new program, currently under development, that will help us do this.**

Using a blended learning model of face-to-face, online and practical training, the Cadets Pilot Project aims to provide a safe environment for CFA's 16 and 17-year-olds to gain the necessary skills and experiences that will prepare them to become senior members.

Although its implementation has been impacted by COVID-19, the Cadets Pilot Project continues to gather pace with an anticipated 12-month pilot project commencing in 2021. Stakeholder consultation revealed that younger and more

senior members both shared similar views on the key skills and experience required to prepare for a future in CFA. These areas were identified as:

- leadership
- emergency response skills
- health, safety and wellbeing
- community connectedness.

The Youth Programs Team, together with key staff from Training, Fire Prevention and Preparedness, and Bushfire and Safer Together are building program content around these key areas to develop a program that's comprehensive and practical and will develop our young leaders.

STORY JEN CLEMENT

# Emergency Memberlink

The Emergency Memberlink program is a way for us to recognise your commitment and contribution to emergency services and Victorian communities.

By using Emergency Memberlink, you can receive discounts and benefits on a wide range of products and services in Victoria and interstate.

Details of the offers and full terms and conditions are at [emergencymemberlink.com.au](http://emergencymemberlink.com.au).

To join Memberlink phone 1800 820 037 or register online at [emergencymemberlink.com.au](http://emergencymemberlink.com.au). You can also access your Memberlink card on the website.

The Memberlink team welcomes feedback about the program and your suggestions about new benefits you think would be of value to you, your family and your colleagues. Phone the team or leave a message on the Emergency Memberlink Facebook page.



## POPULAR OFFERS DURING COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS

- Discounts on a range of pre-purchased gift cards including Woolworths, Coles, Myer, Kmart, Target, David Jones, Rebel Sport, JB Hi-Fi, Supercheap Auto, BCF and more. These provide a 4% to 7% discount on purchases when paid for with your gift card. During the COVID-19 restrictions members are recommended to purchase **E-gift cards** rather than physical gift cards. Delivery is much faster and much safer given the contactless delivery of the e-gift cards by email. Coles (4% discount) and Woolworths/Wish (5% discount) continue to be the most popular.
- **JB Hi-Fi Corporate Benefits Program** has grown significantly during the COVID-19 restrictions. Members have access to exclusive discounts and unique offers on home entertainment, audio, televisions, mobile phones, IT hardware, fitness trackers, whitegoods and much more. Purchases are made online and delivered to your home.
- Commercial pricing on a wide range of household appliances and electronics through **The Good Guys Commercial Division**. Discounts vary from product to product and brand to brand, but on average members save around 25% of RRP. Purchases are delivered to your home.
- Free small soft drink, small orange juice or small McCafé coffee with any purchase over \$4 at **McDonald's** restaurants in Victoria.
- 15% off the best rates of the day with **Thrifty** car rental.
- RSEA Safety offers members 15% off full-priced items online.
- Exclusive pricing on a wide range of products including whitegoods, kitchen appliances, audio visual, computers and mobile phones, home appliances and furniture through **Harvey Norman Groups & Associations Division**. Contact the Emergency Memberlink Team to arrange a quote.
- **Isuscribe** offers an extra 10% off the listed price of any magazine subscription. Popular titles include Better Homes and Gardens, National Geographic, Gardening, Home Beautiful, New Idea and Who.

## OTHER POPULAR OFFERS TO CONSIDER

- **Latrobe Health** offers members access to 6.5% discount on the Gold Hospital Choice Members corporate cover (direct debit premiums).
- 4% discount on the Emergency Memberlink Health Plan through **Bupa**.
- 15% discount on **ADA's Reward Gear** products including clothing, camping gear, navigation equipment and everyday essentials for the adventurer and traveller via a one-stop online store.
- Discounted rates and reduced insurance excess on car hire with **Avis**.
- 15% discount on dash cameras and action cameras and 20% on accessories from **Todays Computing**.
- 30% off a **Slumba** mattress-in-a-box with free delivery.
- 20% off flowers from **Petals Network**.
- 20% off storewide at **edge clothing** on online purchases.
- 15% discount on the full range of **Jay Leno's Garage** Advanced Vehicle Care products.
- Up to 20% discount on the public web price on the entire range on **Lenovo** notebooks, desktop PCs, monitors and accessories.
- No application fee for any home loan or personal loan through the **Firefighters Credit Union**.
- 10% discount on pre-purchased Freedom, Snooze, Plush and the Original Mattress Factory e-gift cards via the **Greenlit Brands Group**.
- 20% discount on all **Silver Cross** prams, strollers and accessories when purchased online.
- New and existing customers have access to special offers on **Elgas** LPG bottled gas.
- 10% off your next **Ultra Tune** manufacturer's handbook service.



# BRIGADE

If undeliverable return to:  
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