

Brigade

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Volunteers help form the new Apostles Group



**How staging
areas run
smoothly**



**The crucial
role of
Hamilton
Airbase**

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We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Custodians of the land. We pay our respects to Elders, past and present.

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COVER PHOTO: PAUL BENJAMIN

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Spring 2025

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CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Greg Leach AFSM

In the past year, we comprehensively reviewed the CFA Strategy and Outcomes Framework 2020-2030 to refine and adjust the strategy because of internal or external changes since its inception in 2020. During the review process we consulted CFA members, stakeholders and the community to ensure everyone had a voice in shaping CFA's future.



The result is a refreshed CFA Strategy 2020-2030 that clearly outlines what CFA aims to achieve, the work we will undertake to deliver the strategy and how we'll measure our impact. We've created a page on Members Online (members.cfa.vic.gov.au/strategy) that includes the updated strategy, a downloadable 'Strategy on a page', the accompanying Outcomes Framework and details about how we'll bring it to life. Thank you to all our members for your thoughtful contributions. Together, we play a vital role in delivering on our vision: that Victorian communities are prepared for and safe from fire.

The Victorian Government's new Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund (ESVF) came into effect on 1 July. Eligible CFA volunteers can apply for a rebate on the ESVF. We know this levy continues to be a contentious issue for many of our members. Our current focus is on making sure volunteers can access the rebate they're entitled to. In August we mailed information packs about ESVF to brigade captains and secretaries to help members through the process of applying for the rebate through our online portal.

We have also been busy improving the business systems that underpin CFA's ways of working. Our new finance and procurement system (including SAP S/4HANA and Concur Expense Management and Reimbursement systems) went live in June. This is a significant technology transformation that will future-proof our finance systems. The project team consulted with more than 100 business process owners across our regions, who made crucial contributions to aspects of the design, user acceptance testing, training and change management.

Getting used to new ways of working can be a challenge, and I acknowledge the increased workload incurred in some parts of the business in the short-term as we transition to the new system and the benefits it will deliver. I thank you for your patience and understanding. We have established a network of 'change champions' across Victoria, and these support officers and BASOs are happy to help you.

We've also improved other business processes recently to help volunteers use their time more efficiently. For example, a new mobile training props search option shows members which types of props we have and when they are available. Another way we're helping members access information more easily is through the new Honours and Awards dashboard. When wanting to nominate someone, the dashboard makes it easier for a CFA member to identify the most appropriate award, showcasing what's available and highlighting the criteria required.

CHIEF OFFICER

Jason Heffernan

As winter draws to a close, our attention is now firmly fixed on the fire season ahead. AFAC's Australian Seasonal Bushfire Outlook for Spring indicates an increased risk of fire for drought-affected areas across the south-west, west and central areas of Victoria, as well as south-west Gippsland. With record low rainfall over the past 18 months and a build-up of dry vegetation, these regions could see significant bushfire activity if conditions worsen.



To support communities to be prepared for the coming season, CFA is launching the inaugural Get Fire Ready initiative, beginning on the weekend of 4 and 5 October. This is aimed at addressing gaps in bushfire safety knowledge and being a visible presence in our regions. Brigades are encouraged to open their doors and engage with their residents across the weekend or on any day during October.

In recent times there has been significant coverage and commentary surrounding the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund (ESVF) which replaced the Fire Services Property Levy from 1 July. CFA has long held the position that volunteers shouldn't be paying for the services they deliver, so we welcome the Victorian Government's commitment to give rebates to volunteers.

I want to assure our members that we will continue advocating for fair arrangements, particularly for our primary producers affected by the rebate cap. If you're eligible for the rebate, please make sure to submit your application via the portal on Members Online. Assistance is available from the Department of Government Services through the online form or by calling **1300 778 931**.

Closer to home, and after several months of behind-the-scenes organisation, CFA's new 2025 Regulations came into effect at the end of July. Developed by the Department of Justice and Community Safety in consultation with CFA, the regulations are designed to reflect the realities of the work you do every day.

While some updates are minor, others may open up new ways for us to operate and respond. A dedicated Members Online page is available to help you navigate the changes.

Finally, in recent months, citations for service and courage have been awarded to members from Langwarrin, Hastings, Trentham, Bacchus Marsh, Ballan and Melton brigades for their extraordinary efforts in challenging incidents from complex rescues to responding in extreme weather. These achievements reflect the commitment and resolve of our people.

Thank you for the vital work you do, and for the values you bring to CFA every day as we head into what's likely to be a demanding fire season.

DCO SOUTH EAST REGION

Trevor Owen

As the bushfire season approaches, the importance of strong fireground leadership and coordinated support across CFA becomes more critical than ever. At the heart of every successful operation is a clear mission, empowered teams and a shared commitment to safety; principles embodied in the concept of mission command.



Mission command is a leadership philosophy that enables decision-making at the lowest appropriate level. It relies on clear intent from incident controllers and empowers brigade leaders to act decisively in dynamic conditions.

In the fireground environment, where seconds matter and conditions shift rapidly, this approach fosters agility, trust and better outcomes. Leaders are not just following orders, they are interpreting intent, adapting to the situation and making informed decisions to protect lives and property.

Supporting this leadership model are CFA's groups of fire brigades. Our groups play a vital role in coordinating multi-brigade responses, ensuring security of the area and running local command facilities. Their ability to scale resources, provide experienced personnel and maintain situational awareness across a group area is essential during large-scale incidents. Groups also serve as a bridge between strategic planning and tactical execution, ensuring that frontline crews have the support they need to operate safely and effectively.

Preparation is key. As we head into the bushfire season, brigades and groups are busy conducting joint training exercises, reviewing local response plans, ensuring the Chief Officer's mandatory safety skills maintenance is being undertaken and checking that equipment and vehicles are ready. These efforts build cohesion and confidence, reinforcing the shared understanding that underpins mission command. It's not just about being ready; it's about being ready together.

Leadership on the fireground isn't just about tactics, it's importantly about people. It's about knowing your crew, understanding their strengths and making decisions that keep them safe. It's about clear communication, being calm under pressure, and the courage to act when it counts. It's also about ensuring that at the end of every response, every member goes home safely.

CFA's strength lies in its people. Our members bring skill, dedication and heart to every call. By embracing mission command, supporting each other through group coordination and preparing thoroughly for the season ahead, we set ourselves up not just for operational success, but for the most important outcome of all – our safety.

As we face another fast approaching bushfire season, let's lead with purpose, prepare with diligence and support one another. When we do, we give ourselves the best chance to protect our communities and bring everyone home.

BRIGADE CAPTAIN, D17

Cara Hadzig

People often ask me, "Why did you join CFA?" For me, it started with my great-uncle, William (Bill) Jefferies. He was my hero growing up. He wasn't just a firefighter – he was also the local Santa Claus and Easter Bunny, rattling tins for the Royal Children's Hospital Good Friday Appeal and always showing up to support the community. I admired him immensely.



Although Bill is no longer with us, I like to think he's looking down on me and proud of the path I've taken.

My father was also a member of North Wimmera Fire Brigade. After a farm accident and a stroke, he had to step away from CFA. For years, I thought about joining but didn't quite have the confidence. It wasn't until after I had my children that I pulled my brother aside and said, "Let's do this together".

While recently going through North Wimmera brigade records, I discovered that my grandfather was a member too – making this truly a family legacy.

I've now been a CFA volunteer for 10 years and have served as captain of North Wimmera brigade for the past four. When I first joined, I had no intention of stepping into leadership – I just wanted to be a firefighter. But like many things in life, that plan evolved.

Our rural brigade has about 40 members on the books. Like many others, we face the challenge of attracting the next generation and encouraging them to step into leadership. Mentoring younger members has become one of the most meaningful parts of my role.

It starts with something simple like giving them space to be involved, helping them build confidence and listening when they speak up. I always try to lead by example, whether it's turning out to a call, preparing for the fire season or sitting down to plan training sessions. Sometimes all someone needs is a bit of encouragement and someone who believes in them.

Programs such as the Women in Leadership Mentoring Program, Emerging Young Leaders Mentoring Program, and the Women's Advisory Committee have helped me develop the skills to support others in a meaningful way. It's not just about passing on knowledge – it's about helping people realise their potential.

Our brigade is part of the Warracknabeal Group, and I often turn out with them when I'm in town. It's there I've formed strong bonds with younger members. Seeing them grow, take initiative and eventually step into leadership roles is what keeps me going.

I've had great mentors, from group officers, to former captains, to headquarter brigade captains. Now it's my turn to give back because CFA isn't just about firefighting – it's about community, resilience, and helping others rise.



Woman saved from silage

A woman who became trapped under a large amount of silage was successfully rescued following a multiagency operation at a property in Darnum, West Gippsland, in mid-July.

The woman had been standing on a concrete pad near the base of a silage pit when a four-metre-high stack of fodder collapsed on top of her. Despite being almost completely submerged, she managed to hold onto her phone and call for assistance.

CFA crews from Warragul and Nilma North brigades were among the first on scene, arriving shortly after 4.30pm. VICSES, Fire Rescue Victoria, Victoria Police and Ambulance Victoria were also on scene.

CFA Incident Controller Brian Brewer said the woman's upper body had already been uncovered by the time crews arrived but her lower body remained buried.

"It was a time-critical situation. Light was fading fast and there was a storm approaching. Those factors influenced how we approached the rescue," Brian said.

It took crews just over an hour to successfully extricate the woman – who was carried by stretcher to a waiting ambulance and transferred to a helicopter for transport to hospital.

"In more than 40 years with CFA, this was certainly one of the more unusual rescues I've attended."

Brian, who is a member of Warragul Fire Brigade, said crews faced several logistical hurdles.

"Conditions on the property were challenging. The yard was extremely wet, vehicle access was limited and we had to carry in gear by hand. We relied on lighting and hand tools to free her," Brian said.

"We also had spotters monitoring the remaining silage wall throughout the operation for any signs of movement. We knew if rain set in, the conditions could quickly worsen and put everyone at greater risk."

Brian praised the cooperation between agencies throughout the incident.

"It was very much a team effort. CFA, VICSES, FRV, Victoria Police and Ambulance Victoria all worked together seamlessly under pressure."

STORY JAMES TAYLOR

STAGING FOR SUCCESS

Staging areas are the vital link between planning and action. Without them, firefighting would be far less effective – especially during campaign fires. We talked to four staging area experts.

Story by Shaunnagh O'Loughlin



CAM GELLATLY, DMO

The 2024-25 season was unlike any other for CFA's district mechanical officers (DMOs) because of the widespread nature of the fires. Instead of working from staging areas, they were dispatched directly into the field, meeting crews in a safe area near the fire front.

"Usually, there are two to four DMOs at a staging area," Horsham DMO workshop OIC Cam Gellatly (pictured above) explained. "Last season, we went directly to where we were needed. It was more chaotic than usual and took longer to assess which trucks needed work – especially given the hundreds of appliances deployed to the fires.

"It was not just CFA vehicles that we look after – we also worked on vehicles from DEECA, NSWRFs, ACT Fire and Rescue, SA Parks and FRV."

The terrain added challenges. In the Grampians, rocks and gravel caused frequent tyre damage, while at Little Desert sandy conditions and soot build-up kept DMOs on their toes.

"Many trucks had to run on low tyre pressure to navigate sand," Cam said. "Crews often had to leave vehicles on site and be bused in and out each day. This made it quite difficult to access these vehicles for maintenance."

Like CFA members, DMOs prepare well before summer hits. Each year begins with a pre-season meeting to check equipment, conduct entrapment drills, the hazard awareness training, and refresh Maintain Safety on the Fireground accreditation.

"We go over everything. Safety is key – most DMOs have General Firefighter qualifications so we know the risks and how to work around them," Cam said.

Fleet Services coordinates DMO deployments, with local mechanics kicking off the work and calling in support from around the state as needed. Their mobile workshop vans are their lifeline – fully stocked with spare parts and tools as well as first-aid and hydration supplies.

"We carry what we need to get the job done," Cam said. "But sometimes, you don't have the exact part or tool, so you improvise. That's part of the challenge – and the fun."

DMOs take pride in supporting volunteers and keeping the firefighting effort moving.

"We don't get a lot of time to stop and watch the volunteers come and go," Cam said. "But when we do, it's uplifting. They really appreciate our work and we appreciate what they're out there doing. It's a massive team effort and rewarding knowing we're working hard for a good cause."



NICOLE MCGRATH, STAGING AREA MANAGER

"Setting up a staging area for a major fire demands logistics, leadership and – above all – teamwork," Ballarat City Fire Brigade Captain Nicole McGrath said.

As a Staging Area Manager (SAM), Nicole is at the forefront of operations on the ground, supporting teams in Incident Control Centres to track every crew, every movement and every resource. SAMs are also often called upon to support the set-up of base camps at campaign fires due to their specialist skills.

"Setting up a staging area at a base camp is like setting up for a large festival," she said. "You're dealing with everything from traffic management to lighting to safety and welfare. You assess the space you have to work with, visualise the set-up – and then it all has to come together fast."

From this central point, Nicole and her support team coordinate resources from CFA and other firefighting agencies, ensure crews and vehicles are ready to deploy and that they receive briefings before heading out to the fireground.

Ballarat City brigade has its own mobile staging area capability, ready to respond to both small and large-scale incidents locally and across the state as needed. "We can scale up quickly, not just with what we have in the brigade, but by calling on support from agencies such as DEECA and local councils," Nicole explained.

"Often you're working from just a rough plan and a tight time line. You have to know what needs to be done and lean on your team and other agencies to get the job done."

While each staging area is tailored to the specific fire it supports, the essentials remain the same: a safe, well-organised space where trucks, vehicles and crews can muster and resources can be allocated efficiently. Additional support services such as catering, first-aid and welfare are layered in as needed.

"A well-run staging area can make a huge difference to crew safety and the overall firefighting response," Nicole said. "It's one of the most important parts of our operations and probably one of the most underrated."

Behind every successful deployment is a team of dedicated individuals, each bringing their own skills and experience. "It would never happen without the team. Everyone steps up, brings their strengths and we just make it work."



LEIGH MARSH, STAGING AREA MANAGER

For Industry Fire Prevention Manager Leigh Marsh the journey into the SAM role began not in the field, but behind the scenes.

"When I was working as a community safety officer, a number of my colleagues were undertaking SAM duties," Leigh explained. "After several years working in an incident control centre, I realised I wanted to take on a field-based role - something that brought me into direct contact with our members on the ground."

That decision led to formal SAM training, followed by a structured mentoring program and endorsement. Now with more than a decade of deployments, Leigh's experience spans everything from rapid initial support during local incidents to complex operations at major campaign fires.

"Some of my most significant deployments have included the south-west peat fires in 2018 and more recently, large-scale support operations at the Grampians fires during the 2023-24 and 2024-25 fire seasons.

"I've managed staging areas out of the Moyston and Dadswells Bridge stations, as well as larger recreational reserves. I also work in a 'Go-forward' SAM role, supporting fast-developing incidents before a full incident management team is established, ensuring resources can be deployed safely and efficiently from the outset."

What drives Leigh is more than the operational challenge, it is purpose, connection and pride.

"The dynamic nature of each incident keeps you on your toes. No two set-ups are the same," he said. "But more than that, it's the interaction with members that makes this role so fulfilling. During the Grampians fires this year, we had 300 to 400 personnel passing through Moyston station each day. Seeing brigade members jump in to help with no hesitation is incredibly motivating.

"One evening at Moyston, Deputy Chief Officers Garry Cook AFSM and Brett Boatman, along with Incident Controller Mark Gunning AFSM, had dinner with our crews at the staging area, listening to their stories from the fireground. It gave everyone – especially some exhausted volunteers – a real morale boost. That kind of leadership presence matters and it reminded us that every role counts."

Leigh says the SAM role has become one of the most rewarding aspects of his work. "Being a staging area manager is a demanding role, but you instantly see the impact of your work. "You're right there, supporting the people who are giving their all. It's one of the most fulfilling things I do."



EMMA HERSCHELL, LOGISTICS OFFICER

Every day working in an ICC or DCC is an exercise in adaptability, problem solving and purpose for seasoned Logistics Officer Emma Herschell (pictured above with Logistics Officer Scott Hamilton).

With more than eight years in the role and accredited as a Level 3 Logistics Officer, Emma's experience spans both local and international deployments, including the 2023 Kimberley floods, the 2023 Canadian wildfires, and most recently the Grampians and Dimboola fires during the 2024-25 season.

"From a logistical perspective, the environment is dynamic," Emma explained. "There's a constant flow of personnel, resources and information. Crews are arriving and departing at all hours and their needs can change rapidly due to fire behaviour, weather conditions and operational priorities.

"You have to anticipate needs and adapt quickly, often under tight time constraints."

Managing logistics during a fire campaign comes with no shortage of challenges. Daily tasks range from coordinating meals and catering, tracking deliveries and managing fuel supplies, to liaising with operational teams, ensuring everyone from strike teams to IMTs has what they need when they need it.

"The base camp must operate like a well-oiled machine, providing food, water, accommodation and other essential services efficiently.

"You're working long hours, sometimes in heat, dust and noise, and trying to keep everything running smoothly," Emma added. "You have to plan ahead while still responding to immediate needs on the ground."

This requires constant problem-solving, often with limited resources and tight deadlines, while leaning on strong local relationships.

"We had calls to the ICC on separate days requesting urgent meal support after crews were deployed at short notice. In total, about 150 meals were needed quickly.

"Thanks to our connection with Victoria Police in Ararat and the incredible work of our teams, we were able to source meals locally and get them out to the field. That partnership was key to making it happen and meant we could respond fast and ensure the extra crews were fed."

Despite the intensity of working in ICCs during a busy fire season, Emma said the sense of camaraderie keeps her going.

"Seeing volunteers, staff, fellow agencies and interstate support come together reminds you of how powerful our collective effort can be," she said.

"It is always inspiring to witness such high levels of commitment and collaboration – and this was especially evident in the west this season.

"It reinforces my belief in the strength and resilience of our emergency services community. It's a powerful example of what we can achieve when we work together as a unified team."



Seasonal outlook for spring

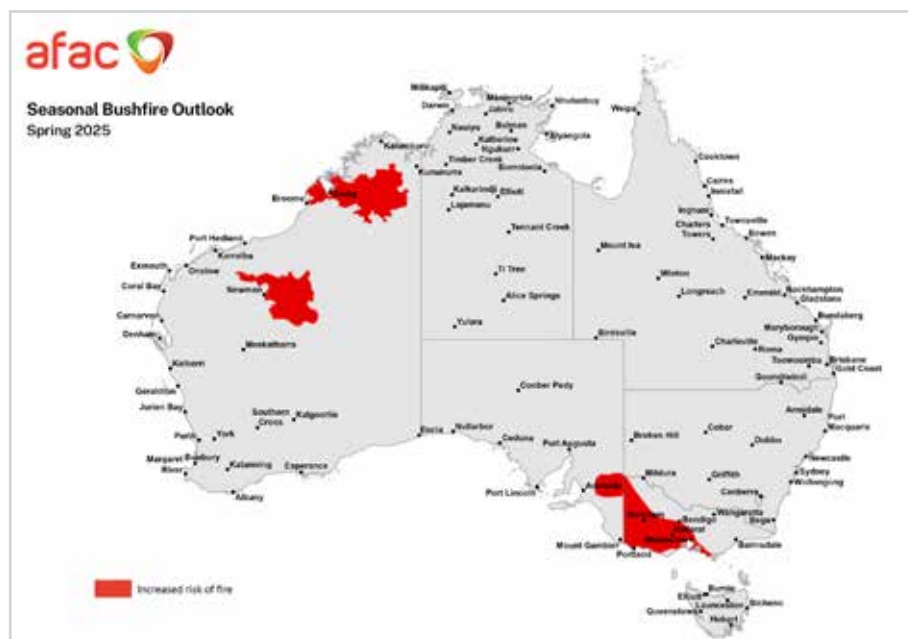
AFAC's Seasonal Bushfire Outlook for spring 2025 identifies a heightened risk of fire for the south, south-west, central, and south-west Gippsland regions in Victoria, the Dampier Peninsula, Derby Coast and the Central Kimberley, Little Sandy Desert, and south-eastern Pilbara in Western Australia, and the south-eastern agricultural areas of the Murraylands in South Australia.

The higher risk of fire in WA follows increased fuel growth following seasonal rains, coupled with the predicted warmer than normal temperatures and higher likelihood of below average rainfall through spring.

Towards the south-east of Australia, surface moisture hides deeper drying that has resulted from long-term rainfall deficiencies that have built over the past 12 to 18 months. Some places have reported their lowest ever rainfall during this period. If spring rainfall doesn't occur, the conditions will rapidly switch to an increased risk of fire.

The Bureau of Meteorology's most up-to-date information has supported the outlook. It shows long-term rainfall deficiencies persist in southern SA, Victoria and Tasmania, as well as western WA. In contrast, rainfall has been above to very much above average for northern WA, most of the NT and Queensland.

Above average sea surface temperatures persist around much of the Australian coastline, providing increased moisture



and energy that can enhance the severity of storms and weather systems.

The Bureau advises that September to November is more likely to experience above average daytime temperatures across northern, western, and south-eastern Australia, with overnight temperatures expected to be warmer nationwide. Soil moisture is average to above average for most parts of the country, however drier than average levels persist in small parts of western and southern WA, Southern NSW, central Victoria and Tasmania.

This Seasonal Bushfire Outlook was developed by AFAC, the Bureau of Meteorology, Queensland Fire Department, NSW Rural Fire Service, ACT Emergency Services Agency, ACT Parks and Conservation Service, CFA, Victoria's Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action, Tasmania Fire Service, SA Country Fire Service, Department of Fire and Emergency Services, Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions WA, and Bushfires NT.

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New homes and trucks

In late July, two brigades celebrated the opening of a new station and also received new vehicles.

In District 18 Irymple Fire Brigade members eagerly accepted the keys to a new heavy tanker and celebrated the official opening of their new station.

The keys were officially handed over by the Minister for Emergency Services Vicki Ward, CFA Chief Officer Jason Heffernan and CFA Board Chair Jo Plummer.

The new station will allow Irymple's dedicated volunteers to serve and protect the community well into the future. Irymple Captain Andrew Millen said the new station and truck meant a lot to the brigade.

"The upgrades to our facilities and equipment mean we have the necessary tools to continue keeping our community safe," Andrew said. "This has been a huge project and it's great to see the fruits of everyone's labour."

"We want to thank everyone who has been involved in this process; we really are so grateful."

"The brigade is proud of its new station and truck, and Irymple and surrounding communities will reap the benefits of this long into the future."

The new station replaces the previous fire station on Koorlong Avenue in Irymple with a modern facility including four motor bays, a four-bay external shed, support areas, offices and volunteer amenities.

The heavy tanker will also boost the brigade's capability by providing 4,000 litres of water, an increase of 1,650 litres from the previous medium tanker. The truck also has improved off-road performance, electronic monitors, electric rewind hose reels, and provides more safety and comfort features for volunteers.

Chief Officer Jason Heffernan said it was great to see Irymple brigade receiving updated facilities and equipment.

"Irymple is a remote brigade and they do an outstanding job of responding to their community as well as others around the area," Jason said. "The new station and truck will allow them to continue protecting lives and property for many years to come."

Meanwhile in District 8, Cockatoo Fire Brigade members celebrated their renovated fire station and new field command vehicle (pictured right).

CFA Board member Peter Shaw AFSM, Chief Officer Jason Heffernan and Deputy Chief Officer South East Region Trevor Owen joined the brigade for the official handover of the station and FCV.

The project, which was launched following generous donations from the local Cockatoo op shop and the wider community, grew into a \$1 million dollar refurbishment with investment from CFA's Base Capital Works Program.

The renovations provide a new office, turnout room, amenities, a breathing apparatus wash room, workshop, laundry, drying room and external covered pergola. The kitchen, training room and motor room have also been refurbished.

The bathroom facilities were included in the upgrade along with separate turnout rooms and change cubicles.

Cockatoo Fire Brigade Captain Marcus Harris said the renovated station is a fantastic facility which will further support their 34 members well into the future.

"It's great having a separate room for our turnout gear and dedicated spaces to wash, clean, dry and store clothing and equipment," Marcus said.



"The new FCV will not only be a great asset to attend incidents, but will also be used for Fire Medical Response callouts which we're currently training towards."

"We also have a new electric chainsaw in the FCV, which was donated by Emerald and District Bendigo Bank. This will assist us with storm response in the area."

Cockatoo Fire Brigade has been proudly serving the community since 1942. The brigade responds to more than 100 incidents each year and is well known for their efforts on the frontline in many major bushfires including the Ash Wednesday fires in 1983.

Deputy Chief Officer Trevor Owen said the renovated station and FCV are welcome resources for Cockatoo.

"Cockatoo brigade has a rich history of protecting its local community and I look forward to seeing the brigade use this improved facility," Trevor said.

STORY BRITTANY CARLSON AND AMY SCHILDBERGER



UPDATE ON CFA PROJECTS

In each issue we update members with the progress being made on some of our projects. More information about all of our projects is on Members Online: members.vic.gov.au/CFAprojects

Volunteer leadership development

Last quarter, Women's Challenge Camps took place across all regions. The first group of participants in the Certificate IV in Leadership and Management completed their course and a second group started. Fireline Leadership courses one through eight were completed. The Emerging Young Leaders Mentoring Program finished in August.

This quarter CFA is launching a new online governance training course and new courses will be added to the Leadership Essentials pathway. Programs planned for 2025 will continue including the Captain's Peer Mentoring Program, the Regional Leadership Scholarship Program and Fireline Leadership training. The Women in Leadership Mentoring Program for 2025-26 will start in October.



Women's boots and gloves

CFA is sourcing structural firefighting boots and gloves designed specifically for women. This project addresses volunteer feedback and demonstrates CFA's ongoing commitment to safety and inclusion. Recognising the unique needs of female firefighters, CFA aims to provide gear that offers better fit, comfort and functionality, thereby enhancing firefighter safety and performance. CFA identified potential suppliers and carried out an evaluation to shortlist suppliers for a selective tender process. The aim is to award the contract by the end of 2025.

Mobile data capability

There is a need for our members to access broadband data in the field. Between April and June 2025, the installation of brackets and docks into designated vehicles progressed as planned. Tablets will be distributed separately. The revision of profiles and finalisation of the Situation App development are complete. Onboarding and testing of tablets also began last quarter. Tablet software testing will finish this quarter and the five-digit brigade PIN security tags and user guides will be finalised for distribution along with the tablets.



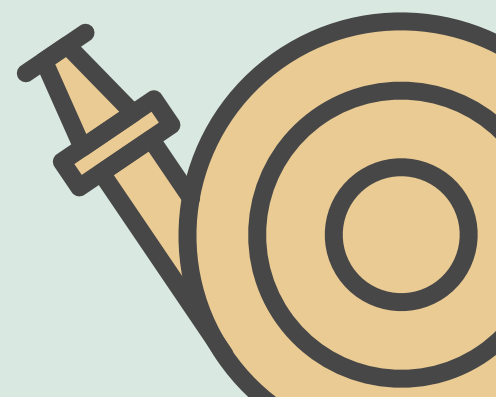
Drone trial

The remotely piloted aircraft systems (RPAS or drone) trial continues. Operations are based at Rowville and Edithvale brigades and data is being collected for all events to assess what is working well and what can be improved. Additional pilots are undergoing Remote Pilot Licence training and certification. An additional two aircraft have been purchased and will be dedicated to training. This leaves the other aircraft available for operational activities at all times. The number of incidents where drones will be deployed is expected to increase as we approach warmer, dryer weather.



Breathing apparatus cylinder exchange

The cylinder exchange project will increase flexibility and convenience when refilling used BA cylinders. We successfully partnered with a provider to develop the technology, which builds on our existing collaboration with ServiceNow and Fujitsu. By the end of October 2025, we aim to have a working app ready for testing in a pilot area to collect feedback.



King's Birthday Honours

Sharon Merritt AFSM

Sharon has been a CFA member for 28 years, initially as a volunteer firefighter and then a staff member for more than 15 years. Since 2003, Sharon has served as captain of Macclesfield Fire Brigade, showing exceptional leadership.



Sharon is a qualified sector commander, strike team leader, crew leader, and Level 3 fire behaviour analyst and safety officer. She has responded to many significant incidents at the local level, interstate and overseas. She was a Level 3 incident management team safety officer during the 2019-20 fires and was a strike team leader and sector commander during the 2009 fires.

"As a safety officer I was in the field and in incident control centres. My role was to look after the safety of firefighters, both physical and psychological," Sharon said. "It was a challenge dealing with a wide range of safety issues. A particular challenge was making sure crews could safely get to Mallacoota on a single road that was impacted by hazardous trees."

She recognised the specialist response needed for large animals in distress, including during bushfires and floods, and was integral in developing the brigade's large animal rescue unit.

For 12 years, she worked for CFA as a vegetation management officer, focusing on bushfire risk management through prevention and mitigation efforts.

As a qualified trainer/assessor, Sharon is endorsed to train members in a range of skills, and is also a volunteer structural and wildfire fire investigator.

Tony Scicluna AFSM

Tony's career in fire services spans more than four decades across both volunteer and career roles. During that time he has left a lasting mark on bushfire training, shaping programs, training thousands of volunteers, and instilling a culture of calm, safety and awareness on the fireground.



Tony began his CFA journey as one of the founding members of Clonbinane Fire Brigade in the early 1980s. Driven by local need and collective effort, Tony joined other local residents and successfully lobbied CFA for a new brigade, which continues to serve the region today.

From 1990, his firefighting expertise deepened. During 12 years with the Department of Natural Resources and Environment, where he gained hands-on experience in bushfire behaviour, forest management and operational response. He also worked in the Fire Management Branch developing bushfire training packages and firefighting training videos.

Tony has played a pivotal role in creating major CFA training programs including CFA's initial core firefighter training module, the General Firefighter program, and the Chainsaw and Tree Hazard programs. He has also taught fire ecology and planned burning at TAFE level, and helped to develop interagency training packages.

"I'm a big believer in the older firefighter teaching the newer firefighter," Tony said. "Hands-on learning, real stories, real consequences. By engaging the firefighters you train, they bring out the best in themselves."

Peter Langridge AFSM

Peter's legacy is one of dedication, innovation and an unwavering commitment to protecting those who serve on the frontline. The strong safety culture enshrined in CFA is a reflection of the important contribution Peter has made over his distinguished career at CFA as both a volunteer and staff member. He has dedicated more than 40 years to CFA and the emergency services sector, demonstrating exceptional leadership and innovation in firefighter health, safety and wellbeing during that time.



"In hindsight, joining CFA in 1982 was probably not the best time as I went straight into a very bad fire season being the year of the Ash Wednesday fires. But being thrown into the deep end, I learned a lot very quickly - and I did stay on as a volunteer," Peter said.

As CFA's Manager, Health Monitoring and Rehabilitation, Peter has been instrumental in improving firefighter health practices, establishing health programs, leading innovative research initiatives and advocating for firefighter safety. He has also transformed CFA's approach to health monitoring and firefighter rehabilitation through the implementation of a health monitoring program for firefighters.

In 2015 he established a network of firefighter rehabilitation units across the state, setting a national standard for real-time health checks in fire and hazardous material incidents.

"We learned many lessons during the 2004 and 2008 Hazelwood mine fires and each time had to modify how we managed these incidents. After 2008 we developed a plan for any future fires of this kind, which is now part of EMV's State Smoke Framework."

Colin Brown AFSM

Colin is a dedicated and highly experienced firefighter and emergency services leader with more than 40 years of service to CFA and Fire Rescue Victoria. His longstanding career exemplifies outstanding leadership, innovation and service in firefighting, emergency management, aviation operations and community engagement.



Colin is a Warrandyte Fire Brigade volunteer and a Fire Rescue Victoria Commander. He is also an accredited wildfire and structural fire investigator and has mentored prospective investigators.

Colin has made a significant contribution to protect lives and property at major fires including Dandenong Ranges fires (1967, 1997), Ash Wednesday (1983), the 2009 fires and the Cambarville fires (2019-20).

"The Longford gas explosion in 1998 stands out. It was my first day as a CFA Operations Officer and I was asked to lead the CFA fire investigation team to determine the cause," Colin said.

Colin's expertise and leadership during catastrophic events has led to significant advancements in township protection plans, improvements in incident control centres and the creation of the highly successful Your Emergency Services (YES) program in the Yarra Ranges.

Following the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, Colin worked with 21 CFA brigades across the Dandenong Ranges and surrounding areas on an EMV-led project to provide community alert sirens in emergencies through existing CFA and purpose-built sirens.



THE TWO OF US

Scarlett and Helen Henderson

In early 2024, Helen Henderson accompanied her teenage daughter Scarlett to a Wandin Fire Brigade open day to support Scarlett's future dream of pursuing a career with Forest Fire Management Victoria. But Helen felt so welcomed and encouraged by brigade members that she joined as well.

Scarlett Henderson

Wandin Fire Brigade had an open day on Australia Day last year. Mum and I went down and the members were showing everybody around. We told them I was interested in firefighting as a career. They set us on the pathway of how to put it in an expression of interest and what to expect in the next couple of months. The brigade was really helpful and welcoming with everything.

Obviously, with me being 15 or 16, I was very nervous and the brigade members were all adults so I was a bit scared. Initially, I think mum was going to come with me for the first few months and then she was going to just kind of fade away, but instead she turned out to love it and she joined up too. So, we've just continued on together.

It's been really good to have someone to talk about everything. We have our own little briefings after meetings and after training sessions. Being able to talk through incidents and sharing our different experiences has been good too.

I have three siblings and mum is always doing something with each of them. So to be able to have this as our own little thing has been really good. Every Wednesday we're up there together. It helps us spend a bit more time together in the busy life of school, work, football and different hobbies. It just gives us our own little personal time.

The whole of General Firefighter training was memorable. Being able to go through the course and actually doing our final assessment together; that was a really good day. We even had one of our members volunteer to drive us down for the assessment. That whole day was pretty memorable. I loved doing the whole course with my mum.

Mum definitely pushes me to step out of my comfort zone, as they all do at Wandin. She's always encouraging me to sign up for things, try different things and different versions, so that's been really handy to have someone to actually push me like that.

And when we're driving to a callout, I'm always first out of the car. Mum is always saying, 'Now, you're getting on the truck, this is your turn to go on the truck.' So, she's always pushing me.

I really admire mum's will to push on and learn new things at her age. Being able to start a whole new skill set in emergency response and helping people and fitting it into her busy schedule is pretty impressive.

I also admire mum's resilience and courage. She's just a great mum and it's so impressive that she's been able to learn all of these new skills.

I definitely see us sharing this experience in the long term. I think we'll be in this for probably the rest of our lives. Apart from the actual firefighting side of things, I just love having that community and being able to go there together with mum.

Even if we were not operational, I think we'll still be there for a long time. If my career takes off as a park ranger or in forest fire management, I think I would definitely still be at Wandin with mum when I can, just to be able to share that experience with her.

Helen Henderson

Scarlett had been very interested in becoming a park ranger. We didn't really know much about Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMVic) at that point. It was more all about being a park ranger and she did some work experience. That's when she learned that perhaps she was more interested in the hands-on part of it, which was FFMVic.

They were the ones that suggested that being a CFA volunteer would get her a lot of recognition on her resumé. It's just a really good knowledge base when it comes to fire behaviour. So we went along to the local open day at Wandin Fire Station.

We've got a lot of neighbours that are long-term members. The station has always been there, and we've always supported them, but we'd never thought that we would ever be a part of it.

You will not hear me say a bad word about this brigade. From the very first day every single person welcomed us with open arms, and they just couldn't wait to share their knowledge. They were incredibly encouraging and I just found it exciting.

At that point I was still just mum, pushing my daughter out of her comfort zone, heading towards something that she was keen on for a career. That's how it all got started. The brigade gave us all the information for the expression of interest and it rolled from there.

Volunteering together has brought us closer by having that common interest. All through life we've had common interests as well. I have with that with all my kids. I've been a single mum of four for 15 years, so you just try to spend that individual time with each one. Scarlett's three siblings are so supportive of our volunteering. They get very excited when we receive a callout and are really in awe of the knowledge and commitment required to be a CFA volunteer. I wouldn't be surprised if we see some more Hendersons joining in the future.

I didn't realise what was missing from my life. I didn't feel like I had a void that needed filling until I went along and met all these beautiful people. It just brought back this spark for me.

I would never have considered becoming a firefighter. I was literally just there to support Scarlett. But signing up myself, I put that down to the encouragement from the brigade. They are the ones who have encouraged me and in turn I've encouraged Scarlett.

We had a fire in our local area that was quite large. On this particular night, we got a callout and I was in my pyjamas, so I dropped Scarlett at the station. Then I got home and we got another callout and I thought 'Oh my God, I have to go now.'

We ended up being at the same fire. Scarlett was hands-on and I was down in the control point doing the scribing. I remember Scarlett walking past me at one stage, I'm getting emotional just thinking about it... it's just the pride, seeing her there with our members, and we were both so busy. It was very surreal to think that we were at this major incident together. I was just so incredibly proud and just thought, 'You go girl'.

I find I learn a lot from Scarlett. She picks up a lot of things that I perhaps don't. Then there are other times she'll say to me, 'Mum, I don't understand this or that', and I'll say, 'Oh really? I took that one in'. We really do bounce off each other.

It might be age-related, but Scarlett can sometimes lack a bit of confidence. I think she's come out of her shell an awful lot. I have that little bit more confidence, and am able to talk to anyone, anywhere; I've done volunteering in the past. I've seen Scarlett grow a lot in that area, so I think perhaps I complement her in that regard, encouraging her to step out of her comfort zone.

As much as I love volunteering, I don't think I would get as much out of it without Scarlett. I think it's the fact we're doing it together and it's something that I can share with her, and I'm incredibly proud of her for doing it. I think that's what I get out of it the most.



I love Scarlett's passion. When she really enjoys something, she's passionate and very committed. I like to see her blossom, and she certainly has done that. At the beginning of General Firefighter she was a bit overwhelmed with the amount that she needed to learn. But to see her now, she just wants to go out there and do every single course she can.

I've seen her go from being a brand-new volunteer, to being able to get off the truck and know exactly where all the equipment is, what to do and how to handle things. She's actually fighting fires and making a difference. It's been lovely to witness, because I wouldn't get to see any of that unless I was also part of the brigade. I have a front row seat.

Scarlett is turning 18 and getting her licence, so she'll become a bit more independent in terms of turning out. I feel like we're possibly going to be going down slightly different paths from here on. We're starting to find our own niche within CFA. I love the community education aspect and Scarlett really loves the adrenaline side of it. I think she'll probably learn rope rescue and get her truck licence. She wants to go all the way. But I'm sort of at the other end of life, so I think that's the other area where we complement each other. We each see things from a different perspective.

The brigade has really embraced Scarlett's youth and enthusiasm and they're sharing so much knowledge with her. She says they're like fathers to her. I can't begin to tell you how happy we are to be part this brigade. They really are like family.

STORY ALISON SMIRNOFF



Volunteers drive formation of the new Apostles Group

From 1 July 2025, a new CFA group was officially launched in District 6 – the Apostles Group. Formed through the merger of Cobden and Timboon groups, this new team reflects a proactive, volunteer-led effort to build a more sustainable group for the area.

WHY THE CHANGE?

Like many rural areas, CFA groups in District 6 are dealing with fewer volunteers, leadership gaps and heavier workloads. For Cobden Group in particular, maintaining viability was becoming harder.

“It really came down to people – just not having enough of them,” Group Officer Mark Roberts AFSM (pictured right) said.

“Running a group with only six brigades just wasn’t going to cut it long term. We needed a group that was the right size for the years to come.”

A working party was established with representatives from each group in District 6. Its focus was to plan for the future and identify ways to strengthen the role of groups.

“With the trending change in the community’s values around volunteering, it was time for us to be proactive,” Deputy Group Officer and Captain of Port Campbell Fire Brigade Katy Millard said.

“Exchanging ideas and considering other points of view as part of the working party was a positive way of being able to influence change,” Katy (pictured far right) said.

The working party’s first recommendation was to bring Cobden and neighbouring Timboon groups together to create a single, stronger group with shared resources, experience and people power. The new group includes Bostocks Creek, Brucknell-Ayrford, Carpendeit-South Purumbete, Cobden, Cobrico, Ecklin & District, Jancourt, Kennedy’s Creek, Lower Heytesbury, Port Campbell, Princetown, Scotts Creek-Cowleys Creek, Simpson and Timboon.

VOLUNTEERS LEADING THE WAY

What set this process apart was that it was entirely volunteer led – from the initial conversations and planning to consultation and decision-making.

“The pragmatic approach from both groups’ delegates was great,” Deputy Group Officer and new CFA Board member Bryce Morden said. “Many had been through mergers before with local sports clubs and knew we couldn’t wait for a crisis to trigger a merger.”

Delegates also agreed on the group’s new name – Apostles Group –to reflect the iconic landscape and shared identity of the region .

LAYING THE GROUNDWORK

As planning got underway, it became clear that merging two groups involved more than just deciding on a new name. There were different ways of operating, and alignment was key.

Templates and tools helped clarify expectations, but the real value came from collaboration.

“It’s been interesting to see the different approaches from each of the groups across operations, admin, training and communications,” Bryce said. “We will need to take the best from both and create a new Apostles Group way of doing things.”

Katy said working with a wider range of people made decision-making stronger.

“I didn’t anticipate the value of the combined group management teams, with a broader experience base,” she said. “Bringing different perspectives to the table actually made the nuts and bolts of setting up the new group pretty straightforward.”

Introducing pre-nomination process before elections also gave brigade delegates more confidence in the process.

“We received pre-nominations for the officer positions, which really helped,” Mark said. “It gave delegates time to consider their choices ahead of the meeting. Voting by secret ballot meant the decisions were made in a fair, confidential and democratic way for the group’s first term.”

Succession planning

Succession planning plays a vital role in building confident leaders and maintaining the strength of CFA into the future. CFA’s Succession Planning Framework is available to support brigades and groups in their long-term viability and ensure the coverage of key roles. Visit members.cfa.vic.gov.au/succession-planning-framework for practical tools to help identify, develop and support current and future volunteer leaders.



WHAT’S NEXT?

With elections complete, the focus is now on establishing group procedures, preparing for the fire season and continuing to learn from each other.

The Apostles Group was created by bringing two groups together, but the goal was bigger than just a merger. It was about building a stronger, more sustainable future for the brigades involved.

As Bryce summed up: “Change is inevitable. We can choose to have agency and influence in the change process or we can sit back and let change happen to us.”

To learn more about the group amalgamation process, a case study is available. For a copy or if you have any questions, please contact the Volunteer Sustainability Team (South West Region) at vst-swr@cfa.vic.gov.au.

STORY KIRSTEN DUDINK



Program that benefits Year 12 volunteers

La Trobe University's Aspire Early Offer Program rewards Year 12 students for their volunteering. Tatura Fire Brigade volunteer Charlotte Freemantle (pictured) was keen to talk about her time in Year 12 and what it was like to balance study and volunteering with the help of the Aspire program.

The Aspire program is an early entry scheme that lets secondary school students secure an early conditional offer to La Trobe University before finishing Year 12. One way of qualifying for the program is by making a community impact through volunteering.

Although it was only a few years ago, remembering the COVID-19 years is a struggle for many because so much has happened between then and now. However, Charlotte recalled her final year in high school with fondness and in detail.

"It was COVID. I was worried about my marks. Trying to do everything at once was hard," Charlotte said.

As La Trobe University has a campus in Shepparton, its staff were able to visit Charlotte's high school and discuss the Aspire program with the senior students. There are many options for regional students including opportunities for scholarships to relocate to metro locations.

"A lot of people applied but I thought I could use fire brigade because I was completing General Firefighter training at the same time."

Many students were encouraged to take up leadership positions at the school to meet the community contribution criteria but Charlotte had an edge over the competition – she was already impacting her community by volunteering with CFA. That experience contributed towards her application. She said the application process was easy and was supported by her brigade communications officer who had children her age at the time.

"My only hiccup that year was that I was a young woman coming into a brigade where I felt like I needed to prove I wanted to be there and that I could do everything. I'm grateful for the support I had from my comms officer because as a 17 year old it was really challenging balancing training and study during COVID."

At the time there were a couple of young people in brigades near Tatura, but there weren't many young people to make connections with and gain support from in her own brigade.

"I made one friend from a neighbouring brigade who was a little older than me and we did the same course together."

It wasn't until she attended that year's Cadet Camp that she found more opportunities for young people in CFA and was able to discuss her experiences with people her own age, make strong friendships and support networks and gain skills tailored for young members.

"I went to one of the pilot Cadet Camps and that's where I really connected with other young people," Charlotte said.

Back at school, Charlotte nominated Bachelors of Exercise and Sports Science or Physiotherapy as her preferred courses of study at multiple universities, but La Trobe was the only one offering an early entry scheme for her circumstances. When she



found out she had been approved for an early conditional offer in October that year before her exams, she was ecstatic and felt like the pressure was off.

"It was a massive stress relief knowing there was somewhere I could get into and that the ATAR score for the courses I wanted would be lowered for me. I felt like I could still commit to both my brigade and school. I could study and not be worried about being distracted by a fire and being a volunteer and not be stressed about my exam scores."

After selecting her preferences and attending open days, Charlotte decided on a university that suited her learning needs and course preferences. When asked about any tips for students interested in the program, Charlotte pointed out that "it favours people in regional areas and those who do community service including CFA. Even if you only do Championship running, your membership and service still counts."

For more information about La Trobe's Aspire program use the QR code. You can also email the Pathways team at youthteam@cfa.vic.gov.au for application support.



STORY ALEX REID

New Digital Store goes live

There are now new options for CFA volunteers to order stock items from the State Logistics Centre following the launch of the Digital Store in July.

The Digital Store platform will also give volunteers the ability to buy self-funded items including work wear, dress uniforms, apparel and merchandise. A complete list of items is available on Members Online.

Volunteers can place orders for structural PPC in the Digital Store, or district staff can place requests on behalf of volunteers in their district. This applies to all structural PPC sets including initial

and additional sets. Orders will be automatically sent to the relevant brigade captain and ACFO for approval, after which the PPC will be dispatched to the brigade or district.

Moving forward CFA plans to increase the functionality of the Digital Store to include the ability for brigade management team members to create brigade purchase orders, as well as raise requests for wildfire PPC and operational items.

A series of quick reference guides and learning materials have been produced to explain how to create an order in the Digital Store. Visit Members Online for

more information: members.cfa.vic.gov.au/tools/digital-store.

If you have any queries, contact digitalstore@cfa.vic.gov.au.

The Digital Store is the latest phase of CFA's Project Sapphire, which will simplify, streamline and modernise how we work. The expense payment system Concur went live in 2024, and in June 2025 we launched the contemporary system for finance and inventory management known as SAP4HANA.

Use the QR code to access the Digital Store.



Reducing fire risk in forests

Most CFA volunteers would be aware of forestry industry brigades that help protect plantations, but did you know that a group of plantation owners in south-west Victoria and south-east South Australia work together and with CFA to reduce fire risk?

Called the Green Triangle, this cross-border region is known for its forestry industries. The Green Triangle Fire Alliance (GTFA) comprises nine plantation owners and managers who all have a forestry industry brigade that works alongside CFA and Forest Fire Management Victoria.

"Our aim is to improve fire management outcomes for GTFA members and the wider community," Manager of GTFA Anthony Walsh said.

Anthony is our point of contact when CFA needs to coordinate an activity such as an exercise and wants a representative from the GTFA to attend, or if there is a training issue with forestry industry brigades.

The GTFA installed fire detection cameras at 15 sites across the area (eight in South Australia and seven in Victoria) to improve early detection in the region. It's the largest fire detection camera network in Australia. If the AI-powered system detects smoke, it alerts GTFA and CFA by sending an email and text message.

The photo above shows a fire on the Hamilton–Dartmoor Road on 18 April this year, which was detected by the Digby camera site.

"If two cameras spot a fire, the system triangulates the data to give an exact location," Anthony said. "If only one camera detects a fire, it will estimate the distance to the fire on a particular bearing."

"The GTFA has also added to Victoria's aerial firefighting fleet through by contracting a firebombing helicopter that is stationed at Casterton. Last fire season it was dispatched 29 times."

The GTFA is constantly looking at new ways to improve fire management. It has a subscription to the OroraTech satellite fire detection and notification service, and is also investigating other innovative fire unit types that are suited to working in plantations.

THE CRUCIAL ROLE OF HAMILTON

Water bombing aircraft play an important role in suppressing fires, but to do an efficient job they need the dedicated work of volunteers at airbases.

Story by Lucy Bishop



A group of volunteer firefighters were recently honoured with National Emergency Medals for their efforts at the Hamilton Airbase during the 2019-20 Australian bushfire crisis.

Operating water bombing aircraft out of Hamilton Airbase has long been a key component of CFA's incident response, supporting firefighting efforts at ground level with direct suppression of fire activity via aerial attack.

Aircraft operating out of the base rely on a volunteer bomber loader crew to help prepare and load water and retardant and enable repeated water bombing runs to be conducted on request.

When CFA Deputy Chief Officer South West Adrian Gutsche presented the National Emergency Medals, he said they were an important recognition of the valiant efforts of CFA members.

"The work that the bomber loader crews undertake is hot, strenuous and requires a high degree of care and precision so that ongoing aerial attack operations can be conducted successfully," Adrian said.

The Hamilton Airbase was activated for 26 days during the 2019-20 National Emergency declaration for Glenelg and Southern Grampians, including a period of 15 consecutive days from 20 December 2019 to 3 January 2020 when fire activity was at its highest.

"These volunteers come from brigades in Hamilton and surrounding areas and are members who have already dedicated many years of service to CFA," Adrian said.

Hamilton Airbase Manager and medal recipient Ron Huf said it was an honour to be formally recognised.

"I'm proud to be able to provide support to the community through what I do at the airbase. It was my first year in that role.

I had just done my training, which was fairly intense, but it was great preparation for what was to come," Ron said.

"I've been in CFA for 45 years and spent years as a captain and strike team leader. I got to the point where I wanted a change from being out on the fire trucks and command vehicles.

"Having an interest in aircraft and aviation, I was drawn to helping in the airbase setting. Having managed resources, staff and other complexities in my past leadership roles I thought it would be a good opportunity to contribute in a different way."

Ron said the back-to-back days are long and hot, but the crew enjoys the camaraderie of the team environment.

"It's hard to quantify the work our members do at the airbase. We all do different things within the group, but those out there loading planes definitely deserve to be recognised," Ron said.

"While working at the airbase in a voluntary capacity, CFA provided us with welfare support such as meals, accommodation and everything in between. They really looked after us."



2024-2025 Hamilton Airbase fire season statistics

Total number hours on the airbase: **2,832**

Total bomber loads: **596**
(482 retardant, 55 foam, 59 water)

Time to load a bomber: **3.5 to 4 minutes**



SIMON WILSON, SENIOR AIRBASE MANAGER

As a retired farmer and CFA member since he was 15 years old, Simon Wilson remains devoted to giving back to his community, no matter the role.

Now aged 71, Simon has swapped the strike teams and ground crews for the camaraderie of the Hamilton Airbase and District 5 Headquarters brigade.

Simon spent 30 years as a CFA air observer before completing his accreditation as an air base manager and receiving several years of mentoring from his late friend Leighton Wraith.

In 2021, Simon inherited Leighton's job following his tragic, sudden passing.

"Leighton was the driving force behind establishing the airbase, and when he was looking for a radio operator and someone with aviation experience to assist him, he came to me," Simon said.

A day in Simon's seat can be varied but when the Fire Danger Index conditions are above 50, he knows anything can happen.

"There are days where for whatever reason no fires happen, thankfully, but then suddenly, the pagers go off, the pilots get organised and get airborne quickly," Simon said.

"We've got four teams of bomber loaders on a weekly standby roster at home. As soon as the pilots leave, we call the team in.

"The planes are fully loaded ready to go, so they take off and do the initial run of the fire and by the time they're back for their first reload we have our loaders ready to go."

As a manager, Simon is then immediately tied to the radio to conduct flight following for the pilots - an aviation safety requirement and record keeping process for a fire.

"There are set procedures we go through if we cannot communicate with pilots. Something I hope I never have to do," Simon said.

"Pilots must communicate with someone on the radio every 30 minutes, updating where they are and what they're doing. If we don't hear from them for a further 20 minutes, we call search and rescue."

The 2024-25 fire season was the busiest on record for the airbase, mainly because of its support for the Grampians National Park bushfire.

"During the Grampians fires we were taking on a number of roles daily, whether that was maintaining the welfare of those at the airbase, liaising with logistics people for food and meals or keeping an eye on the level of supplies like retardant and fuel," Simon said.

Simon said his team is always on the lookout for locals who would like to give them a hand at the airbase.



ALLAN HADDEN, BOMBER LOADER

Allan Hadden, a North Hamilton Fire Brigade firefighter of 13 years, jumped on board at the airbase four years ago when he found out the aircraft got serviced in his hometown.

"I've always had a fascination with aviation and seeing the water bombers. When I realised it was just around the corner, I thought it was a good way to get up close and personal and learn more about them," Allan said.

"Due to some health issues, I had to get into something a bit slower, so it was a good opportunity. But as soon as I got the all-clear, I went back to jumping on the fire truck too.

"The fellas out there are unreal. They've been in it for a lot longer than me - I'm always learning from them.

"It's amazing to see how far they've come, from a small garden shed to the big shed we operate out of now."

Having been baptised by fire on his first callout to a bushfire in the Grampians many years ago, Allan has now felt the rush of being a water bomber loader.

"We started as soon as the first fire kicked in at the Grampians, and we could see the small column of smoke that ended up being the start of the second fire. We could see the glow at night," Allan said.

As the youngest member of the airbase, 39-year-old Allan said his first year was a big eye opener, quickly learning what goes on behind the scenes.

"In my head I sort of knew what it entailed, but seeing the effort the men go to from when they first walk in to then watching the planes as they fly off is amazing," Allan said.

"There are many checks happening in the shed beforehand to prepare for when the planes come back.

"I'm often the first one to arrive, so I get the pumps and hoses ready, have a chat with the pilots and get the bags of retardant ready to mix for when we need it."

Allan's son James has come up through the Juniors, and being 14, is itching to get involved at the airbase alongside his dad when he turns 16.

"We'll hopefully have a new member at the airbase soon. My son is glued to the planes already. He's been out a few times and so has my daughter who was amazed by them too."

Canadian firefight for captain



Portland Fire Brigade Captain Ian Hamley spent four weeks lending his expertise to Canada's firefighting efforts to combat a significant wildfire season. Departing in mid-July to Manitoba, Ian drew on his experience as a forestry industry brigades coordinator to perform the role of operations section chief.

Fire activity was rife in Thompson. Four active areas of fire were impacting the community and warm, windy and dry conditions intensified the fire behaviour for weeks.

For Ian, each morning started with an incident management team meeting to review the previous 24 hours of fire activity, before heading to the airport to work alongside the Air Operations and divisional commander.

"Post-briefing I usually conducted a helicopter reconnaissance flight over the fire areas to pinpoint priority zones and to plan the crews' next day of assignments," Ian said. "My primary responsibility was to identify key areas of concern and coordinate crew deployments and water bombers as needed.

"We had five Quebecois, four Mexican and two local firefighting crews all working on the Mystery Lake fire. It was our top priority as it posed a threat to the city of Thompson for a significant time."

Well entrenched in the operations, Ian observed how Canada's fire suppression strategies differ significantly to Australia's, largely due to the water sources available.

"Their primary approach involves aerial bucketing from helicopters to cool down fire activity before ground crews are deployed to the fire line," Ian said. "Unlike us, they don't use tankers or slip-on units. They rely entirely on portable pumps and extensive hose lays to tackle the fire edge, as well as dozer lines when the terrain allows for it.

"Crews are inserted directly onto the fire line via helicopter and then set up camp on-site. Once a helipad is established, supplies are then airlifted to them.

"They typically remain on the fire line for 24 consecutive days, followed by four days of rest. Every seven days they are rotated out briefly overnight for a shower and laundry."

Ian has gained deeper insights into hose lay techniques and how they could be effectively applied in Australia, especially in culturally sensitive or remote areas.

"The success of hose lay operations depends heavily on having a reliable water source, and Canada's abundant water resources contrast sharply with Australia's scarcity," Ian said. "We'd need to truck in substantial amounts of water to make this method viable.

"In Canada, fires burn through neat forests with poplar canopy trees. Although the surface can be damp, the elevated fuel load is what sustains the fire and allows the spread along the treetops.

"They also use a ranking system to assess fire intensity, from Rank 1 for low, up to Rank 6 for extreme, adding another layer to understanding and predicting fire dynamics on the ground."

While Ian earned a three-day rest break, he reflected fondly on the fishing trip the local fire chief treated them to at Paint Lake where they spent an afternoon cooking and reeling in pickerel.

"We took some time to explore the island and were lucky enough to spot a bald eagle and come across some fresh moose tracks. The local community was incredibly welcoming," Ian said.

"I've really valued the opportunity to work alongside fire agencies from around the globe and learn from their diverse experiences and how they tailor efforts to their unique terrains.

"Collaborating with the Canadian teams has been rewarding. Their knowledge and practical approach to suppression tactics have taught me a great deal about what methods are truly effective in the field, and which ones aren't."

STORY LUCY BISHOP



Leading cause of death on the fireground

Research shows that the leading causes of on-duty firefighter deaths are related to heart disease. There are several factors specific to field-based emergency work that can increase risk of heart attack or stroke, including periods of high physical and emotional stress, strenuous activity, increased body heat, dehydration, sweating and exposure to a range of gases present at a fire.

Suffering a heart attack or stroke while operating plant and equipment, firefighting, driving vehicles, or working in remote environments can severely jeopardise your safety and the safety of your crew members.

Recommendations for firefighters

Members with underlying cardiovascular disease have a 35 per cent increased risk of heart attack and stroke which may occur at any time during firefighting and emergency response activities. Members over the age of 45 years (or 35 years for First Nations people) are at increased risk of developing heart disease.

Heart disease is one of the leading causes of illness and death in Australia because the red flags aren't easily detectable without a medical examination. This means many people may be at risk of having a heart attack without knowing it.

Australians over the age of 45 should have regular heart health checks to test for high blood pressure and cholesterol. Heart health checks don't need to be scary. There are plenty of things you can do to reverse or manage high blood pressure or high cholesterol, either with simple lifestyle changes or with the help of medication.

A new model of heart health checks was recently released, called the Cardiovascular Risk Score (CVRS). The CVRS is a screening tool that can detect an individual's risk of having a heart attack or stroke within the next five years. CVRS is validated in Australia for those aged 45 to 79 (35 to 79 for Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders).

For the first time, an online heart health education module is available to members on the CFA Learning Hub. The Heart Health Fundamentals module gives members knowledge and strategies to assist with their personal health and their safety and performance at CFA.

CFA's Health Watch Program

In line with its safety first value, CFA is helping members look after their heart health and reduce heart-related diseases by providing free, confidential heart health checks through the Health Watch Program held at a brigade station.

CFA's Health Watch Program now includes an optional CVRS component for members in the validated age brackets, enabling CFA members to have their CVRS completed for free if they want to. Following completion of a health check, the team will take the time to explain your results to you on the spot and provide some advice around lifestyle changes you may wish to make to improve your overall health.

Participating in the Health Watch Program is voluntary. CFA does not record or keep any personal information from the health check and all results are private and confidential and provided to you in a booklet to take with you and discuss with your own medical professional as needed. You can then bring back the booklet at every subsequent yearly health check to see how you've progressed.

The program is delivered by qualified health professionals in CFA's Health Services team, and includes on the spot assessments and results for blood pressure, cholesterol, blood sugars and other heart disease risk factors.

To book a Health Watch session for your brigade, email healthwatch@cfa.vic.gov.au or complete the Online Health Watch booking form.

Important note

Volunteers who have diagnosed heart conditions should inform CFA to ensure safe role assignment to avoid the risk of harm to themselves or their crew. Use the QR code to find out about the Medical Referral Program on Members Online.



Township protection through planned burning



As bushfire risks continue to escalate across Victoria, proactive township protection works are critical to safeguard communities, infrastructure and the environment. These efforts encompass more than just fuel reduction – they involve strategic, community-focused planning and implementation of protective measures, including planned burning, firebreak construction and asset protection zones.

When bushfires occur and fire spread predictions indicate potential impacts on townships, these protection works become essential to defending lives and property. The integration of local knowledge, emergency services and coordinated planning ensures that communities are not only prepared but resilient in the face of fire threats.

During the Grampians fire in January 2025, township protection efforts – including those led by the Planned Burn Taskforce (PBTf) – played a vital role in complementing local resources and enhancing the overall response. This collaboration highlights the importance of embedding township protection into broader bushfire management strategies.

A statewide effort for local protection

The PBTf operates under the Safer Together program, which mobilises CFA volunteers from across Victoria to support districts in need. These members – from seasoned fireground operators to newly-qualified firefighters – form agile, skilled teams capable of deploying anywhere in the state for up to five days.

In January and February 2025, PBTf crews led by David Love, David Robertson and John Crozier were deployed to assist township protection efforts in Dunkeld, Cavendish, and Victoria Point. These deployments were not isolated actions but part of a coordinated strategy to shield communities from the advancing Grampians fire.

Strategic burns with tangible impact

Planned burns were conducted to establish strategic breaks – cleared areas designed to slow or halt the spread

of bushfires. These breaks were created along roadsides, around homes and near critical infrastructure. In Dunkeld for example, 115 hectares were treated across three burn sectors, directly protecting 14 properties adjacent to the national park.

“We had enormous success in areas where the fire broke out of the Grampians and ran into some strategic breaks we had burned,” CFA’s Manager of Community Safety for South West Region James Haley said. “This allowed us to contain the fire at the roadside instead of having it jump and spread to adjoining properties.”

Integrated operations and community engagement

These operations were complex and multifaceted:

- Vehicles and access. Up to 30 vehicles per day, including slip-ons, tankers and bulk water carriers operated across both accessible roadsides and rugged terrain.
- Operational teams. Crews were organised into ignition, safety, logistics and weather monitoring teams, with strong mentoring and coordination.
- Community collaboration. Burns were conducted with landholder consent, often directly around homes and gardens, creating defensible space and peace of mind.
- Interagency cooperation. CFA worked closely with Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMVic), sharing resources such as aircraft and incident management team (IMT) support.

Challenging conditions

Burns were carried out under demanding conditions with temperatures reaching 39°C, winds of up to 38 km/hour, and relative humidity around 33 per cent. Operations included both day and night shifts, mechanical and hand ignition of grasslands and bushland, and extensive blacking out and patrol phases.



What went well

This season's operations underscored the importance of:

Community-led planning: Engagement meetings informed burn strategies and built trust.

Interoperability: Seamless collaboration between CFA, FFMVic and local stakeholders.

Knowledge retention: Ensuring continuity across ICC changeovers and planning units.

Volunteer development: PBTF is not just a resource, it's a capability-building initiative that strengthens CFA's future readiness.

"The value of these burns, particularly around homes, sheds and other infrastructure, cannot be overstated," James Haley said. "They've proven critical to fire suppression efforts and have given communities confidence and breathing space."

Next steps for brigades and groups

Brigades and groups are encouraged to incorporate local knowledge of previous fire footprints into response planning and fuel management plans. This includes identifying strategic control and fallback lines. Such information should be shared with catchment and regional vegetation management teams.

This flow of information and planning is a key lesson from this year's taskforce operations. It is important that fuel management plans are ready to serve as protection plans, and they include details such as whether local plans are in the first or second year of implementation.

Further information about Local Response Data can be found Members Online. Use this QR code.

Brigades and groups are central to success in this space. While fires may not have reached towns, the proactive work in the days and



weeks leading up to burns demonstrates the agency's commitment and preparedness. These efforts empower members and communities, especially in the face of large, remote fires that can otherwise create a sense of helplessness.

Next steps for members

Opportunities to participate in the Planned Burn Taskforce are open to all CFA members. Use this QR code to access more information about the Planned Burn Taskforce on Members Online.



Evacuation of Cape Otway camping ground

This case study presents the perspective of CFA in the initial hours of the January Cape Otway fire, that was later transferred to the control of Forest Fire Management Victoria. It considers how the CFA response worked well and what could be improved for future responses. It's important to keep in mind that while these lessons should be considered, members must operate under the direction of the control agency when attending incidents outside of CFA's jurisdiction.

Summary

At about 1am on 7 January 2025, an urgent 'Leave immediately' message was issued in response to a rapidly escalating wildfire at Cape Otway – a remote and popular camping destination along the Great Ocean Road. The fire was later confirmed to have been ignited by a camper who lit a fire outside a designated area, which quickly became uncontrollable.

This incident underscores the complexities of safeguarding transient populations such as campers and visitors to national parks particularly during peak periods such as weekends, holidays and overnight stays when individuals are asleep.

A major challenge was the limited access at Blanket Bay, which had only one exit route via Blanket Bay Road, requiring travel through the fire zone.

A nearby caravan park was successfully evacuated, with emergency crews working closely with park management who conducted door-to-door checks. This allowed firefighters to concentrate on fire suppression.

At one camp site, some campers sheltered in place while others were evacuated to a relief centre. For about 100 campers it was deemed safer to remain in place under the warning 'It's not safe to return'.

Responding brigades shared key insights from the incident, highlighting the importance of:

- local knowledge and collaboration with partner agencies. Physical searches for campers were required during the night. Local crews possessed critical knowledge of both formal and informal camping areas. Coordination with Victoria Police and Parks Victoria was essential to locate and evacuate individuals.
- early decision-making that enabled optimal resource allocation and the ability to scale back if necessary.
- integration of response plans into Township Protection Plans to ensure cohesive and adaptable emergency strategies.
- automated messaging to relief centres facilitating timely and accurate communication.
- clear evacuation messaging including guidance on safe destinations.
- having satellite radio options to address communication blackspots in remote areas.



Incident overview

The first officer on scene escalated the response with a 'Make tankers 20' call, aligning with the Chief Officer's pre-season guidance to scale up early. This proactive approach proved effective, particularly given the difficulty in locating the fire front in darkness and the potential need for additional tankers and water sources.

Communication blackspots throughout the national park influenced the decision to escalate, as evacuation efforts could have been compromised by limited reception and a rapidly increasing tempo.



Despite access challenges, the number of tankers proved beneficial in a remote location. One was positioned at the top of Lighthouse Road to block incoming traffic, which meant police officers didn't need to come from Colac and Winchelsea. The additional tankers also supported water resupply logistics, as the nearest static water source was more than six kilometres away.

A key success was the rapid activation of the local relief centre, opened within 10 minutes of the request. This was facilitated by the CFA captain contacting his wife who worked at the centre, demonstrating the value of community connections and recent township protection planning.

Throughout the incident, there was a need to issue various warnings and advice messages. This was a complex activity given the varied circumstances in the affected areas, so numerous polygons were established, all requiring different messages and actions to be taken. This ensured messages were tailored and enabled the safest action to be taken in each area, which varied from 'take shelter now', to 'monitor conditions as they are changing.'

For instance, while residents in Blanket Bay were advised to 'Take shelter now', other areas remained under a 'Leave immediately' directive.

To support those sheltering in place at the Blanket Bay camping ground, a vehicle was deployed to provide reassurance and real-time updates. Additionally, the presence of the CFA captain at the relief centre helped reinforce trust in the advice being given, particularly after the fire had been brought under control.

This incident demonstrated the value of response plans and automated messaging that not only instruct people to evacuate but also specify where to go.



What worked well

Local knowledge: A critical success factor in the Cape Otway response was the application of local knowledge by responding brigades. Crews familiar with the terrain and informal camping areas were instrumental in conducting physical searches during the night, particularly in areas not listed on official maps. This local insight enabled faster identification and evacuation of at-risk individuals, especially in remote or unofficial camping sites. The effectiveness of this approach was further enhanced through close collaboration with Victoria Police and Parks Victoria, ensuring a coordinated and informed response. The ability of local personnel to navigate access challenges, anticipate community needs, and activate resources – such as the rapid opening of the relief centre – demonstrated the value of community-based knowledge in managing complex, high-risk incidents.

Community support: The smooth evacuation of Bimbi Park and other sites was attributed to the preparedness of local operators. Cape Otway caravan park owners conducted a doorknock to alert campers, allowing CFA crews to focus on firefighting. This was supported by FFMVic's 'Evacuate now' notifications.

Resource allocation: The incident controller's early 'Make tankers 20' decision ensured timely mobilisation of resources, particularly as neighbouring brigades were up to an hour away. This enabled effective staging, traffic control and water resupply planning.

Operational efficiency: Issuing the 'Evacuate now' message early enabled swift action, bypassing delays associated with formal police-led evacuations. More than 300 campers were safely relocated to a designated drop-in centre in Apollo Bay shortly after 1am.

Staging: The arrival of 20 tankers before access routes became congested was critical. Returning tankers promptly after the fire front was under control maintained operational flexibility.

CFA community assurance: Crews remained at Blanket Bay to support campers during the shelter-in-place period. The CFA captain's presence at the relief centre was later recognised as instrumental in providing reassurance and clarity after the fire was contained.

Lessons identified

Following this incident the updated township protection plan and a new response plan were tested during another bushfire a month later. Key improvements included:

- sectorised mapping developed with FFMVic
- communication upgrades with satellite phones
- strategic staging areas located more than one kilometre from access points to reduce congestion.

Questions for your brigade

- Does your township protection plan include a response plan? For example, does your brigade have a connection with local caravan parks and tourist locations and an understanding of their emergency management procedures?
- Does your response plan specify not just 'Leave immediately' but also 'Leave and go to'?
- Is your messaging automated and integrated with key community stakeholders, such as relief centres?
- If you have a township protection plan, response plan, automated messaging and destination-based evacuation instructions, do you also have sectorised planning developed in collaboration with FFMVic?

Conclusion

The Cape Otway bushfire response on 7 January 2025 serves as a compelling example of the importance of proactive decision-making, community collaboration, and adaptive planning in managing emergencies involving transient populations. Despite the challenges posed by limited access, communication blackspots and the remote nature of the location at night, the coordinated efforts of CFA crews, local operators and community stakeholders ensured a safe and effective response. This allowed for a smooth transfer of control to FFMVic in the daylight hours, when heavy plant were able to move in to consolidate containment lines.

Key successes included the early 'Make tankers 20' escalation, rapid activation of the relief centre and the strategic use of resources, which demonstrated the value of preparedness and local knowledge. The incident also highlighted areas for improvement, particularly in communication infrastructure, mapping and integrated messaging systems.

For Cape Otway, the lessons learned have already informed enhancements to township protection plans and response plans, with sectorised mapping and satellite communications now in place. These developments will strengthen future responses and reinforce the importance of planning, partnerships and clear, actionable communication.

Cardiac arrest on a fireground

Summary

At about 3.45pm on 4 March 2025, District 9 crews responded to a grass and scrub fire near the Princes Highway in Yarragon. The fire was initially reported as about five metres by five metres, spreading east, with windy conditions and smoke affecting both sides of the highway and a nearby train line. There were no access issues or threats to buildings.

The fire was reportedly ignited by an individual who had since left the scene and was being followed. Train services were halted and subsequent reports indicated the fire had grown to approximately 50 metres by 10 metres, spreading rapidly along the railway line. Police were requested for additional traffic control.

The first truck arrived on scene at 3.55pm, and at 4.05pm the team leader activated an emergency alert, reporting that a CFA firefighter had suffered a cardiac arrest.

Incident overview

The cardiac arrest was observed by other crew members. CPR was started immediately and within two minutes the affected member had received three defibrillator (AED) shocks while CPR continued. Ambulance Victoria (AV) was contacted and a crew was reported to be eight kilometres away. By 4.10pm, the patient was breathing independently.

Despite the positive outcome, the incident commander noted that AV's arrival could not have come soon enough. The district duty officer (DDO) issued a Signal 27, and Peer Support was notified. Crews were blacking out the fire at this stage.

The patient was taken from the scene at 4.37pm – within an hour of the initial call. By 5.45pm the patient was stable. WorkSafe was notified shortly after all members had left the incident scene.

What worked well

CPR and first-aid skills of generalist members

Immediacy and effectiveness: Three defibrillator shocks were provided to the member by our crews on scene.

Crew welfare and mental health support

Peer Support activation: The Signal 27 protocol was initiated by the State Duty Officer (SDO), who notified Peer Support. The captain promptly left the scene to personally inform the member's wife. The ACFO went to the fire station to prepare for the debrief, ensuring welfare and Peer Support arrangements were in place. Meanwhile, the DCO attended both the scene and the Victorian Heart Hospital to provide support to the member's family and keep the Chief Officer well informed.

Communication and command structure

Clarity of roles: Roles were instinctively assumed by members on scene. When one firefighter collapsed, others immediately divided responsibilities – some began CPR while others retrieved the defibrillator.

Radio communication: Communications with Firecom clearly conveyed the urgency of the situation, including that a firefighter was down, CPR had commenced and defibrillation was underway.

Interagency coordination: CFA received strong support from AV, with two ambulances and paramedics on motorcycles arriving within 10 minutes. This allowed medical care to continue while firefighting operations remained active.

Equipment and resources

AED access and use: The AED was readily accessible and used effectively, reflecting the importance of all primary vehicles carrying defibrillators.



Logistics and scene management

Scene safety: The area was secured for both firefighting and medical response. The firefighter collapsed near the fire, but not in immediate danger.

Extrication process: The patient was safely transported 50 metres to the freeway edge, assisted by the relatively gentle railway embankment.

Post-incident reporting and support

WorkSafe notification: Protocols were followed, and WorkSafe was notified in line with serious injury reporting requirements.

Debriefing: A hot debrief was held at Yarragon Fire Station after the fire was under control. Peer Support, AV, the commander, area commander, and district ACFO attended to ensure members were informed of available support.

Lesson identified

Training and preparedness: This incident highlighted the importance of maintaining first-aid certification every three years and annual resuscitation training, even for non-specialist crews.

Questions for your brigade

- Is your brigade checking Philips AEDs monthly to ensure they are ready for use when required? If you have any queries about CFA Philips AEDs email defibs@cfa.vic.gov.au.
- How confident do you feel in responding to a medical emergency on a fireground?

HLTAID009 (CPR) and HLTAID015 (Advanced Resuscitation and Oxygen Therapy) require annual reaccreditation. First-aid requires reaccreditation every three years (HLTAID011 for regular/basic CFA first-aid training).

- What additional training or resources would help you feel more prepared?



Conclusion

This incident at Yarragon is a powerful reminder of the unpredictable nature of fireground operations and the critical importance of medical readiness. What began as a relatively small grass and scrub fire escalated rapidly, not only in size but in complexity, when a firefighter suffered a cardiac arrest during the response.

The swift and coordinated actions of CFA crews – administering CPR, deploying a defibrillator and maintaining clear communication – were instrumental in saving a life. The rapid arrival and support from AV further reinforced the value of strong interagency collaboration.

Key strengths identified included the availability and effective use of medical equipment, the clarity of roles assumed under pressure and the activation of Peer Support to address crew welfare. The incident also highlighted the importance of regular first-aid and resuscitation training, even for non-specialist personnel.

Moving forward, this incident underscores the need for all brigades to reflect on their preparedness for medical emergencies during operational incidents. By learning from what worked well and addressing opportunities for improvement, brigades can enhance both safety and resilience on the fireground.

Awards for remarkable rescue



The incredible teamwork and rescue efforts of 24 CFA members during an extremely rare and confronting incident at an industrial site in Hastings in July 2024 has been commended.

Members from Langwarrin and Hastings brigades received a Unit Citation for Service in August to recognise their work to free a man who had been crushed and pinned by a 10-tonne roller, and also assisting a man who had become unconscious.

Incident Controller and Hastings Fire Brigade Captain Mike Willmott and Rescue Officer in Charge and Westernport Deputy Group Officer Craig Aiton were acknowledged for their meticulous planning, coordination and execution of the agreed approach under very stressful circumstances.

On arrival, Mike was relieved to see Peter Munyan awake and speaking but the sight of his legs pinned under the roller spoke volumes about the complexities they faced.

With the threat of crush syndrome a very real possibility, it was vastly important that everyone worked together during the extrication.

"The scene was fairly confronting but knowing that two people were in dire need of help we knew what we needed to do. We got the rescue team on their way, made room for their equipment and appointed our roles on scene," Mike said.

"Fire Rescue Victoria arrived. Their expertise was just amazing – they were fantastic."

Mike said it was the largest emergency management team he had been involved in, with WorkSafe, Victoria Police and Ambulance Victoria also on scene, alongside a surgeon who was on standby for amputation. Thankfully, Peter was airlifted to hospital.

"Everyone just worked together seamlessly to do what was needed to safely release him. It was out of the ordinary for us and was technically challenging, requiring multiple pieces of equipment. It was the first time a CFA brigade has had to use the new 50-tonne jacks," Craig said.

Due to the physically demanding task and the layout of the industrial environment, the rescue site was confined, with nine rescue operators from Langwarrin and eight from FRV working on the extrication.

"Because of the damage the roller had caused and the nature of the environment, everything was covered in grease and the whole area was slippery," Craig said.

"We also tasked Hastings firefighters and the site's emergency management team to secure and monitor the unstable buildings above us. It certainly was multifaceted."

Mike thought he would never see Peter walking again, let alone at the station's doorstep with his walking frame in March this year.

"I'm pleased to say Peter Munyan is in fantastic spirits. We were all gobsmacked to see him standing at the station with a smile on his face. It was absolutely brilliant," Mike said.

An after action review was completed with all agencies. As a result, further training was conducted at an FRV station to familiarise CFA and FRV members with each other's equipment.

"During the review, FRV mentioned it was one of the best interagency operations they'd been involved in. It was quite a compliment," Mike said.

While they rarely accept recognition, Craig said it was an honour to receive the Unit Citation for the team effort.

"When it's an exceptional and extraordinary circumstance, recognitions are a nice way to say well done," Craig said.

Group Officer David Breadmore and Acting Commander Blake Ross were also acknowledged for their actions with a Chief Officer's Commendation for their remarkable leadership.

STORY LUCY BISHOP





Designing safer gardens

CFA's Statewide Vegetation Management Team has been collaborating with Community-Based Bushfire Management facilitators to help keen gardeners have valuable conversations about how to enhance bushfire resilience around their homes, while also providing enjoyable landscapes and habitat for wildlife.

A number of workshops across the state educated homeowners by using CFA's *Landscaping for Bushfire* document, online plant selection tool and associated example gardens. The workshops focused on plant selection, garden design, zoning of the property, defensible space, as well as property and garden maintenance. Two examples are described below and example gardens are being developed by local governments and Landcare groups.

The Landscaping for Bushfire tool was used in the workshops to test a range of plant specimens from local gardens for fire-wise attributes. This means touching, scrunching and smelling foliage, and sharing different opinions about the values these plants provide people. Participants also learn that while some plants may be ranked as more flammable, they can be managed through pruning or placed in safer locations further than 10 metres from the house.

Well-placed vegetation with low flammability may help protect homes by:

- reducing the amount of radiant heat received by a house
- reducing the chance of direct flame contacting the house
- reducing wind speed around a house
- deflecting and filtering embers
- reducing flammable landscaping materials in the defensible space.

Although the workshops focused on garden design, they also included discussion about ecology and biodiversity conservation that acknowledged there can be competing interests around management for fire risk as well as conservation.

Newham Landcare group hosted a two-part Living with Fire and Biodiversity workshop. Part one explained the evidence related to house loss and fire ecology. Discussions and exchange of practical advice continued the next day at a private property at the foot of Mount Macedon. The owners shared how they

consciously considered the impacts of fire while providing habitat for wildlife. A group of people walked through the different zoning of this fire-wise property to learn how subtle modifications can make living with bushfire less scary and aesthetically beautiful.

"Participants said they left feeling less scared of bushfires and confident they could design a garden that looks after wildlife," event organiser Jess Szigethy-Gyula said. "Others were keen to share this field day information with neighbours, which indicates how transformative the field day was for many."

In Balnarring, Red Hill Garden Society hosted an interactive talk where Owen Gooding, a keen gardener and retired CFA vegetation management specialist, brought the Landscaping for Bushfire interactive tool to life. Based on extensive experience in understanding house loss following the 2009 fires, Owen provided examples of houses impacted in past bushfires by poorly-placed plants and flammable garden structures. He compared these with clever and practical solutions to create beautiful gardens in high fire risk areas.

"The Landscaping for Bushfire plant selection key is designed for users to learn more about suitable plants for landscaping, how and where to place things you love in your garden and what to avoid, without having a garden that is barren and devoid of character," Owen said.

"More than 70 people found the presentation and discussion of plant types keenly interesting, and it showed how we can enhance our gardens," Virginia Ross from the Red Hill South Landcare Group said.

Lessons learned from these workshops are being collated so that CFA can create an information sheet and supportive material that brigades, local government or Landcare Groups can use to facilitate sessions with their local community. Brigades that would like to run sessions using the Landscaping for Bushfire resources will be able to get support from the Vegetation Management team, Community-Based Bushfire Management and community engagement teams.

To access the Landscaping for bushfire tool use the QR code.



STORY SAM STRONG AND DANIEL IDCZAK

New CFA Regulations

CFA now operates under the Country Fire Authority Regulations 2025 which came into effect on 31 July 2025. These regulations operationalise the powers in the CFA Act and sit above CFA's policies and doctrine.

Some of the areas updated in the regulations are:

- Administrative matters, such as modernising Authority (Board) proceedings, improving arrangements related to the registration of CFA brigades and groups, consolidating Brigade and Group Model Rules and election requirements, and clarifying financial management arrangements for brigades.
- Membership of brigades including expanding and clarifying member conduct, physical fitness requirements and duties.
- Employee and volunteer discipline and appeals including clearer requirements relating to investigations, hearing of charges and appeals process.
- Volunteer compensation, which directly outlines processes for officers and members of brigades and forestry industry brigades in making personal compensation claims for both injury and personal property.
- Fees and charges for CFA services are being implemented to include a charging process for CFA services at commercial events.

- Fire prevention measures including elections and local government nominations to regional fire prevention committees, permits to burn during Fire Danger Periods, conditions or restrictions on engaging in high fire risk activities, and regulating fire suppression equipment.
- The current false alarm fees will remain, subject to a later review to align both CFA's and FRV's false alarm fees.

The regulations were developed by the Department of Justice and Community Safety on behalf of the Minister for Emergency Services. CFA had an advisory and consultative role in this process and the resulting changes consist of updates to clarify, streamline and support CFA operations now and into the future.

The new CFA Regulations 2025 can be viewed on the Victorian Legislation website - Country Fire Authority Regulations 2025.

A printed version of the CFA Regulations 2025 can be purchased via the Victorian Legislation website.

Information to help members understand the changes is available on the CFA website. Use this QR code.



Timboon firefighter joins Board

CFA volunteer and Deputy Group Officer Bryce Morden joined the CFA Board in June 2025. He became a member of Timboon brigade in 2010 after transferring from Maffra brigade which he joined in 2005. Bryce brings experience as a previous board director and senior manager in the public sector.

"I recognise that CFA has had a challenging journey through Fire Services Reform and I want to help take the organisation forward in a more positive way," Bryce said.

Bryce contributes to three Board committees including the People, Culture and Remuneration Committee, which particularly aligns with his interests.

"So much of what we do is driven by culture," Bryce said. "Our culture needs to be one where we enable good people to do good work with appropriate governance. The mission and purpose of CFA come to life at the point where individual capability meets organisational culture. I believe that good governance makes the way clear for us to be the organisation our communities need us to be."

People take pride in being CFA members and Bryce said we need to support that. "We must continue to respect and value the contribution of our members," he said.

Bryce believes that the challenge with governance is that it needs to find a balance between enabling good outcomes and appropriate controls.

"We are such a highly variable organisation, from small rural brigades to large urban brigades. We need to recognise there isn't a one-size-fits-all approach but also need to be consistent with CFA's higher goals."

In his volunteer role, Bryce was recently involved in combining two brigade groups into a single larger one called the Apostles Group.



"A key challenge for leaders as we work through the process is to recognise the strengths of the previous groups and incorporate those into the new group," Bryce said.

"We can also develop new opportunities thanks to having a bigger pool of shared resources and through achieving efficiencies. We're aiming for a better use of members' time – we want a sharper focus on training and leadership development, rather than being tied up in the administration of two groups."

Triangle of success in District 12



After the 2009 fires, the community surrounding Marysville significantly changed and brigade membership at Marysville, Narbethong and Buxton dropped. But thanks to the launch of combined training and support for each other, this triangle in District 12 is now stronger than ever.

The three brigades cover a large area that includes dry bushfire conditions and cool climate rain forest conditions.

"We haven't been a team in the past," Marysville Fire Brigade Captain Travis Gleeson said, "and it was time to change."

"A Buxton brigade member asked me if the three brigades could work together a bit more, and I thought yes why can't we?"

Travis talked to Narbethong and Buxton brigades to try to improve their teamwork.

"Sometimes you need more than one brigade for a training session to work properly, so combining training between the three brigade works better," Narbethong Fire Brigade 1st Lieutenant Stephen Schulz said.

Each brigade still has its own training sessions, but they also train together about once a month, with brigades taking it in turns to be the host.

"The dynamic has changed with our new training program," Buxton Fire Brigade 3rd Lieutenant Brian Denham said. "We wanted to focus on combined training. There has definitely been a shift to working together more, which leads to a better understanding on the fireground."

"The joint training has absolutely improved things. It creates better working relationships and a better understanding of each brigade's issues."

"The three captains are quite different and they share their knowledge," Stephen said. "Members from Marysville and Buxton have a lot of structural background and they can teach us things we don't learn at our brigade."

"It's good to have the support from surrounding brigades, especially as there isn't a lot of experience at our brigade. It gives our members confidence."

"We turn out as one bigger brigade and that's normal for us."

District 12 Assistant Chief Fire Officer Steve Keating is full of praise for what these three brigades have achieved.

"These three brigades are isolated from their district office at Seymour. Being at the far end of the district, their nearest support is a long way away," Steve said.

"Narbethong's existence today has a lot to do with the support they received from neighbouring brigades to re-engage their community and lift their profile," Steve said.

"It really solidifies that community connection is so important."

"The brigades have really shone in the community safety and training space and operationally. I'm proud of their efforts."

STORY DUNCAN RUSSELL

Reduce the risk of burn-offs

In 2024, CFA volunteers responded to more than 930 private escaped burn-offs, resulting in more than 11,925 members jumping on the truck to respond.

More than 19,000 volunteer hours were spent responding to preventable fires last year, putting an unnecessary strain on CFA crews, neighbouring properties and the community.

In preparation for the predicted early fire season, we know hundreds of Victorians will now take the opportunity to burn off grass, stubble, weeds and undergrowth. CFA's overarching message to community members this spring is clear – do not leave burn-offs unattended.

Rain deficits continue to be severe across the state and the landscape remains dry enough to allow fires to start and spread quickly if a burn-off gets out of control. Victoria will soon start to experience warmer, drier north to north-westerly winds, and conditions will need to be monitored closely before residents ignite a fire on their property.

CFA encourages people to prepare but if they light it, they own it. Letting a burn-off escape during a Fire Danger Period can result in severe penalties.

When speaking to your community members over coming weeks, please reinforce that before burning off they ensure:

- a three-metre fire break is left, free from flammable materials, around the burn
- weather forecasts have been checked for the day of activity and days afterwards, particularly wind
- they register their burn-off at Fire Permits Victoria – firepermits.vic.gov.au
- enough water is on hand (10 litres for small fires)
- there are enough people to monitor, contain and extinguish the burn
- a burn-off is never left unattended
- regulations or laws by CFA and local councils are followed
- neighbours are notified if activity will generate fire and smoke
- logs, stumps and standing dead trees are monitored closely, as they may burn more readily and could be difficult to put out.



STORY LUCY BISHOP

Prepare your community for fire

As Victoria heads into what is forecast to be a challenging fire season, it's more important than ever for residents and property owners to understand their local fire risk and take steps to prepare.

CFA brigades are encouraged to open their doors and host a Get Fire Ready event across the weekend of Saturday 4 and Sunday 5 October 2025, or during October, offering practical advice and resources to help their local community get ready for the fire season.

An open day might be as simple as just opening up the station or being available at an event for a couple of hours to offer your community members the opportunity to chat with volunteers and ask some questions about what they need to do to be prepared.

As we head into summer the focus when engaging with your local community should be around encouraging Victorians to have a fire plan and knowing where to get emergency information by downloading the VicEmergency app.

If you haven't registered for an event, brigades are still encouraged to open up their doors and engage with the local community.

For more information about the initiative use the QR code.



Seasonal firefighter initiative



An initiative in District 13 is boosting the firefighter ranks of several brigades in an innovative way.

If community members who live in Fire Rescue Victoria response areas apply to become CFA firefighters, they are normally rejected – it would be impossible for them to turn out fast enough given the distance to their nearest CFA station.

Rowville brigade members had the clever idea that they could recruit these people specifically to fight grass and bushfires as part of a strike team, support VICSES in storm and flood response, and to carry out planned burns as members of the Planned Burn Taskforce. These activities don't usually need as fast a response.

New seasonal firefighters are activated in the lead-up to summer in order to complete all the Chief Officer's minimum requirements and participate in brigade training. They are deactivated at the end of summer if they choose to, however the current crop of seasonal firefighters typically stays on during winter to participate in all brigade activities.

When qualified, they are encouraged to join strike teams where they will be paired up with an experienced firefighter.

District 13 held an information session at Rowville Fire Station in June to encourage a group of young people to join either Rowville or Boronia brigades as seasonal firefighters. These potential firefighters live in an FRV response area of Melbourne. The session was run by Commander Richard Hill, Rowville Fire Brigade Captain Cien Pereira and Boronia Fire Brigade Captain Ramon Relph.

"What we really need are strike teams," Ramon said. "They are our bread and butter."

Ramon, who's a strike team leader, said being part of strike teams leads to strong friendships and life-long memories. They are also a crucial part of CFA's response.

"Being on a strike team is rewarding. A pre-planned strike team that's in position before a fire hits can save a whole town," Richard said.

The Knox Group in District 13, which currently has 20 seasonal firefighters, has seen the benefits of this program, and they encourage groups in districts 7, 8 and 14 to get involved.

"I would like the seasonal firefighter initiative to be adopted across all of metro Melbourne," Richard said. "Why would we ignore people who live in metro Melbourne? They can get to a CFA station fairly quickly."

"People in metro Melbourne care about people in regional and rural Victoria and want to help."

Two current seasonal firefighters attended the session to answer any questions.

Wes Armstead and John Anastasoglou (pictured right) qualified as seasonal firefighters in October 2023.

Wes hasn't been part of a strike team yet, but he has gained valuable experience with the Planned Burn Taskforce.

"When the 2019 Mallacoota fire happened, I watched the news and saw that people had lost everything. It was devastating," Wes said. "Seeing American firefighters in Melbourne helping us inspired me to join CFA."

He has carried out planned burns in Belgrave, Olinda and around the Rowville Lakes golf course. He also checked the safety at a Knox Council fireworks display.

"I really like planned burns and helping local brigades. It's good experience to light a fire and then put it out."

"After I freshly graduated with a degree in environmental science, I knew that I wanted to help mitigate the effects of climate change," John said. "I'm pursuing a career in bushfire management and have also decided to become a firefighter."

John joined a strike team to help fight the 2024 Beaufort bushfire and he was also part of an SES Taskforce in Frankston to clean up fallen branches after a storm.

"I would like to progress to be a crew leader, develop as a CFA leader and use my knowledge from university," John said.

As a result of this evening session, Boronia and Rowville each gained four firefighters.

For more information, districts and brigades can email Richard: r.hill@cfa.vic.gov.au.

STORY DUNCAN RUSSELL



Book brings Bayindeen fire to life



When the Bayindeen-Rocky Road fires tore through the Mount Cole region in February 2024, they left more than a blackened landscape – they left a tapestry of unique stories.

In the months following the fires, the idea to preserve those stories began to emerge, and what started as a simple proposal to collate photos quickly evolved into something more ambitious: a full-length book.

At the launch held at the Cave Hill Creek camping area in Raglan in late August, the book *Scarred* was officially unveiled to the fire-affected community, capturing the Bayindeen fires through the many voices of those who lived through them.

The project is the brainchild of Raglan Fire Brigade member Rod McErvale, who enlisted the services of experienced author Hugh Carroll (pictured above with Martha Haylett MP). Hugh said the scope of the project became clear after attending a barbecue in Raglan shortly after the fires.

"I had no intention of writing a full-length book," Hugh said. "But after I went to Raglan and spoke with the affected families, I quickly realised there was a story here and it needed to be told."

Hugh began the writing process by interviewing more than 100 locals from Raglan, Beaufort, Warrak, Elmhurst, Amphitheatre, Ararat and the surrounding areas.

"Everyone had different stories and no one had the full picture of what happened across the fireground," Hugh said.

"There was this universal shock at the scale of the fire. Even seasoned locals who had experienced fires before weren't prepared for something of this magnitude."

Hugh was surprised by the backgrounds of the people affected.

"I expected to find mostly farming families who'd been there for generations. But I was struck by the diversity of people – from places like Paris and Mexico – or those with family histories shaped by global conflict, all ending up in this quiet corner of Victoria."

"Their reasons for settling there were just as compelling as their experiences during the fire."

The result of Hugh's interviews is a book that blends personal histories with reflections about the fire and people's resilience.

Rod, who convened the Book Group that was tasked with bringing the project to life, said a \$10,000 grant from Bendigo Bank's Bushfire Recovery Fund helped turn the idea into reality.

"We formed the group and applied for the grant. When we were successful, we thought we could really make something special," Rod said. "Fortunately, Hugh had also agreed to come on board free of charge."

Rod praised Hugh's storytelling approach.

"It reads like a novel. I was surprised by how candidly people opened up," he said. "It wasn't like we asked them to bare their souls, but once the interviews started it became clear people needed that opportunity to speak. It was like a healing process."

"The way the book weaves different people's stories together is brilliant. To have something like this to pass down through the generations in the area is just fantastic."

'Scarred' opens with one family's personal account, then steps back to trace how the fires unfolded across multiple communities.

"It's about what people went through, with the fire in the background. Hugh's done such a good job," Rod said.

Hugh's vivid descriptions include: "Beloved trees stand stark and black. Some are still smouldering, others still blazing red hot inside their blackened exterior; native plants and grasses have disappeared into carbon particulates and blown away."

Proceeds from 'Scarred' will support the restoration of bushland camp sites and community spaces in the Mount Cole area.

To buy the book email mtcolefir@gmail.com.



STORY JAMES TAYLOR



Will our truck fit?

Have you ever turned out to an incident only to find narrow streets are blocked by parked cars on both sides of the road, or narrow driveways into larger rural properties make it difficult or impossible to get in? All brigades have stories like this or have identified properties in their response area that have access issues.

CFA was aware that several brigades and districts had produced their own videos, brochures or social media assets to deal with these issues. They needed something to educate their communities and ensure they're able to reach them in an emergency. Some of these locally-produced resources were excellent but some were not presented professionally, were inaccurate or provided information not consistent with CFA messaging. Some focused on the size of the brigade's own trucks without considering that supporting brigade vehicles may have different dimensions.

To address these issues, CFA has recently produced resources for brigades to help the community understand the importance of providing clear access for emergency vehicles on their own properties and in local streets.

CFA examined the types of resources being produced at a local level and consulted with members across the state. When developing any resources we need to understand what the problem is we are trying to solve, who the audience is, and what messages we want to convey. CFA then worked closely with a production company to develop a video, brochure and postcards.

Carrying a bundle of postcards in the truck could be handy for a quick letterbox drop in streets where parking has made access difficult, or to target properties that present particular problems.

Fortunately, under the Victorian Planning Scheme, in many instances, CFA is able to prescribe requirements for access to properties and water access during the permit application process. For existing properties we can only appeal to people to do the right thing so our trucks can reach them during an emergency.

"The standard permit conditions provide great best-practice specifications for our messaging to the broader community so we can provide them guidance on how to help us help them," CFA Manager Natural Environment and Bushfire Safety Mark Holland said. "In most cases we can't compel people to comply, but we can present them with our problem and appeal to them to help."

Lieutenant Clair Arnold from Boneo brigade, firefighter Oliver Russell-Lothian from Dromana brigade, and Lieutenant Meaghan Wightman and firefighter Mike Abbott from Rosebud brigade, gave up their time to help us create a video to help get the message out to communities.

"It's important for us to highlight to the community the challenges we face when we respond to an incident and make them aware that any help we can get from them to make our response quick and effective will reduce the impact on them," Peninsula Group Officer and Rye Captain Eddie Matt said. "These resources go a long way to help communicate this."

The new resources will be available to order from community engagement coordinators at region and district offices, and can be downloaded from the Community Engagement Content Portal: cfa.vic.gov.au/cecontentportal.

STORY CHRIS BARBER



Faces of CFA

KAYLENE STOCKS, WINCHELSEA FIRE BRIGADE, DISTRICT 7

What is your CFA role?

Brigade captain.

Why did you join?

I wanted to give back to my community – the same community that's always been there for me and my family. Growing up, I watched my family dedicate more than 45 years to Winchelsea Fire Brigade, and that had a big impact on me. After raising my kids, I felt it was my turn. I wanted to learn new things, challenge myself and be part of something meaningful. I'd already spent years quietly helping out in the background, so officially joining just felt right. It's more than volunteering. It's continuing a family legacy and doing my part to help others.

What incident has had the greatest impact on you?

My first callout. It was a serious car accident just outside of town. I remember feeling nervous, not knowing exactly what to expect. But what stood out the most was watching all the emergency services come together – CFA, Ambulance, Police – and seeing the helicopter land right there on the road. It was one of those moments where everything felt surreal.

I'll never forget helping carry the patient to the helicopter, knowing every second mattered. Being part of that team effort really hit home just how important our role is. After the incident, CFA organised a debrief and offered peer support, which meant a lot. It helped me process everything and made me feel truly supported. That experience reminds me just how strong and connected we are – not just as a brigade, but as a wider emergency services family.

Who have been your mentors in CFA?

I've been fortunate to have many mentors I regularly rely on. My dad has been one of the biggest influences in my life. He's taught me to get in there, get it done and do it right. That mindset has stuck with me through every challenge.

I've also had incredible guidance from Group Officer Mark Brown, ex-Captain Rod Taylor and my Commander Gavin Fitzgerald. Each of them has offered support, advice and a steady presence. I'm proud to stand beside people who not only back me, but also help shape the way I lead.

What have been the highlights of your time in CFA?

Some of the biggest highlights for me have been the support, the memories and the friendships made along the way. The people you meet through CFA become more than just fellow volunteers;

they become part of your extended family. It's not just about your own brigade either. The support you get from the wider CFA community (neighbouring brigades, group leaders and even people you've only met on the fireground) is something really special. That sense of connection, of having each other's backs no matter what, is what makes it all so meaningful.

How do you motivate your brigade members?

I lead by example. I don't ask anyone to do something I wouldn't be willing to do myself. I believe in jumping in, working hard and showing up for the team because that kind of attitude is contagious.

I try to create a space where everyone feels supported, heard and valued. Sometimes it's just about checking in, having a chat or reminding someone that what they're doing matters. I also like to highlight the small wins, celebrate the effort and remind people why we do what we do.

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


Back yourself. You're more capable than you think and you don't need to know everything on day one. Ask questions, be open to learning and don't be afraid to step up. Also, lean on your team. You're never in this alone. There's always someone who's been there before and is willing to help you through it.

Treat people the way you want to be treated whether they've been around for 30 years or just signed up last week. Everyone brings something valuable.

One of the biggest lessons I've learned is that you never stop learning. Every job we attend, no matter how big or small, teaches us something. It might be a new skill, a different way of approaching a situation, or simply learning more about your crew and how you work together. That's part of what keeps it rewarding – you're always growing, always improving and always becoming a better version of yourself.

What do you like to do in your spare time?

Spending time with my children and grandchildren is what I cherish most. Quality time with the people I care about is really important to me and always recharges my energy. Beyond that, I love getting outdoors. Camping is one of my favourite ways to unwind and connect with nature. I'm also really into photography. Capturing moments and beautiful scenes gives me a creative outlet and a fresh perspective.



How the past informs the future

Dr Rebecca Ryan, a Natural Hazards Research Australia postgraduate scholar, uncovered 3,000 years of fire history to help shape future fire management strategies.

The devastating 2019-20 bushfires inspired Rebecca to dig deep into Australia's past to better understand how bushfires have changed over thousands of years.

"We need a longer-term view of past fire patterns to improve how we predict and manage future events," Rebecca said.

Bushfires have shaped the Australian landscape and biodiversity for millennia, but as climate change continues to alter the fire regime, understanding how fire may change in the future is critical for mitigation and prevention. Existing high-resolution records of past fire events are limited to the recent past or cannot accurately distinguish fire characteristics, such as severity and intensity.

Rebecca's PhD research at the University of Wollongong could have a lasting impact on bushfire science by providing a new way to measure past fire severity and intensity, two characteristics that are hard to track in the long-term record. This data can strengthen fire predictive models and support better planning and preparation in bushfire-prone areas.

To uncover the past, Rebecca developed two new techniques:

- Using boron isotopes to detect the severity of a fire (for example, whether it reached the forest canopy or remained confined to the understory).
- Using FTIR Spectroscopy to determine changes in chemical bonds to reveal how intense (determined by temperature and heating duration) the fire was.

She applied these methods to sediment samples from the Blue Mountains and Namadgi National Park.

What Rebecca found was striking. Bushfires in south-eastern Australia have

become more intense and more frequent over the past 200 years compared with the previous 3,000 years. This shift appears to be driven by changes in climate, vegetation (particularly fire-prone eucalypts) and human activity.

As part of her PhD, Rebecca shared her findings with experts and emergency services through the Natural Hazards Research Forum and Hazardous Webinars.

"Having access to feedback from both researchers and people working on the ground has helped shape my research and its real-world relevance," she said.

This research provides valuable insights into global fire science and could inform management strategies not only in Australia but also in other fire-affected regions around the world.

To read more about this research use the QR code.



STORY LINA WOOD, NATURAL HAZARDS RESEARCH AUSTRALIA

Finding bold solutions

More than 600 people from 200-plus organisations attended the Natural Hazards Research Australia's Annual Research Forum to explore how research can shape bold, practical solutions for disaster resilience.

It focused on transforming research into action –supporting the sector to be not just ready, but ahead of ready against a backdrop of increasingly frequent, severe and unpredictable natural hazards.

From community readiness to critical infrastructure, it showcased more than 75 research projects, including

advances in bushfire planning, risk communication and community recovery.

One highlight was the launch of an updated Australian Disaster Resilience Index, designed to help agencies such as CFA better understand local vulnerabilities and guide future investment in community resilience.

Workshops and panels explored improving hazard communications, boosting community education and better understanding local risk. The forum also offered space for deep

reflection. From the opening smoking ceremony and Welcome to Country, to collaborative sessions co-led by researchers and practitioners, the forum reinforced the importance of working together across sectors, organisations and roles.

To explore a collation of resources from the forum, use the QR code naturalhazards.com.au/nhrf25-resources.

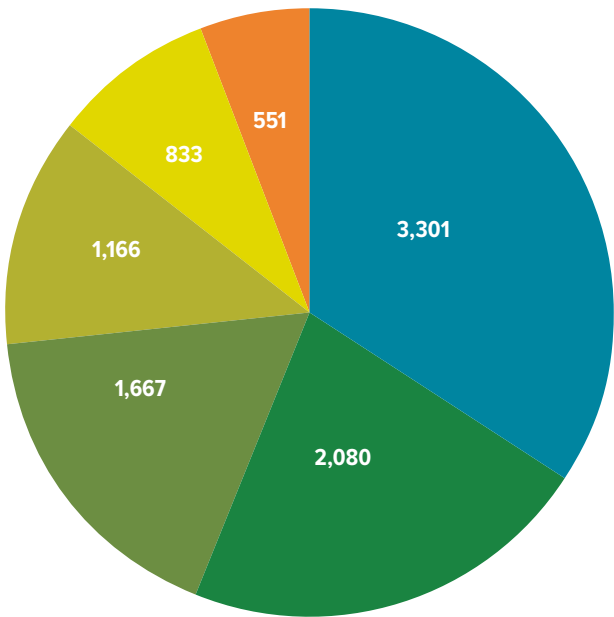


STORY AINSLEY BURGESS, NATURAL HAZARDS RESEARCH AUSTRALIA

Incident statistics

1 April 2025 – 30 June 2025

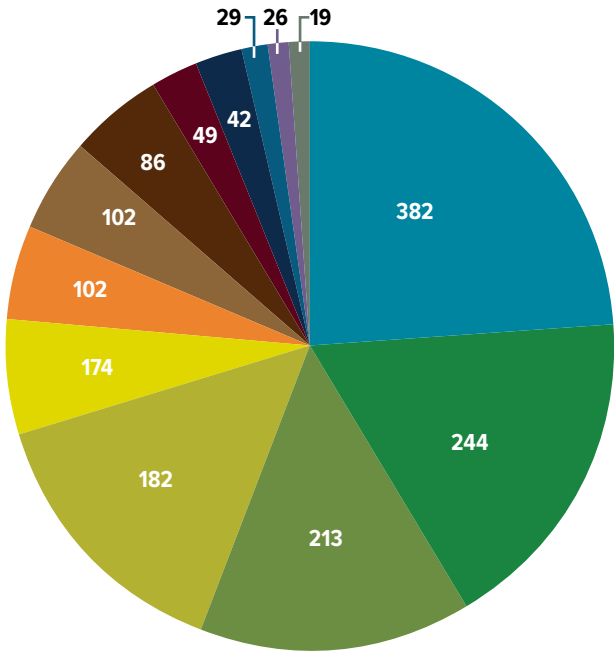
INCIDENTS BY TYPE



Service calls*	
Fire and explosions	
Motor vehicle accidents/rescue/EMS calls	
Good intent calls	
False alarms/false calls	
Hazardous condition	

* Includes 2,616 callouts supporting FRV, 3 supporting DEECA

ORIGIN OF FIRE



Paddock/open area/lawn	
Scrub/bush area	
Undetermined	
Area of a vehicle	
Road/car park	
Engine area/running gear/vehicle wheel	
Waste or rubbish area/container	
Kitchen/cooking area	
Garage/carport	
Chimney/flue	
Lounge	
Bedroom	
Storage area	

INCIDENTS BY DISTRICT



SOUTH WEST	
District	Incidents
4	67
5	164
6	184
7	590



WEST	
District	Incidents
15	719
16	167
17	148



NORTH WEST	
District	Incidents
2	611
14	1,642
18	228
20	257



NORTH EAST	
District	Incidents
12	334
13	816
22	424
23	254
24	284



SOUTH EAST	
District	Incidents
8	2,323
9	369
10	174
11	171
27	285

IN BRIEF

CONVERSATIONS CAN SAVE LIVES

A new Communicator level course, CFACSEIND Communicating for Community Engagement is now available on the Learning Hub. This recently released eLearning module has been developed to prepare members to have respectful and effective fire safety conversations. It provides handy tips, tools and resources to support effective engagement. The module can be found on the Community Engagement Pathway on the CFA Learning Hub.



POCKETBOOK APP

Downloads of the Pocketbook app have been steadily climbing since its release late last year. More than 6,000 members have downloaded the app across both iOS and Android platforms. If you haven't already downloaded the app, visit the Pocketbook App Members Online page for the links.

Thank you to the users who have given valuable feedback about the app. To provide feedback or make suggestions, click the top right menu button in Pocketbook and select 'User Feedback Form'. Feedback is currently being reviewed to plan for future expansion to the functions and features of the app.

ART JUST GOT EASIER

CFA has streamlined the community engagement Activity Reporting Tool (ART) to help brigades plan and record community engagement activities, including Open Days.

The new tabs on the home page – 'My Activities' and 'My Brigade' – make it easier to locate and manage your activities. After adding an activity, you'll find the 'Promote' tab above the activity details, which allows you to feature your event on the CFA website.

Using ART lets your brigade demonstrate its contribution to community fire prevention and preparedness, and supports CFA's reporting to the Victorian community. For more information visit the ART page on Members Online or contact your community engagement coordinator.

EMERGENCY SERVICES AND VOLUNTEERS FUND REBATE

Eligible CFA volunteers can apply to the Victorian Government for the Emergency Services and Volunteers Fund (ESVF) rebate when they receive their rates notices. CFA members can only access the Department of Government Services (DGS) rebate application form through the CFA volunteer rebate portal on Members Online as the rebate is not accessible to the general public. Use the QR code to access the portal.



2026 STATE CHAMPS

Thinking about getting a team together for the 2026 State Championships? Whether you're starting fresh or making a comeback, now is a great time to begin planning. Rule books are available on the VFBV website, and the Urban and Rural competition committees can connect you with mentors to support new or returning teams. Entries and judge/official nominations will open in late 2025. Email championships@vfbv.com.au or phone VFBV on 9886 1141 for more information or to join the mailing list.

HOW TO WEAR HONOURS

We've recently received feedback highlighting inconsistencies in how honours and awards are being worn, with some instances of incorrect placement. We'd be grateful for your support in ensuring honours are correctly displayed. Please read the booklet 'How to wear honours and awards' by using this QR code.



CFA'S ONE-STOP SHOP SERVICE CATALOGUE

The CFA Service Catalogue, an initiative of the Operating Model Program, is available on Members Online. It outlines the services CFA provides, why CFA provides these services, who is involved, how, where and when each service is provided, and the legislation, policies, procedures and standards relevant to each service. The catalogue enables a common understanding of the critical work we do to keep communities safe, the vital support required to ensure we can deliver our services, and how it relates to our roles, CFA's mission and priorities. To find out more use the QR code.



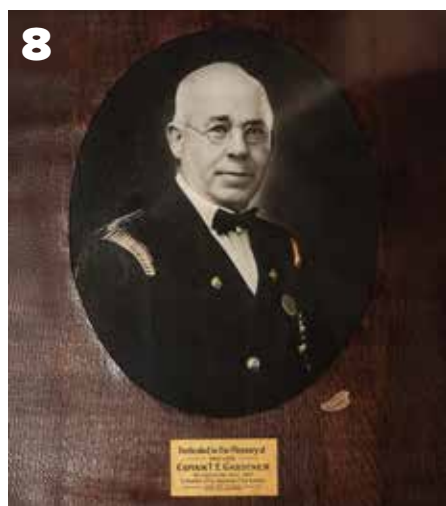
UPDATED CFA STRATEGY 2020-2030

CFA has completed a mid-term review of the CFA Strategy following consultation with staff, volunteers, stakeholders and community members. The strategy builds on our strengths and capabilities in the areas where communities need us most. Use the QR code to read the strategy.



Warracknabeal Fire Brigade





- 1 Current fire station
- 2 Training Juniors, 2010s
- 3 Brigade REO 6 pumper, 1927
- 4 Brigade parade, 1930s
- 5 Planned burn, 2011
- 6 Collecting for the Good Friday Appeal
- 7 Fire station 1929 to 1983
- 8 Captain T E Gardiner, died 1935
- 9 Brigade training in Main Street Warracknabeal, 1920s
- 10 Brigade Junior running team, 2014
- 11 Auxiliary brigade members, 2016
- 12 Mrs Les Winsall, President Ladies Social Club, 1930-1963
- 13 Gardiner-Aussie Factory, 1927

POSTAGE
PAID
AUSTRALIA

PRINT
POST
100010934



Brigade

If undeliverable return to:
D&D Mailing Services
6/400 Princes Hwy
NOBLE PARK NORTH VIC 3174

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

To join Memberlink phone 1800 820 037 or register online at 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 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.



- Save 8%* with **Australian Unity** Corporate Health Insurance. T&Cs apply. New members on corporate products only.
- Generous savings on **Qantas Club** membership using the Member Benefits Corporate Scheme.
- Plants, trees and garden products at true wholesale prices from **Plantmark**.
- 6% discount on health cover with **Bupa**. Plus, no two- and six-month waiting periods on extras when you combine Hospital and Extras cover.
- Savings of up to 10% on a range of **eGift cards**, including Coles, Woolworths, JB Hi-Fi, Endota Spa, EG Fuel Card, Bunnings, and the Ultimate Gift Card range.
- Hire a **Britz**, **maui**, or **Apollo** campervan and receive 10% off daily hire rates.
- **Searoad Ferries** offer 10% off ferry travel between Sorrento and Queenscliff.
- 5% to 10% off the best unrestricted rate of the day at **Accor Hotels**.
- Save \$170 on **Virgin Australia** Lounge memberships.
- **RSEA Safety** offers 10% off full-priced items in-store only.
- Corporate leisure rates and reduced insurance excess on car hire with **Avis**.
- **Flie Legal** offers a free online consultation and 20% off fixed-rate conveyancing, wills and estate planning.
- Up to 10% off **DELL Technologies**, plus exclusive extra savings.
- Up to 20% off the public web price on **Lenovo** notebooks, desktops, monitors and accessories.
- 15% off travel insurance with **Insure&Go**.
- **Experience Oz** has 10% off, plus hot deals on attractions, zoos, aquariums and theme parks.
- Exclusive accommodation rates in Australia and internationally with **Hotel Planner**.
- A free small McCafé hot drink, small soft drink, or orange juice with a \$5+ spend at **McDonald's** in Victoria (with your Emergency Memberlink card).
- Take a further \$50 off the already discounted price of a **Driver Dynamics** Defensive Driving Course.
- **iSubscribe** has 10% off any magazine subscription. Popular titles include Better Homes & Gardens, National Geographic, Gardening Australia, Home Beautiful and New Idea.
- \$300 excess reduction when your car is repaired at **Sheen Panel Service**.
- **mycar Tyre & Auto** has 10% off servicing, repairs and TCP tyre purchases.
- 10% off Australian car rentals with **Budget**.
- Exclusive discounts on entertainment, tech, fitness trackers, and more through the **Hi-Fi Corporate Benefits Program**.
- Discounts year-round at **Specsavers**.
- **Sixt Australia** offers up to 20% off the best daily rate on passenger and commercial vehicles.
- Save with the Emergency Memberlink Preferred Customer Rate at over 270 **Choice Hotels** in Australia and New Zealand.
- Access commercial pricing on appliances and electronics through **The Good Guys Commercial Division**.
- 15% off the best available rate at **Quest Dandenong**.
- Up to 15% off the best daily rental rate with **Europcar**.
- Discounts on **Village Roadshow Theme Parks'** 5-day Escape Pass, Aussie Outback Spectacular, Topgolf, Sea World Resort and Paradise Country Farmstay.
- Save 5% on adult Spirit and Flexi fares when travelling with **Spirit of Tasmania**.
- 20% off flowers from **Petals Network**.
- Competitive pricing from **Complete Home Filtration** and a \$300 VISA gift card when you install the CHF-6000 whole-home system.
- Save up to 25% on room and bed and breakfast rates at the **Radisson on Flagstaff Gardens** Melbourne.
- Special pricing on appliances and electronics through **Harvey Norman's** Groups and Associations Division.
- 15% off the full website price on **Bridgestone** car, SUV and light van tyres.
- **Nissan** fleet pricing and extra benefits on selected new Nissan vehicles.